

Order from Chaos: Using Tasks in an EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This research sprang from a very specific and pressing problem. After teaching EFL for six years in private language schools, I was surprised to find some relatively pronounced behavior problems in my language classes when I moved to teaching in a university. Therefore, the problem looked at here is three fold:

There were three questions, which this research raised:

First, what were the causes of the motivational problems that had been witnessed?

Second, what could be done to improve the atmosphere of the class?

Third, what could be done to improve the learning that took place in my classes?

To accomplish this goal a number of different kinds of tasks were tried over a year and a half period. At first the goal was to find the type of tasks that promised to be most successful with my students; however, as time went on, the more important practical concern became one of methodology.

Teachers do not deny the value of experiential activities...they do not know exactly how to implement an experiential strategy" (Stern, 1992: pg. 322 quoted by Brian Kenny, 1996)

In the same way, few would argue that classroom activities should be interesting to and engage the students and be suited to their learning needs. However, it is developing such activities that work with ones students and – maybe even more importantly – evolving the methodology that enable the activities to work that do this. For this reason, the question became how to modify given tasks and the methodology used with them, so that the activities would be more suited to my class.

This paper will do two things. First, there will be a short analysis, based on an informal survey, trying to understand the causes for the lack of motivation with the university students. Second, a description will be given of what happened when a number of tasks were tried with attention given to what changes were made to the activities, and more often to the methodology, to adapt them to my classes.

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By Mike Reda

How do you shape an axe handle?
Without an axe it can't be done....
Shape a handle, shape a handle,
The pattern is not far off.....

From Book of Songs
China, 5th c. BC.
(www.english)

1. Introduction:

1.1. Problems teaching at the university

Although I had six years prior experience teaching at private language schools in Korea when I started teaching Freshman English at a university, I was surprised at the failure of most of my activities. In fact, they failed so badly that I had class discipline problems, and would often find myself feeling tense and angry. Even though I was not in a position to observe other teachers' classes, from conversations in the teacher's room it was easy to note that there seemed to be a lot of tension between teachers and their students (this was later verified through an informal survey see 2.1). Favorite stories include accounts of humiliating a student in class, yelling at a class, walking out of class, and threatening students with Fs.

Common problems which I personally experienced with students in class were:

- ◆ Talking in Korean with friends
- ◆ Doing very little work

- ◆ Sneaking out of class after role was called
- ◆ Coming in five minutes before the end of class and trying to get counted present
- ◆ Sleeping in class
- ◆ Doing homework for other classes

In addition, for the first time since I taught in Korea, there was difficulty in creating a social atmosphere, a puzzling failure for students to understand simple directions, and a marked failure to be able to apply what was learned in one class to another class. In the past, where students could do a task C, for example, after doing task A and B, in the university classes it was necessary to do Task A₁, A₂, A₃, B₁, B₂ and then students still might have difficulty with task C.

In looking for solutions to these concerns, three research questions were raised:

- ◆ First, what were the causes of the motivational problems that I had witnessed?
- ◆ Second, what could be done to improve the atmosphere of my classes?
- ◆ Third, what could be done to improve the learning that took place?

In this research, two sources of material were used: an informal survey, and a personal dairy of class observations. When the latter are used they will be indicated by placing them in a box.

Class observations from personal dairy notes

1.2. Research Methodology

The research methodology used in the attempt to answer the above three research questions was the Kemmis and Mctaggart's model for Action Research (Richards and Nunan 1990: 12):

- ◆ Phase 1: Identify and analyze a problem
- ◆ Phase 2: Develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening.
- ◆ Phase 3: Act to implement the plan
- ◆ Phase 4: Observe the effects of action in the contexts in which it accrues
- ◆ Phase 5: Reflect on these effects
- ◆ Phase 6: Reformulating the problem and planning future action

Action Research has a long history, the term being coined in 1946 by Kurt Lewin (Collins and Spiegel 1994 and Kemmis 1993), however John Collier is credited (Deshler and Ewert 1995) with originally developing the methodology from 1933 to 1945 in his work to improve race relations. Its roots were deep in the humanistic tradition, as we can see from the comment by Deshler and Ewert:

It has been considered a process of combining education, research, and collective action on the part of oppressed groups working with popular educators, and community organizers. The knowledge that is generated is intended to help solve practical problems within a community and, ultimately, contribute to a fairer and more just society. Its primary purpose is to encourage the poor and oppressed and those who work with them to generate and control their own knowledge. It assumes that knowledge generates power and that people's knowledge is central to social change (1995).

Many of the modern writers on Action Research, it could be argued, still reflect this humanistic tradition:

Another distinguishing characteristic of Action Research is the degree of empowerment given to all participants. Involvement is of a knowing nature, with no hidden controls or preemption of direction by the researcher. All participants negotiate meaning from the data and contribute to the selection of interventionary strategies, including the university researchers, the teachers and the students (Gabel 1995).

Teachers are viewed as equal partners with their collaborators in deciding what works best in their situation, thus reducing the possibility for unequal power relationships. (McLean, 1995 cited in Borgia and Schuler, 1996).

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) pointed out that Action Research and the idea of teacher as researcher, an idea he introduced as a way to improve education through empowering teachers by engaging them in curriculum development, were closely related (Cited in Collins and Spiegel, 1994).

Action Research is quite widely used as a research method today. For example, at one web site alone - at the University of Colorado's Department of Education's www.carbon - there are more than 60 full-text journal articles on or using AR.

Some writers claim the following are some of the aspects and goals of Action Research:

1.2.1. Involves change intervention

One of the most common aspects of action research is that AR often has as its goal or objective the improvement of a specific situation (Baskerville, 1999; Borgia and Schuler 1996; Collin and Spiegel 1994; Baskerville 1992; Deshler and Ewert 1995; Kemmis 1993).

The major thrust is not primarily to create generalizable knowledge or "basic" research that is unattached to particular circumstances, but to focus the knowledge generation on specific desired changes in a specific, often unique, situation (Deshler and Ewert, 1995)

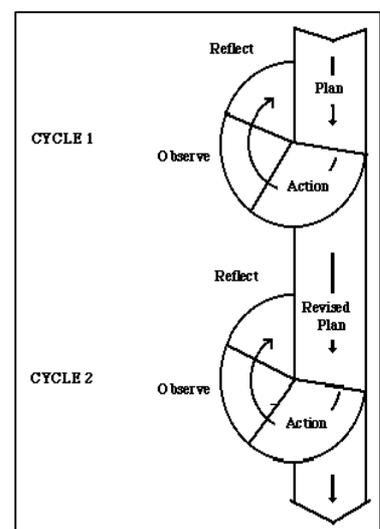
Kurt Lewin (1946) argued that through Action Research advances in theory and needed social changes might be simultaneously achieved (Cited in Collins and Spiegel 1994).

The fundamental contention of the action researcher is that complex social processes can be studied best by introducing changes into these processes and observing the effects of these changes (Baskerville 1999).

1.2.2. Cyclic in nature

Central to Action Research is the idea that there is a cycle of "planning, action, and learning which leads into the next cycle of similar activity" (Gabel, 1995). A representation of the cyclical nature of action research is given by Kemmis in Figure 1 (Found in Gabel, 1995).

Figure 1



1.2.3. Reflection and Values:

Another strongly stressed element of AR is reflection. There is the need for self-reflection at each stage of the cycles (Borgia and Schuler 1996), in seeking patterns and relationships (Borgia and Schuler 1996), in actualizing ones values in teaching in (Brooks-Cathcart 1998), as a tool for self-managed learning (Collins and Spiegel 1994) and on ones practices and the effects of ones actions in the classroom (Collins and Spiegel 1994).

1.2.4. Initiated by the Practitioner

Action Research deals with questions and problems “perceived by practitioners within a particular context “(Baskerville 1999). Borgia and Schuler (1996) are in agreement with this point further claiming that action research is growing because practitioners find themselves in leadership positions,

Action Research is conducted by practitioners to help them understand their contexts, practices and, in the case of teachers, their students. The outcome of the inquiry may be a change in practice or it may be an enhanced understanding. (Virginia Richardson 1994 cited in Collins and Spiegel 1996)

Deshler and Ewert (1995) stated that this tradition has its roots back to Buckingham in 1926 when he stated that educators were more “likely to make better decisions and engage in more effective practices if they are participants in their own research activities.” A similar view is expressed by Prabhu.

I argue that it is naive to think that specialists can formulate a good teaching method and then get teachers to implement it in the classrooms, I suggest that classroom teaching can improve only to the extent that teachers themselves act as specialists (Prabhu 1992)

1.3. An outline of this research

Since this research was carried out over a two-year period with a number of classes it proved difficult to report on what happened in a completely linear fashion: Phase 1 Phase 2 ... Phase 6. . Some tasks went through what were in reality mini-action researches. For example, the task Situations and Role-plays (see 4.4) went through

five separate cycles in an attempt to find a methodology that worked with my classes. It was felt best, for readability, to combine Phases Three and Four. This is not without precedent; Bartlett when writing about the process of reflective teaching states:

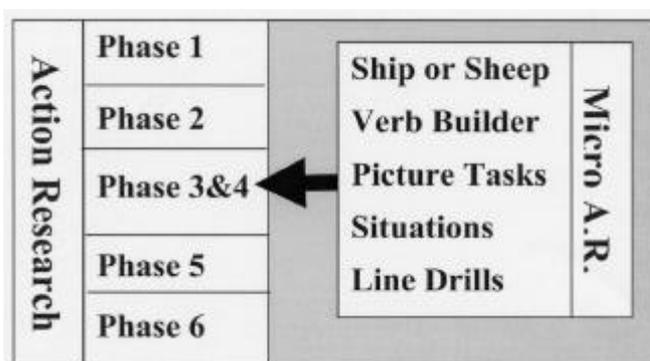
It is important to understand that all elements constitute the process of reflective teaching, but the elements are not linear or sequential. That is, in reflecting on your teaching you may 'pass through' the cycle several times; one element is not always or necessarily followed by the next element in the cycle; and one element may be omitted in moving through the cycle, especially when different courses of action are adopted (in Richards and Nunan 1990: 209).

A similar view is expressed by Skilbeck when speaking of his model for school-based curriculum development:

Such a diagrammatic representation of the process of curriculum making must simplify and risk distortion by its very brevity and apparent orderliness. Let us be ready to take concurrently or even in reverse what may suggest themselves to the orderly-minded as items for step-by-step progression (Cited in White 1988: 37)

figure 2

From figure 2 we can see that my research followed the standard six phases of the Kemmis and McTaggart's model. However, at phase 3&4 there are five Micro Action Researches, so to speak, which I am calling "Micro A.R.s:"



These constitute the body of the research. Each of these Micro A.R.s also follow the Kemmis and McTaggart's model. However, to save confusion in over labeling each phase within each cycle in these Micro A.Rs, these have not been labeled. If this had not been done then just the **Situations** Micro A.R. alone, because it went through five cycles, would have had a riotous maze of "phases."

2. The Informal Survey: identifying and analyzing the problem: Phase 1

What were the causes of the problems that were taking place in the Freshmen English classes?

This is an even more pressing question when we consider that in the language school, where I had taught for six years before coming to the University, there were extremely few motivational problems. Students were always extremely polite, usually interested in learning, and attentive. Furthermore, it was often easy to create an almost family like atmosphere in class. Once this happened, the class went extremely easy. Students were often vocal on this point. A typical comment after a few months was:

I had studied English since Middle School and couldn't make a sentence. Now after a few months, I can talk to a foreigner.

The atmosphere there was incredibly positive. Even on days when I was tired or low in spirits, after teaching a few hours I had so many pleasant encounters with students that I felt charged and full of energy.

In order to gain some understanding of why there was this difference between language school classes and university freshman classes, open informal interviews were used. For these twenty students, ten Western teachers, and two Korean teachers from the university were involved. These interviews followed the lead of the interviewees rather than a predetermined direction. The interviews were done with one person at a time. First, as brief a sketch as possible was given of some of the problems that had been experienced. After that, no attempt was made to direct their conversation, to agree or disagree, or to support or censor what was said. The only questions asked were clarifying questions.

This type of interview, it could be argued is well within the tradition of Action Research, for example:

Elliott (in Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990b Cited in South Florida Center for Educational Leaders @ <http://www.fau.edu> –no authors or dates cited) considers the need for communication between all participants to be of paramount importance: Since action research looks at a problem from the point of view of those involved it can only be validated in unconstrained dialogue with them. ...Since action research involves unconstrained dialogue between

"researcher" (whether he be an outsider or teacher/researcher) and the participants, there must be free information flow between them.

Having described the thematic concern, I set out to develop a plan of action to improve an existing situation. I did this in collaboration with a group of six students in a clinical practice setting. I was open and honest with them about how I felt about a particular school-imposed evaluative feedback tool required as part of their clinical experience. I discussed with them my personal values, action research, the power of reflection and my personal experience with journal writing. I encouraged them to share their feelings with me, and they did. They shared many of their thoughts and feelings about a variety of aspects of their educational experience. They also shared their perception that they could not change things and that no one really cared enough to listen. From this discussion, we were better able to understand each other and enter into a partnership to promote change (Karen Brooks-Cathcart 1998).

It is only by checking with the user community and with the learners themselves that a rounded picture of needs can be obtained. (White 1988: 89)

What follows are the results of these interviews. While it is certainly not extensive, it does give some indication as to why freshmen students were less motivated in studying English.

2.1. All the teachers interviewed felt the same problem

At the beginning of the interview, only about a third of the teachers admitted that they were having problems in class with students. About a third stated that they had no difficulties with students. However, oddly enough, as the interviews preceded all of the teachers – without exception – talked of the problems they were having with students. Kohl observed a similar reluctance on the part of teachers to talk about classroom failure and troubles:

...the school I taught at encouraged a collusive atmosphere in which everyone except the students pretended that the school was functioning smoothly and effectively and that the teachers were "doing a good job." It was not popular to talk about troubles or admit failures (1969: 12).

2.2. Learning English was not seen as important at that time

It was very rare for any of the students interviewed to express any enthusiasm or present need for learning English. They would usually say that "English is the international language," however less than 10% of the students expressed a real

desire to study English at this time. Quite often students indicated that the usual reasons for learning English were too far in the future.

One difference between language school and university students is that there is a much longer period of time before students will use English for the purpose of obtaining employment. At the language school students were usually older and were often motivated by career decisions: they were either looking for entry positions with large companies or advancement within their present employment. When asked, "Why are you studying English?" the main reason given by students was, "to get a job." For the language school students motivation was strong and immediate, or near enough so. For university students, based on the interviews, this does not seem to be true.

2.3. Large class rooms

At the language school, the maximum size of our class was fourteen students. The average size ran from eight to fourteen, but usually there were not more than twelve students. At the university, the maximum size was sixty, with classes ranging from forty to sixty. Everyone interviewed indicated that this was seen as a problem. Usually this came up almost immediately; it was often repeated several times; and it was stressed – sometimes quite strongly.

2.4. Low expectation for success

The classes at the language school usually went two hours a day for five days a week. Each session was four weeks long. The average length of time a student stayed there was four months. In this time, the average student reached a functional level of proficiency in English. They could not only talk about a topic in class, but they could also talk with you in the hallway or at class parties. This generated an excitement that filtered down. Even beginning students knew students who had had success, and they saw "successful" students in the hallways. Right from the beginning they often came to class with the feeling that something was going to happen - somehow after years of failure they were going to receive the magic pill

which would let them to speak English. Of course, they were shy and easily frustrated, but there was a lot of faith and the expectation of success was high.

In four months at the university, this does not happen. University classes run an hour and a half a day two days a week - in theory. In practice, it was less than this. In Korean universities, there are many holidays, special days, and "class-claimed holidays." During 16 weeks students go an average of 22 days - 18 days if we do not count test and test prep days. Obviously, they are only receiving at best about the same classroom time that language school students receive in two and a half weeks. Four months, however, is four months, and students, fairly or unfairly, indicated during the interviews that they felt concerned that they were making "no progress" during the four months. At first students were very positive during the interviews, but as they continued to talk they all indicated that this was a concern – some quite strongly. Some interviewees indicated that they had heard, before coming to class, many students expressing concern or frustration about this lack of progress. All these students know each other and older students talk to younger students, so probably instead of excitement filtering down there is a sense of frustration.

2.5. The first time male and females are together

According to the survey, it seems that over half of the students were in mixed classes for the first time since elementary school. Although no students surveyed were unhappy about this situation, it is possible that this was a distraction.

2.6. Social pressure

All the students surveyed, again without exception, indicated a strong desire to be accepted by their classmates. At the University, Freshmen English classes are based on majors: all the students in an English class have the same major. Therefore, in the class there are a large number of the people from whom a freshman wants to win acceptance. This may be an obstacle to their wanting to take risks in a second language.

Perhaps the most immediate and pervasive concern of teachers and learners alike in classrooms is to guard against a loss of face and, to the extent possible, to win approval, sympathy or loyalty from others as a safeguard against future hazards to "face" (Prabhu, 1992).

2.7. Text Books

Not one teacher or student interviewed, that spoke about textbooks, liked our textbook! Strangely, teachers were almost evenly split on their view of what should be done: some voting for an easier textbook some a harder. The generally comment from students was that it was "very boring." However, all teachers and students were equally strong on wanting to have a textbook in class.

Some of the students interviewed claimed that the textbook used in the Freshman English class was the same one they had used in Middle School! Even if this was a rare occurrence, the book certainly seemed, to me, to be very elementary. It was true that the students could not accomplish all the tasks in it, but it was probably also true that they had had very similar tasks so often – and failed at them – that this proved an obstacle.

2.8. Between high school and the army

Most male students in Korea have to go into the Korean army for two years after their second year of university. They have just finished, what sounded like one of the most brutally tense high school experiences, and in two years they have to face what is, by all indications, a horrendous military experience. So the first two years of university might be compared to a small oasis in a rather bleak and barren landscape. Hence, it is not too difficult to see why they may want to relax.

2.9. Conclusion from Interviews

Although the results of this survey are probably not surprising, after listening to students talking about their experiences, I found myself starting to see the university classroom from their perspective and to feel that what was happening in class made sense. By listening to students explain their world to me, it became a less alien world.

By beginning to understand why students were reacting the way they were, I was able to accept – at a basic level - things that were happening in class. Looking back it seems that here was where the first step was taken to solving the problems in class. Further, I seriously doubt that much progress could have been made otherwise. A similar experience was noted by Brooks-Cathcart (1998) where she said that direct communication with her students through interviews led to “a clearer and context bound understanding of their learning” and the “development of a caring connection between teacher and student.” A similar feeling can also be seen in Rogers and Freiberg:

Students tell us much about their conditions of learning. When we listen to students, we can gain an understanding about the reasons for both the successes and failures of our schools (1994: 27).

3. Develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening: Phase 2

The next step was to try to find activities that would interest students and a methodology that worked with these. Since the survey seemed to indicate that there was little motivation to learn English at this time and a lot of distractions and frustration, it was hoped that if tasks (the word “task” is used here to mean a set of activities that are similar) could be found that were intrinsically motivating and more likely to engage the students interest, that this would lead to an improvement in the atmosphere of classes and the learning that took place. Support for this can be found in the literature, for example:

When we capitalize on the student's initial motivation, focus it, and direct it into ego-enhancing learning experiences, this satisfaction motivates the students to further learning along these lines. Intrinsic motivation is both cause and effect. Using more and more language brings with it an increase in confidence and hence more language (Sadow, 1994).

... you can perform a great service to learners and to the overall learning process by first considering carefully what the intrinsic motives of your students are and then by designing class-room tasks that feed into these intrinsic drives. Classroom techniques have a much greater chance for success if they are self-rewarding in the perception of the learner: the learner performs the task because it is fun, interesting, useful, or challenging, and not because they anticipate some cognitive or affective rewards from the teacher (Brown 1994:20).

The plan is to present learners with an activity that will engage their interest and impel them to use whatever language they have at their disposal (Beretta and Davies, 1989).

When learners' interests are engaged, and when they are able to bring their own background schemata to classroom interactions, these can begin to be truly communicative, even with very basic learners (Nunan, 1987).

The question to be examined is what kinds of activities are most likely to catch student attention and promote participation (Sadow, 1994)

"Interestingness," the ability to grab and hold student attention, may be more important than the practice of specific language points. Activities that evoke a sense of excitement and fun and the need to actually think provoke and reward curiosity (Sadow, 1994).

In selecting learning experiences in a learning-centered classroom, the teacher will introduce a range of learning activities and tasks (Nunan, 1993).

These activities were used alongside the required curriculum – which was to complete half of a textbook each semester. This proved no problem. Because of the increase in motivation, it was possible to cover the textbook and to do a large number of activities.

3.1. Pre-testing the activities and methodology

It was fortunate that the university also had an English language school. This proved invaluable for testing out activities and methodologies in a much easier environment. Students received no university credits for classes they took in the university's language school, the classes were voluntary, and students had to pay extra money for them. Possibly because of this, it tended to attract the more motivated students. In addition, the classes were small, ranging from eight to sixteen students (but seldom being more than twelve students). Because of its high motivation and small classes, it proved an excellent place to test out and try to perfect activities and methodologies. However, as will be seen, activities and methodologies that worked well at the university's language school seldom work well in university classes without modification. Sometimes, as will be shown, extreme modification was required. Still it was useful to gain some feel for a task and to gain some confidence with a methodology before offering it to university classes.

3.2. Evaluating the activities and methodology

According to Prabhu (1987:56) to achieve learners' engagement in a task, it has to be seen as having a "reasonable challenge."

If a task looks very easy to learners, they expect no sense of achievement from success in it and are likely to be less than keen to attempt it. If, on the other hand, the task looks so difficult that they feel sure they will fail in it, they are likely to be reluctant to make an effort at all (Prabhu 1987:56).

To determine if the task was at the appropriate level, the teachers on Prabhu's project used the rule that a task was reasonable if "approximately half the learners in the class were successful on approximately half the task" (henceforth this will be called the 50/50 rule). Although this has been criticized - "Use of any such ad hoc criterion for assessing difficulty is not a satisfactory issue (Long and Crookes, 1992)" - for the purposes of evaluating the appropriateness of tasks used in my classes Prabhu's 50/50 rule proved quite adequate. It had the great advantage of being easy to apply, which is important when we remember that it was used in large classes and under less than ideal conditions.

Many activities were tried; however, because of space limitations, only five task types will be discussed in what follows. These represent about half of the task types tried. Nonetheless, this should be sufficient to indicate the problems encountered and the kinds of adaptations that were made.

4. Act to implement the plan and Observe the effects: Phases 3 & 4

4.1. Micro A.R.1 - Ship or Sheep

This set of activities started by using the minimal pairs (the reason for choosing minimal pairs will be discussed below) from the book Ship or Sheep (Baker 1981). However, since there were only a few words in each set of activities it became

necessary to compile my own minimal pair lists. To do this the web site at “stir” was used.

4.1.1. Implementing

1. Two columns of minimal pairs were put on the board. One column was labeled “A” the other “B” (see figure 4).
2. The correct pronunciation was modeled.
3. The class reproduces the pronunciation.
4. A semi-game was played with the class. The teacher pronounced one of the words randomly and students had to guess if it was from column “A” or “B.”
5. The students did the game in groups.
6. Questions on pronunciation were answered during and after step 5.

Figure 4.

A	B
Sheep	Ship
Bean	Bin
Eat	It
Seat	Sit
Leek	Lick
Cheeks	Chicks

Step 3 and 4 seem important because they allowed the class to work as a whole. From my notes, there is the following entry.

This seems to create a social atmosphere. Students like being active; this seems to provide them the opportunity.

4.1.2. Observations & Reflections

This task usually received immediate attention from my classes. This is probably because, from my observations, Korean students seem to have a strong desire to improve their pronunciation.

Despite this, the main value of this project is arguably not in any improvement that takes place in the student’s pronunciation (although this is important). First, it has proven a great project for moving students from the “I give up” mode to the point

where they are beginning to take *risks*. Rubin (1975, quoted in Larsen-Freeman and Long p. 188) argues that this is a necessary element for language learning to take place. Students seeing it as a game aid success in this task: they think it is humorous, and laugh when they fail.

For some strange reason, repeated failure to guess the right word is usually seen as funny rather than discouraging.

Next, these tasks were so simple for the students to have a successful experience with that it became impossible for students to hide behind the "English is difficult" excuse. Considering that the problem being explored was engaging students, this can easily be seen as of essential importance.

Finally, it often provided a great chance for the class and the teacher to interact. It was a good chance for exaggeration and light teasing, which tend to be forms of humor that, in my experience, Korean classes enjoy.

Adaptations:

1.) The main adaptation was turning this activity into a game. A simple change, but probably essential.

"Interestingness," the ability to grab and hold student attention, may be more important than the practice of specific language points (Sadow, 1994).

2.) Another adaptation was in choosing the minimal pairs. It seemed important to pick carefully minimal pairs where the difference in sound was neither too difficult nor too easy, striving for Prabhu's "reasonable challenge." By using the 50/50 rule, it was easy enough in practice to tell if the minimal pairs had been correctly chosen. Students were watched, if too many of them were having trouble with some minimal pairs then they were replaced. In the same way, if students had no trouble guessing, it was not hard to tell that a lot of them were becoming bored. Accordingly, more challenging pairs were chosen next time.

4.1.3. Reformulating

Although this task was very successful, it had one major problem. I did not have any follow up activities. True, students did different sets of minimal pairs, but quite probably, it would have been better if there had been other levels to this task, which used the interest that was generated.

The main concern of this research was to motivate students to study English, yet here I had found what seemed like a very strong motivation, but had not developed activities to move with it.

Some ideas of activities that could have been to allow students to continue with the interest indicated are: Jazz Chants, more systematic work on pronunciation, and group “radio” performance in presenting ads from magazines to the class.

4.2. Micro A.R 2 - Verb Builder Task

This task went through several versions before it reached the form that worked in the university classes. What follows is a typical example of using the 50/50 rule to develop methodology rather than to evaluate individual activities.

As with all the tasks, this set was first piloted in the university’s language classes. There it went through the following cycles.

4.2.1. Implementing

First Cycle:

At first picture cards were used. One side of a card had a picture the other side had a verb that corresponded to the picture.

1. The picture side was shown and students had to guess the verbs. Making this step more difficult generated more interest here. For example, the pictures could be shown very quickly, upside down, or just a part at a time.

2. Students wrote out sentences using the verbs, these were collected and put on the board. With some classes, this was successful; however, sometimes the class's energy dropped at this stage.
3. After this, there was a discussion on the mistakes made in the sentences, but here there was a real drop in energy.

Second Cycle

1. Same as 1. above
2. The cards were shown and individual students made (oral) sentences.
3. They were asked several follow up questions based on their sentences. This would often lead into mini conversations. This went really well; it went even better when we started using Korean characters: famous stars, traditional monsters, and heroes from the past as subjects.
4. Students worked in small groups – usually four or five students - practising making sentences with the verbs. At this time there were corrections made as I moved from group to group.
5. There was a group contest where the group that made the most correct sentences in two minutes won.

Although this Second Cycle had become very successful when used in small-motivated classes at the university's language school, it did not function satisfactorily with the large less motivated university classes.

Partly because of class size, there were problems using the verb cards (step 1). At first having students generate their own verb list was tried. In groups students were asked to compile as many verbs as they could in five minutes, then as a group they picked out the ten most useful words. These group lists were then combined to form a class list. However, this met with mixed success: with some classes things went well, but with other classes things moved too slowly to maintain student interest. Finally, the students were given a verb list composed of commonly used verbs. This

was determined by analyzing past samples of students' writing. The purpose of using common verbs was to reduce the effort needed by students to recall and use them.

In addition, although step three, asking follow up questions, was successful in the university's language school classes - often leading quite early in the session to a rather free form of communication - it did not prove possible to include this step in university classes. When it was included the students spoken to very often became confused and withdrawn, while the other students in the class became bored and disengaged and almost always quickly fell back into the behavior patterns I was trying reduce.

Third Cycle

1. A grid was drawn on the board (see figure 5) with the columns labeled "Subject, Verb, and Object." In another area of the board were placed a list of 10 "Subjects" and 20 "Verbs." The "Subjects were
general names like Joe
and Mary plus famous
Korean stars, and comic
and cartoon characters.

Figure 5

Subject	Verb	Object

2. Sentences were modeled by placing a subject and verb word in the grid. There was an attempt to elicit the "object" words from the students, however this almost always failed, so this step became just a short demonstration, with the object word being supplied
3. Students were put in their groups and were given ten minutes to write ten sentences.
4. The students then practiced making questions in their group. One student picked a verb and the next had to make a sentence. This continued around the circle.
5. Students then left their groups and visited other groups. This worked very well - when it worked. Still in a lot of classes, students did not want to do this.

6. After the students had gained some proficiency with the task – this required doing this task on several different days - there was a contest where each group was given two minutes and the number of correct sentences were counted.

4.2.2. Observations & Reflections

Class Atmosphere

When students were first put in groups there was a lot of confusion. It was not unusual for over half of the class to not have been listening. This was, however ignored, and students who were working were focused on. Later I started placing stars in these students' records. Students who were not working stood out quite strongly, so most of these soon learned that it was necessary for them to work.

This personal attention to students was extremely popular. It is important to note that during this step that a lot of communication started taking place. This took many forms: simple smiles, students turning their notebooks so I could easily check them, students asking for their stars or showing me how many they had, greetings, asking about my weekend or a movie I had seen, or standard grammar questions. Probably – I would say without a doubt – this is where real conversation started taking place in the class. This later carried over, it could be argued, when more “conversation-like tasks” were used. It was very difficult to get anything like a free conversation going with students at any other time except when I was “visiting” their group. By simply having a clear and specific output required from each group the class atmosphere greatly improved and I was able to start relating with individual students. Thus, by this simple means some progress was made toward two of the goals of this research - improve the atmosphere and the learning that took place.

The Contest

The contests (step 6 above) were preceded by a pre-practice period (steps 4 & 5) where each group would work together trying to maintain their accuracy while increasing their speed. At this time there was a lot of peer teaching, where more advanced students would work with the weaker students. This seemed to cause a change in perception with some students. Before the contest there was a bit of a positive reward for some students when they failed to speak English – the attitude seemed to be “Koreans don’t have to speak English, so **they were being Koreans by not speaking English.**” There may be some relation here to what Stevick has to say about Maslow’s level of belonging although he was talking about a higher level of accuracy.

As we reach maturity, we become part of groups of all sizes, some very small and others numbering in the millions of people. We depend on these groups as we establish and maintain our image of ourselves... One natural way of showing which of these groups we are loyal to is through our speech...When listeners (including ourselves) who are members of our own in-group hear us go beyond the gross and digital kind of accuracy in an outside language, **they may feel a threat at Maslow’s level of “belonging”** (emphasis is mine) - that we are somehow showing ourselves disloyal to the group of which they and we are members (Stevick 1996:143).

However, this reward for not speaking English was greatly minimized during the contest.

During these practice periods, and especially during the contests, other students certainly were not tolerant when a student went into the “English is difficult” mode and stood there gazing off into space. This seemed to happen because of two forces. One, there was a displeasure at letting the team down by not trying; therefore, the “English is difficult” way of acting became suddenly socially unacceptable. This process was greatly reinforced by the fact that we were using a very small set of verbs that everybody knew that everyone knew, therefore fellow students did not grant excuses. Two, once their group was all working together, it was as if a real social group had been created. Probably being a member in this group was the driving force - and the price of membership was speaking English.

Another positive effect of the contest was to help students overcome their shyness. Before the contest, students were very shy and not able to speak when I came near. Yet, they often tended to overcome this during the contest. Maybe this was because all the students knew that most people were making mistakes, so making mistakes wasn't important; that scoring was relaxed; and that that it was a team event. This student awareness seemed to help students achieve a lot of success. It is not uncommon during the first days for students to produce sentences at the rate of one every two or three minutes. During the contest the average rate was between 12 and 15 sentences in two minutes - the all time school record was 35. In this regards it is interesting to look at the advice given by Plato over 2000 years ago.

You must train the children to their studies in a playful manner, and without any air of constraint, with the further object of discerning more readily the natural bent of their respective characters (Plato 427-347 BC)

At the end of the contest this was put on the board:

15 subjects X 50 verbs X 10 Objects = 7,500 sentences.

Then I said: "You know how to make at least 7000 sentences in English." You could see the effect that this had on many students, particularly on the weaker students.

At the heart of all learning is the condition that a person believes in his or her own ability to accomplish the task...The eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they are fully capable of accomplishing the task. (Brown 1994: 23)

Increased Participation

One observation was how this activity helped students gain confidence. Often, when a student would be in the "I don't know English" mode and was refusing to try building a simple sentence, I could say, "I know you know at least fifty objects." Then pause and the student would "gird up their loins," so to speak, and go on not only to finish the sentence but also the task at hand.

Eliciting a broader range of words

Another observation was that students began to elicit words in broader semantic fields. For example, the verb “open” would have at first only yielded “door” or “window.” As time went on, it pulled in such words and phrases as: book, the store, the “Su-dok Jung” (student lounge), box of candy, soju bottle (the Korean student alcoholic drink of choice), the computer, the soccer game, her arms, his big mouth, the bag of tricks, and Pandora’s box. It was also interesting to note that idioms, personal words, and Korean-English words came into use, for example, “circle” for “student group” and “florescent light” for “stupid” (a florescent light goes on slowly). In addition, it was noted that once students started making sentences with the verbs on the list they had no problem using other verbs. It was as if by gaining the power to call up a few words the connecting words in their mental web also came under their control. The more success they saw, the greater their ability to retrieve words became – the more the bottleneck widened -- the greater was their flow. Possibly, this indicated that they were exploring deeper into their memory webs.

“Different words require different levels of activation in order to be born: very frequent used words require relatively little to trigger them, while uncommon words are harder to arouse (Aitchison, 19994: p. 207)

Using a larger range of structures

Another factor noticed was that at least 40% of the students started experimenting in their groups with a large range of structures. This happened without any conscious teacher intervention. There started being more use of post modification (mostly wrong, for example: “my friend at the train met me opened the door ...”), use of adverbs, and prepositional phrases. Chaining phrases became very popular when students learned they could easily create long sentences with them, e.g., “Superman went to the ball game with his friend from mars by bus this morning after class.” Such sentence got big cheers! So I think it is safe to say that students were becoming confident, pushing their interlanguage development (see quote on interlanguage below), and that risk taking, a necessary ingredient for language learning, was taken place.

In recent years researchers and teachers have come more and more to understand that second language learning is a creative process of constructing a system in which learners are consciously testing hypotheses about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge...The learners, in acting upon their environment, construct what to them is a legitimate system of language in its own right – a structured set of rules that for the time being provide order to the linguistic chaos that confronts them (Brown 1994b:203).

Successful language learners...must be willing to become “gamblers” in the game of language, to attempt to produce and to interpret language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainty (Brown 1994:24).

4.2.3. Reformulating

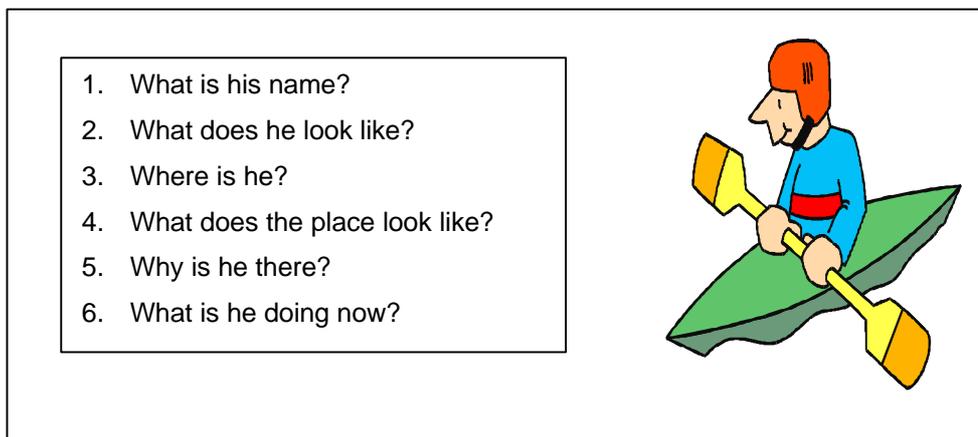
Again, there was the need for some follow up activities. The students were engaged in the task, they were communicating very well for students at their level, and they had gained confidence in making sentence, **BUT** there were no activities to carry their interest and learning further.

Some possible things to try in the future are:

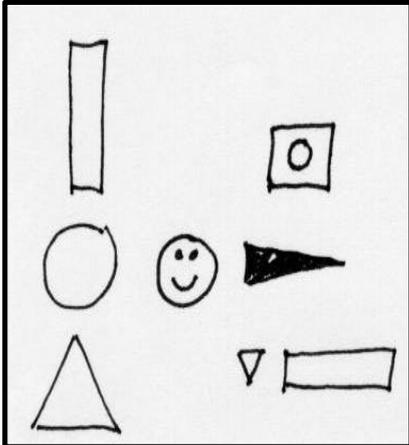
1: Try different approaches with asking several follow up questions based on their sentences (step 3 in cycle 2 above). True this did not work in university classes when first tried, however a change in methodology or a more gradual approach might lead to greater success. This way students would be moving more toward free conversation.

2: Move into asking and answering questions on pictures (see figure 6). First, the questions could be provided. Then, after the students had gained more confidence and skill, they could pick a picture and create their own questions.

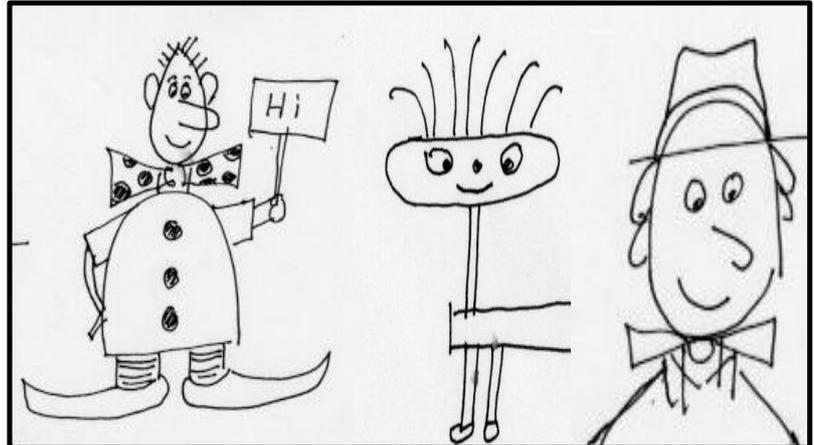
Figure 6



Patterns



Creatures



4.3.1. Implementing

This description is for the figure labeled “**Creatures**,” but a similar methodology was used with all these activities.

1. A picture was drawn of a creature using basic shapes like circles, squares, and triangles. Near the picture were also drawn about nine basic shapes.
2. A guessing game was played to elicit the names of the shapes. For example, “_ _ i _ _ g _ _” was put next to the shape triangle, and students had to guess the word. Then extra letters were added until they guessed it.
3. A creature composed of these shapes was described to the students, and they had to draw it.
4. The students described the same creature back to me and I drew it on the board
5. Students worked in groups. They took turns drawing and describing pictures

These activities and methodology were usually successful – in as far as they went (see 4.3.3 below). There was very little change necessary.

4.3.2. Observations & Reflections

Drawing on the Board

By drawing things on the board, I was immediately able to capture the attention of my students. Because my drawings were crude rather than the slick professional quality that is typical in text books a possible benefit was that students were less intimidated when it came to making their own drawings.

As an aside that may be useful to teachers developing their own material, because I used drawings with a lot of my activities, I found it useful to learn some basic drawing through books designed to teach drawing to children.

Sequencing

Sometimes just a slight increase in complication was enough to ruin a task. For example, one day when using the Logo activity, I tried to increase the complication of the activity just a bit. In this activity students give directions to an imaginary robot moving it around in a grid and having the robot draw shapes in different squares (see above figure labeled “**Logo**”). The standard way of giving directions is: “Go up one square, go right three squares, go down one square....” Since this class was a computer science class, I thought they could handle telling their robots to “turn.” The directions above would then be: “Go up one squares, turn right 90^0 then go forward three squares, turn right 90^0 and go forward one square.” Granted this new version of directions is more difficult, but this was a computer science class, so this was seen as a safe increase in complexity. Yet, the class was completely confused. Student engagement in the activity was being lost, and some students were starting to talk with each other in Korean. This baffled me. This class had been working extremely well; I thought that they would have enjoyed putting their robots through more complicated drills.

My instant reaction was to feel my students were at fault. I remember walking around the class thinking at first, “This is simple, if they would just try, if they would not see it as a problem, then they would find it very easy.” Then all of a sudden there was a

change in perception, "This is a good class, too many of the students are having a problem, there is just something about this change that is causing problems." This I would argue is another example of the usefulness of an evaluative tool like the 50/50 rule.

Student Contact

Another factor was increased contact with individual students. With out the class being focused on an activity it would have been very difficult to achieve this contact (given the size of the classes and the initial lack of motivation). When students, on the other hand, were engaged in a task that requires periods of minimal teacher input it was easy to walk around and relate with students.

Often I found myself passing by a student who had just flashed me a bright friendly look and I would stop and go back and talk with them remembering that I could relate with students again.

Support for this can be found in Brown (1994: 59), when he was describing the theories of Charles Curran:

... learners in a classroom are regarded as a "group" rather than a "class" ...The social dynamics of such a group are of primary importance... what is first needed is for its members to interact in an interpersonal relationship in which students and teachers join together to facilitate learning in a context of valuing and prizing each other...

'Task Fatigue'

At first, because these activities were successful, I tried to do them too often. Then I noticed a decline in interest. Prabhu (1992:57) had reported on a similar phenomena, which he called 'Task Fatigue,' and found that by having a period of several days between when similar activities were done, cycling in other tasks, that this would greatly reduce it. Because of this, I started waiting several days between when I did tasks of the same sort. This proved to work very well.

Magnifying Effect

There was a magnifying effect that took place. For example, when comments were made on the skill that one student had in communicating a more complex picture, then other students started trying similar things. After this, more complex pictures started appearing throughout the class.

4.3.3. Reformulating

There was the same problem as with the two preceding tasks. I had developed activities that worked well in class, however I had focused too much on this and had not developed more challenging levels that would use the interest that my students were showing. Some possible follow-up activities could be:

1. An activity based on asking and answering questions on pictures (see figure 6 above). This would have the advantage of integrating activities more: Verb Builder and Picture Tasks might seem more connected and this might provide a more graceful introduction to Line Drills (see below).
2. Students could discuss more complex charts and graphs or graphical information. For example, the charts and graphs from such journals as *The Economist* or *News week* or the graphical information from *Popular Science* or *Scientific America* could be used as a basis for future activities.

4.4. Micro A.R. 4 – Situations and Role-plays

Situations and Role-plays are common activities in the textbooks that I have used in Korea. Students in my classes in the past have tended, in most cases, to practice these mechanically: they would try to memorize a dialogue and repeat it. At best, they would just make minor substitutions into them. This “mechanicalness” may be caused by the students being over exposed to this type of activity, or possibly is because by an over reliance in the past on the traditional methodology.

When functions were used in classes in the past, a traditional methodology had been used: it was presented, then drilled, then practiced (Coulthard 1977, p. 156).

It seemed that if a way could be found to increase students' motivation when doing them, that they could be very powerful activities in the classroom. Students had practiced similar situations and role-plays many times in other classes over the years, so there was a large body of experience and knowledge to draw on. In addition, since they related to every day events their knowledge of the world could come into play. As Widdowson (1978: 54) said, "learners already know a good bit of what we want to teach them." All that was needed was a way to get the students interested in situations and role-plays. To achieve this I chose to try to apply the Brunfit model.

First, communicate as far as possible with all available resources.

Second, Present language items shown to be necessary for effective communication

Third, Drill if necessary (Coulthard 1996, p. 156)

The method chosen to apply the Brunfit model went through several cycles.

4.4.1. Implementing

Cycle One

At first, I tried to use situations and role-plays from the textbook without first reading the dialogues in the textbook which illustrated the situation. This was a complete failure. It was impossible to keep students from looking at their books and repeating these dialogues.

Cycle Two

Situations and role-plays were created using pictures from the textbook. This was done completely independent of the particular situation being taught in the chapter containing the picture. The reason for doing this was to try to link these activities in some way with the textbook, yet at the same time to make it impossible for students to copy dialogues from the textbook. Again, this was a complete failure. Just asking

students to open their textbooks usually lowered class morale enough that most activities were jeopardized. Simply stated, the textbook may be a symbol of past failure, and this perception may be difficult to circumvent. This seems to be true although the students in the survey all indicated that they wanted to have a textbook in class. One possible explanation of this seemingly contradiction, not liking yet wanting textbooks, can be found in Kenny:

For some students, knowledge, as they have come to understand it, presents a formidable, almost bodily, obstacle. They feel impotent before it, and unable to initiate any endeavors of their own until the fetishism has been exorcised....“We came here for knowledge, they say, because we lack it and can’t do anything until we get it. Some students dramatically reinforce this point and bury their heads in dictionaries as if to show that the dictionary constitutes what they would regard as *real* knowledge (Kenny, 1996)

Cycle Three

Situations and role-plays were taught completely independent of the textbook. This had mixed results. Some students would get involved with the activities, but others would fall into old patterns: doing homework, talking to friends in Korean, etc.

It was not until this was done, however, that I started having some success. It is interesting to point out that even when a situation or role-play that had failed when using the textbook was tried independent of it there was marked improvement: more students were staying focused on the task, for example. One explanation of this could be that the very success of popular textbooks could diminish their effectiveness. As was pointed out above, some students had the exact same textbook we were using when they were in middle school. So they had worked on the same kind of situations repeatedly – and probably in the same way. Yet, by making what seems a relative small change – taking the situation out of the textbook – the activities were revived. Still, there was not real success until checkable output was required (see 4.4.2 Step 2).

Cycle Four

Step One: The situation or role-play was modeled for the class with several students.
Step Two: Students wrote dialogues in their groups.

This worked extremely well (see 4.4.2 Step Two).

Step Three: Students practiced their dialogues

This often worked poorly. Students fell back into their old pattern of memorizing their dialogues and repeating them mechanically.

Step Four: They presented their dialogues to the class

This was an abysmal failure and had to be quickly stopped. In an attempt to save this stage, I tried having the presentations presented as a contest, but even at its best, the students only had medium interest in other people's dialogs.

Step Five: Common mistakes were gone over with the whole class.

Even when this was kept to three to five minutes it proved a failure

Cycle Five: The final methodology

Step One: The situation or role-play was modeled for the class with several students.

Step Two: Students wrote dialogues in their groups.

Step Three: Students moved to new partners and practiced the situations without using their written dialogues

4.4.2. Observations & Reflections on Cycle Five

Step One: The situation or role-play was modeled for the class with several students.

This worked for only about a third of my classes. When it worked, it was extremely dynamic: frequently there were loud humorous exchanges with a class; and students would often enter the situations with a lot of enthusiasm and spirit and the whole class would be involved cheering and clapping. Exaggeration and going to extremes seemed to work best. For example, when doing the situation "Shopping" students enjoyed buying a girlfriend/boyfriend, a submarine, or a Ferrari. Students seemed to win a kind of social approval by "running the gauntlet," so to speak, of the role-play, not necessarily with good English, but with vigor, humor, or courage. A student could be successful, for example, by just arguing loudly with me, in very simple language,

about the exaggerated cost of something; or by describing the Ferrari, he wanted to buy, “Big. – Fast – Expensive – With long legged blond.” or the girlfriend he was shopping for, “beautiful – tall – sexy - shaped like this (student using the standard hand motions).”

In other classes, Step One proved a failure. One problem was the large amount of time some students took to answer a question. Nevertheless, the real problem was that some classes just did NOT want to try modeling a situation or a role-play with a teacher with all their classmates watching. When stage one was skipped, most of the problems disappeared. By starting out with step two (“Write dialogue”), these students were, it could be argued, in a safe enough environment, that they were not threatened. This element of security was strongly emphasized by Stevick (1996:8-9) when he summarized *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*, singling out the following three drives:

- 1.The need for security. Which in pragmatic terms he described as the need to be comfortable with and confident in what is happening in class.
- 2.The need to feel a member of a social group, and to maintain and improve this.
3. The need for self-actualization: satisfying curiosity, having fun, learning...

An alternative tried was to choose the better students in the classes when starting with stage one was a problem. This worked well usually for one, at most two, times. Then it had the undesirable effect of causing these students to feel victimized: these students often started complaining when they were called on more than twice.

Step Two: Students wrote dialogues in their groups.

Di Pietro described using a similar technique in his classes and observing a similar marked increase in motivation:

It became clear after only a few meetings that the students were bored. The textbook dialogues were stilted and unoriginal. In an effort to rescue the class from total failure, I suggested that students write their own dialogues and perform them in class. The turnabout was astounding. The level of motivation took a marked upswing ...(1987: 4)

Another observation was that this put in place a definite checkable required output. Students could not sit in class and do nothing. This may be a bit controversial, but I believe that my students liked having this. Quite possibly, this may not be true in other countries, but it certainly seems true in Korea. When students were doing such a project there was the hum that lies between “the repressed silence of a custodial atmosphere and the noise of the disengaged and idle (Rogers and Freiberg 1994:12).”

When disturbances were minimized there were fewer control battles taking place in class. It could be argued that when there are such control battles, students start feeling tense because there is not enough order in class for them to feel safe; that the teacher is against them; and that the teacher is different and not approachable. On the other hand, when students see the teacher as relaxed and enjoying themselves, especially in Korea, a kind of family like atmosphere starts happening in class. Once this happens there seems to be a major change in teaching. Students start laughing in class, students are more prone to take risks, and their language becomes more animated. Also students start assisting, for example, when the teacher says “shhh” to quite a class, other students start echoing this. When students start assisting, the teacher can easily maintain a harmonious class. For example, I could, walk out of the class to talk to someone on business, come back, and find students working busily away. This would have been completely impossible the first semester. Finally, at least in Korea, a teacher gets a name for being a “good teacher.” After that, creating a family atmosphere becomes almost automatic.

Step Three: Students moved to new partners and practiced the situations without using their written dialogues

Why have students write dialogues and then not let them use them?

By having them write dialogues first, a large portion of the class had the chance to gain enough knowledge and experience to be able to do a semi unrehearsed role-play on the same situation. Moreover, by not letting them practice the dialogues, the tendency to memorize and “regurgitate” what they had written was greatly reduced -

this is a constant problem in Korea. Since there was a large amount of variation in the dialogues, students were practicing relatively unrehearsed dialogues during this stage. In this way, there seemed to be enough challenge to engage the student's interest. On the other hand, since all the practice was on the same situation, there was a large amount of recycled language. This, it could be argued, greatly increased student's comfort with the task.

Willis (1990) when commenting on when students preparing to give reports to class said, "In these circumstances the form of the message assumes great importance. Students will move towards what they believe to be a prestige form of the target language that prescribes a high level of formal accuracy." Although my students were not reporting to the class, this written stage seemed to have the same effect. Once students started writing their dialogues, they became quite engrossed in the process, and were interested in achieving a more prestigious form of English (see 4.4.3 Ripple effect below).

In addition, it seemed that by providing students time – which the writing stage allowed – there was the opportunity to elicit their prior knowledge of English in solving the communicative task before them. It allowed the time, it could be argued, that most of my students needed to pause, look at what they knew of English, and to bring this to the project at hand.

4.4.3. General Observations & Reflections on this set of activities

Feeling uncertain

It is interesting to note that I continued to have feelings of uncertainty when I used this rather than the traditional methodology. When I had used the traditional methodology, I had provided the students with certain basic information before they practiced. When I came to class, therefore, I felt prepared: I knew what I was going to put on the board, for example. However, with this methodology, even after a year and a half, I often felt discomfort when coming to class because I did not feel "prepared."

Trouble getting started

One of the largest and most common problems was in getting students started. For many situations, the first exchange was a greeting. Once students wrote this down, they usually proceeded easily. However, although all they needed in most cases was a "Hi," getting this could be very difficult.

"Hi" ----pause ---- look desperately around the room ----pause ---- "What do you say when someone says Hi." ---- Pause---look in a trance like stare at the blackboard waiting, hoping, or trying through mind power to make the needed dialogue appear----pause----finally---"Hi."

It was interesting to see what a barrier that first "Hi" was. Once students got past this they did not suddenly become fluent, but they did proceed on with a greater ease. Maybe that first "Hi" brought with it an awareness that they could do more than memorize and repeat dialogues.

As time went on the class moved to the point where, when presented with a situation or role-play, most students would engage it quite successfully rather than sit in confusion or waiting to be given language to memorize and repeat. The main problem these students seemed to have was really in the order of perception rather than in the area of language skill. This is easy to demonstrate here. Only twenty percent of the class is able to do the dialogues the first time, but after a few days of working with dialogues in this manner most of the classes mysteriously gained the ability to do them. These students were apparently unable to answer "Hi" with "Hi" after years of studying English. Yet in a few days they could produce dialogues in unpracticed and unique situations. Obviously, they did not learn this in the usual sense of the word. They did learn something; they learned that they had enough knowledge already to handle most of the typical situations on their own.

Ripple Effect

Sometimes confident students would explore or play with a dialogue. For example, when doing the situation "registering at a hotel" some students wanted to get their girlfriends into the rooms, some got in arguments with the clerks, one shocked the clerk by bringing in a harem.

When students heard these explorations there was a kind of ripple effect. More students started going over their dialogues and seeing what they could add to make them more interesting.

There was the same Ripple Effect with students who, for whatever reasons, were not trying. When they saw their classmates busily doing the task and involved with it then they would often - usually very slowly - slide from inactivity to activity. A major point here, I believe, is that this was happening without any input from me and most likely much quicker, yet more smoothly and surer than I could have brought about.

This ripple effect worked for corrections also. Often students would ask me questions about what they had written. At that time, other students would become interested. Then there would either be a spontaneous explanation in Korean by the students or a brief one by me. These times were, in all probability, the most important discourse and grammar "lectures" that were given. They were certainly the lectures that the students paid the strongest attention to, and they were the only ones that they took notes on. This is in line with research in SLA.

Warshawsky's research (1978: 472) found that, " in every case, a form was acquired and used productively only when it assumed a critical role in transmitting essential information. Grammatical structure appears to develop in the learner's speech in response to communicational need (Taylor, 1982).

According to this view (one stressing unconscious processes), there can be no teacher pre-specification of what is to be learned in any given lesson because the teacher's agenda may not match the learner's unconscious process of hypothesis construction and revision. For the CTP, the guiding principle was that form could be best learned when the learner's attention was focused on meaning (Beretta 1989)

Individual Learning

An example of individual learning was the range of language being used on these activities. Some students were using full sentences and already working on extending their language. Instead of saying, "I need computer" they were saying, "I need a super fast computer with a lot of memory." Other students were finding enough sense of success just seeing themselves carrying on the dialogue with their partner by using sentences of just one word or so:

S1: What want?

S2: Sexy girlfriend

S1: Yeah!

S2: What look?

S1: Long leg.

S2: Good. How about she?

S1: Skinny. Short. Ugly.

S2: How about she?

S1: Great! How?

S2: 100,000 won

S1: 50,000 won

S2: 70,000 won

S1: No. 55,000

S2: 60,000

S1: 57,000

S2: OK

Often there was more personal and real conversation taking place in class.

Today I was walking around my classes feeling much calmer and reflecting on the many enjoyable contacts I can have now with students. Some of these might be as brief as a smile and a hello, or their questions about grammar. However, often the lessons were set aside, so to speak, and we joked or chatted about different things, talked about what we did over the weekend, or they asked me questions about America. This was impossible my first semester.

This was in a class of fifty students who a few weeks before were afraid to say “HI”. I think this change is a major argument in favor of the methodology. During the first semester using the traditional methodology, when I came up to students’ desks most of the students became silent and bent their heads, some even hid their faces with their hands – eye contact was very rare.

Less restrictive Language

It had been common with the traditional methodology for students to become “stuck” because they were trying to remember the exact words of a specific dialogue they had learned and could not. A typical case is a student thinking for minutes trying to come up with the word "looking for" in the sentence "I am looking for a jacket." His conversation was completely stalled as he tried different words like "discover," “hope,” or “wish” in his search for the “correct” word he had been taught in some earlier dialogue in some prior class back in some forgotten side road in the past. Usually after a few days of making dialogues with the present method, students learned that they did not have to find or remember exact words from former dialogues they had studied.

Not Controlling the Language

Sometimes students used a more limited area of a situation than would have happened with the traditional methodology. For example, when doing the situation “Invitation” they would use a small set of expressions than I would have taught - “let's” and “how about” predominated. They would also work with a very basic

dialogue: deciding to do something now rather than making an appointment to do something later, which would have required a meeting time, day, and place. I was concerned about this at first and felt a strong tendency to try to stretch the language and the dialogues. Yet, I let them continue on their own to see what would happen. It was noticed that students introduced complexity in what could be considered as outside the usual limits of the dialogue:

One girl went into an elaborate description of Leonardo DiCaprio. She used an enviously long set of descriptive adjectives and animated language.

One pair went into a discussion talking about what the party they had invited each other to had been like. It was interesting to note how corrections on the past tense were accepted here. One could almost feel hands reaching out and grabbing for language information. In effect, the students had wandered into a topic that interested them. They had run into language difficulties but had proceeded anyway. When they had been offered information on the specific problems they had met, they were extremely receptive. When other students saw their interest, there was a mini lecture. I raised the level of my voice to reach the students who were listening. I noticed that many students were taking notes at this time. This seldom happens when I gave “lectures” even for a minute or two at the board (but then I am not Leonardo DiCaprio with his long set of charms). In addition, when I moved from group to group many other students asked me about examples of past tense sentences.

4.4.4. Reformulating

I felt that there was a lot of success with these activities. What I would like to try to achieve in the future is:

1. With some classes, as indicated above, there was a lot of excitement and enjoyment demonstrated. In the future I would like to work towards this happening more often.

2. Di Pietro recommended incorporating ambiguity into situations arguing that, “the need to uncover the agendas of those contributing to the discourse is more important than disambiguating the structure of the initial statement (1987: 8). I would like to experiment with his ideas in the future.

3. It may be beneficial to collect student created dialogues and give students samples of the more sophisticated, creative and imaginative ones. Hopefully these would serve to stimulate the students into working at more depth. Stevick speaks quite strongly on the importance of depth and its relation to learning;

Research also shows that mental activity has a powerful effect on memory, that there is a tight relationship between 'cognitive depth' and retention (Craik and Lockhart 1972). What this means is that the more we actively work on a solution to a problem (the more commitment we make to the task of learning something that is), then the more likely we are of storing this information permanently (1996: 136)

4.5. Micro A.R. 5 - Line Drills

The students were given a handout with a series of questions centering on a topic. They then worked with a partner asking these questions. They changed partners and repeated the activity. As I walked around I would correct the most common mistakes, answer questions, or enter dialogue with students.

4.5.1. Implementing

Although this a very common EFL task (this was definitely true in the Language schools I have taught in) it was not that easy to find activities that actually worked with my students.

In the language school the most common way of doing these were to take a small editorial out of the newspaper and write questions on it. It was possible to form questions with little concern for controlling the language other than possibly simplifying the vocabulary.

Nonetheless, this did not work with my university classes. For one thing, their reading skills were way below what was necessary for newspaper editorials. For another, they needed to begin with a Line Drill that was very simple.

What seemed to work best was to start with a set of questions that followed the same pattern and needed only a “yes” or a “no.” To give an example, the first line drill was based on the pattern: Did you ... last weekend? It had twelve questions like:

Did you go to a “nori-bong” last weekend?

Did you climb a mountain last weekend?

Did you eat any anything special last weekend?

Did you do anything you enjoyed last weekend?

Obviously, this was more like a “grammar drill” than a real “communicative activity.” However there seemed no way around this. There was enough fear of the task as it was. I was not that easy to convince my students that it was “not difficult:” that all required was “yes” or “no.” Once this was demonstrated, students were willing to try the activity.

Once confidence was gained, it was then possible to use more free and natural questions on topics in Line Drills. For example, the following were one set of question on the seventh Line Drill:

Can you drive?

How did you learn? Who taught you?

Is it better to learn from a friend, relative, or at a driving school? Why?

What problems did you have learning to drive?

Have you ever driven (or ridden) on a motor cycle? How did you like it?

Would you like to have a motor cycle?

What cars do you like?

What special things would you like to have in a car?

Where do you like to drive?

What problems are there with cars in Korea?

4.5.2. Observations & Reflections

It was interesting to see that even though the first line drill was extremely simple, students responded to it with a lot of enthusiasm. Possibly this was because they felt they were being asked “real” questions and could give a personal answer. This may very well have been the first time this had happened for these students in a language class. Sadow (1983) suggested that by giving students tasks that are more challenging it might signal “the unspoken message that the teacher believes the students capable of handling them.”

As time went on there was a decline in interest in Line Drills. When they worked, there was a lot of socializing and It was extremely easy to enter conversations with students. However, although Line Drills were very popular in the beginning in the university classes, it was not that easy to maintain interest in them in all classes as time went on. A pattern that started happening in some classes was that students started to talk together in Korean waiting to just before I reached them to start asking and answering questions in English. In the language school classes, *Line Drills* were almost always extremely popular. There, students would effortlessly talk to each other moving around forming different groups spontaneously. The feeling was often like a cocktail party.

4.5.3. Reformulating

One reason for this difference could be that the topics and questions were NOT interesting to the students in the university classes. However, the same activities had been used in language school classes and had generated a fair amount of enthusiasm. Of course, this does not prove that the university students did not find them boring. Another reason might be that there was no required output, so students learned that they could fall back on their old patterns of class behavior. One possible solution would have been to introduce a step in the methodology that required them to write answers to a few questions. However, this was not tried.

Another consideration is that in the university's language school classes it was possible as time went on to give students a few topics and for them to make up their own questions. In most classes, this could be started in the fourth or fifth Line Drill. It was never able to do this in the university classes. This may again be because of the need to improve the methodology that was used. In the future I would like to try changes in the methodology used with this set of activities, especially trying to see if students could reach the point where they could create their own questions on a topic. If this could be done it may be possible to move students toward more natural conversation. One way that might work is to experiment with "idea generating" tools like "brain storming."

In brainstorming, the goal is to uncover ideas, NOT strive for order and coherence. Being concerned with organization and details at this stage slows down our writing and inhibits our thinking. Effective brainstorming keeps pace with our thoughts and happens quickly and freely. Caution: When we write in complete sentences, we often follow the initial idea and thus may eliminate the possibility of new ideas. Sometimes our best thoughts are buried beneath our initial, obvious thoughts.... Brainstorming allows us to capture all of our thoughts. It also takes the pressure off because we don't have to get it right--the outcome isn't permanent. In the end, it also allows us to see all of our thoughts at once. We can then see the "big picture" and not get trapped in the mire of little words....To begin KEY-WORD brainstorming, place your topic at the top of a sheet of paper or on the scratch pad below. When you begin, write down all of your ideas. Continue to focus on your topic, but try to let your thinking go. Write key words only--just enough to be able to retrieve the thought in the future....Write as fast as you can. Write in a list form, and don't worry about spelling, word choice, etc. Get as many ideas on paper as quickly as possible (<http://www.kanten.com>)

5. Conclusion – Reflections: Phase 5

In this research there were three questions raised:

First, what were the causes of the motivational problems that had been witnessed?

Second, what could be done to improve the atmosphere of the class?

Third, what could be done to improve the learning that took place in my classes?

5.1.1. The First Question: looking at the causes of the motivational problems

Although, as stated earlier, little new information came out of the survey, still this was one of the most essential part of the whole research. First, after listing the factors that came out of the informal survey (see 2.The Informal Survey), it was easy to see that there were grounds for difficulties in the classroom. Nevertheless, the more important point was that by taking the time to listen to students in a non-structured manner their class behavior became understandable and non-alien. This was of major importance in establishing a working relationship with my students. Although Rogers was a psychological counselor – who worked extensively in education - we can see he had a similar experience when working with students.

As a psychological counselor talking to them, giving advice, explaining facts, and telling them what their behavior meant did not help. But, little by little, I learned that if I trusted them to be essentially competent human beings, if I was truly myself with them, if I tried to understand them as they felt and perceived themselves from the inside, then a constructive process was initiated (Rogers and Freiberg 1994:43).

5.1.2. The Second Question: improving the atmosphere of the class

An important factor for developing both activities and methodology proved having an evaluative tool – and patience.

An extreme example of this can be seen with the Line Drill activities. For this, I created a little more than 100 topics, and with each topic I tried to write six or seven questions on the average. The questions for each topic were tried in class, and student's reactions to them observed. The ones that seemed confusing, or failed to engage students were then adapted or dropped. After more than two years, I am still working on the questions for this.

The same was true with methodology. Only one task, *Sheep or Sheep*, worked in university classes exactly as they had in my test classes at the university's language school. The general pattern was for tasks to go through a fair amount of changes before they could be used in the university. *Verb Builder*, for example went through

some rather extreme changes (see 4.2) and *Situations and Role Plays* required five different versions of its methodology before a working method was developed (see 4.4).

This need for reevaluation carried on even within university classes. Sometimes when a methodology was “successfully” developed for university classes, it often did not work in all classes. For example, with *Verb Builder* students in some classes would often not want to move around in class (see 4.2.1 Third Cycle), or when doing *Situations and Role Plays*, even though modeling the activity was extremely successful in some classes it was a failure in others and had to be dropped (see 4.4.2 Observations)

Without the objectivity of using an evaluative tool, it would have been difficult to reevaluate activities and methodology that had worked well in the past. The temptation at such times to blame students when a successful activity fails can be rather strong (see 4.3.2 *Sequencing*).

One final point, As predicted by Prabhu, it was quickly found that even successful activities could not be used without there being several days in-between task-types (see 4.3.2 Task Fatigue).

...learner's success began to decline after a certain number of lessons...one can attribute this decline to over-familiarity resulting in a form of 'fatigue'. As a result of this observation, teachers on the project introduced a regular change of task-types after every few lessons, different ones thus being used cyclically (Prabhu 1992: 57).

Cyclical Effect

There seemed to be a kind of cyclical effect that that occurred. By using activities that engaged the students, I could devote time to getting to know my students and relate with them. This in turn created a more positive atmosphere, which probably made it easier for activities to be successful.

This was probably greatly assisted by most of the activities being social in nature; usually students were working in groups of three to four. This provided the

opportunity where my students and I could interact more easily. I believe this last point can be seen repeatedly throughout this report. From this, one could argue that whenever the students in my class reached a point where the large majority were focused on a task real communication between the teacher and the students was greatly enhanced (see 4.2.2 Class atmosphere, 4.3.2 Student Contact, and 4.4.2 Step Two). Of course, this may not always be true in other situation, for example, where there are more extreme behavior patterns or greater difficulties.

Having required and checkable output.

Getting to know my students, developing an understanding of them, and bringing in tasks that were more engaging was often not enough to improve class atmosphere. Repeatedly, it seemed necessary to include a step in the methodology where there was required checkable output. Possibly, this is a controversial part of this research, and it would certainly require more research to substantiate it. Quite probably, it is only a useful intermediary tool in certain situations. However, having made this qualification, in the classes in this research this tool proved very beneficial to the teacher and, apparently, to the students (see 4.2.2 Class Atmosphere and 4.4.2 Step Two).

5.1.3. The Third Question: improving the learning that took place

There was some evidence that improved learning took place, or more accurately, that some conditions for learning to take place had improved.

Trying:

When the majority of students were involved in a task it often had the effect of causing other students, who had been entrenched in “Not Trying” to try to use English (see 4.4.3 Ripple Effect). Another factor that improved “trying” was to have some tasks so simple that it became difficult for students to avoid trying (see 4.1.2)

More Real Communication:

It repeatedly happened that the most real communication would take place when the class was engaged in an activity. During these times students would often ask me questions about English, personal questions about my past, my life, what I did, how I liked this or that, and they would often tell me things about themselves (see 4.4.3 Individual Learning).

More Individual learning:

Different students often used the same tasks at different levels. For example, when doing a situation some students used one or two word exchanges while other students used fairly complex sentences (see 4.4.3 Individual Learning). For another example, during Verb Builder, some students were making deeper associations and more complex sentences while other students were working at a more basic level (see 4.2.2 Eliciting a broader range of words).

Use of Less controlled Language:

When students were not presented with pre-selected dialogues or language they would sometimes use surprisingly advanced language. In addition they would begin to rely on their knowledge of English rather than memorized language from textbooks (see 4.4.3 Individual learning).

**6. Reformulating the problem and planning future action:
Phase 6**

There are many things I would do differently or would like to try in the future.

6.1.1. Use of the journal

For this research, I kept a journal. Although I still feel this was important, I would have organized the information from my journal differently. Specifically, I would have

immediately started classifying the different parts of my journal entries. Of course, these categories would have probably changed as the research went on, but the very act of classifying them would have focused me earlier on to patterns that were appearing and have helped direct the research better.

6.1.2. Lack of follow up activities

The fault that most concerns me in this research is that my activities were too much of a “patchwork” lacking in interconnection. Although they did seem to have very good short-term results in engaging my students, they were probably weak in giving students enough of a sense of accomplishment. Repeatedly, there was the failure to develop follow up tasks that took the interest generated to a higher level.

One cause of this problem was over focusing on making activities successful and not adequately considering how to develop tasks that had multiple levels. This was partially caused by seeing some tasks as easy and hence to be done early in the session and other tasks as difficult and to be done later. This assumption limited the number of activities I could do of a task type in a session.

Another cause of the problem was an over focus on having success with a set of activities and not considering what to do once that success had been gained. Students would almost certainly have benefited more if they had seen themselves achieving increasingly higher levels of accomplishment.

Our self-esteem is directly related to our sense of achievement. Without goals, successes are easy to overlook and our sense of achievement may be severely undernourished (Lauver and Harvey, 1997: 40).

In the future my thinking on activities should be “reformulated” to:

- ◆ How to interconnect activities more
- ◆ How to develop more “advanced” forms of activities that have successfully engaged students.
- ◆ How to enable students to have a feeling that they are progressing in English

6.1.3. Self-direction

In the future, I definitely want to start including more student self-direction and choice.

The key principles which appeared most clearly here were that involvement and excitement occurred when learning was self-directed and initiated by personal choice of the student (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994: 87)

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