

Responses of lower-proficiency Japanese university students to an experimental CLT classroom design

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〈論文〉

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT, or the Communicative Approach) promotes the idea of students talking to each other in a foreign language with a teacher guiding them. However, in reality it can be difficult to implement. Particularly in the Japanese context, shyness and apathy among students toward speaking English in class can be persistent and vexing hurdles. In classes with students of low English proficiency and motivation, it is easy for instructors to give up on the idea of getting students to talk to each other in English.

This paper discusses the implementation of a CLT-based classroom design outlined by Murphy (2013a, 2013b) that promotes semi-structured group dialogues. The responses of 125 students after 12 weeks of instruction using this design revealed positive attitudes toward classroom activities. Tentatively, these results support the idea that even students with lower proficiency can actively and enthusiastically participate in English conversations in class.

日本の大学生に対する CLT 授業方法の試験的導入

ライアン ジョエル P. *

要旨

コミュニカティブ・ランゲージ・ティーチング (CLT 又ははコミュニカティブ・アプローチ (Communicative Approach) という外国語教授法は、コミュニケーション能力の育成を中心とし、教員がガイドしながら学生同士が外国語で会話することを理想とする。しかし、特に日本の環境の中、英語に対して学生による苦手意識あるいは無関心のため、実際に導入することは困難である。英語力と学習意欲が乏しい学生に対して、教員にはグループで英会話をさせることが無理だという固定観念が生まれ易いのであろう。

本研究は、マーフィー (Murphy 2013a, 2013b) による CLT に基づき、グループで半構造的な英会話を用いる授業方法の導入を説明する。同手法を用いた 12 週間のインストラクションを行ったのちに、同インストラクションを受けた 125 人に対して調査を行った。その結果、この授業方法を通じて英語力不足の学生でも積極的に英会話に参加できるようになることを示す。

Keywords: CLT, communicative approach, communicative competence, Immediate Method, communication strategies, speaking English in class

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1. An Uncommunicative Reality

Japanese pre-tertiary English classrooms have traditionally been teacher-centered and passive learning environments (Shimahara, 1984; Hino, 1988; Gorsuch, 1998; McVeigh, 2001). A majority of students enter university having been put to at least six mandatory years of English study that includes listening to lectures and copying, translating difficult reading passages, and memorizing language forms and vocabulary in order to pass examinations (Nozaki, 1993; Anderson, 1993). One of the unfortunate results of the test-oriented nature of Japanese pre-tertiary English education is that students are trained to think that they must produce “correct” English.

Teachers, on the other hand, are under pressure to produce students who produce “correct” English. At best, students may be able to pass written tests, but some feel disappointed that their efforts have yielded them very little in terms of communicative competence in English (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Falout & Falout, 2005). These students may be unenthusiastic toward attending more mandatory English classes to fulfill credit requirements, or toward the prospect of having to deal with more grammar, memorizing more vocabulary, parsing and translating more reading passages, and studying for more testing of language form.

This problem may, in some ways, be an inevitable one. However, the increasing number of demotivation studies with respect to English language learning that are coming from Japan (Ushioda, 2011) suggests it is a problem that is worsening over time. Japanese shyness in the foreign language classroom (see e.g. Cutrone, 2009; Doyon, 2000; Miller, 1995; Helgeson, 1993) is yet another factor for instructors to contend with. Shyness, low motivation and low proficiency can threaten to undermine the enthusiasm of even the most dynamic and well-meaning instructors.

However, it is an untruth to assume that low proficiency students do not have enough means to communicate in a foreign language. In the real world, imperfect English is used for successful communication every day. If teachers create an environment where imperfect English is permissible as long as it communicates, they improve the chances of engaging the interest of students with low proficiency, and of motivating them or re-motivating them toward the idea that learning to communicate successfully in English is within their grasp.

2. CLT in the Japanese EFL Context

Communicative Language Teaching, or CLT, is a desirable goal in many foreign language learning environments. The word “communicative” is attractive. It reflects the movement in the 1960s and ‘70s away from previous teaching methods that were deemed ‘un-communicative.’ CLT seems ideal for Japanese students whose pre-tertiary system has failed them in terms of fostering the ability to communicate in English. In actuality, however, there is a considerable gap between what CLT means and what actually goes on in classrooms, as well as disagreement over its appropriateness to the Japanese context.

According to Richards & Rodgers (2001), CLT “refers to a diverse set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning and that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures. These principles include:

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- Fluency is an important dimension of communication.
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error. (p.172)”

In particular, however, as Humphries (2012, p.490) states, “Regarding classroom dynamics, CLT requires a change from traditional teacher-led instruction to learning environments where the learners become active participants in the construction of knowledge (Kern & Warschauer, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).” The question for many instructors considering shifting their teaching style toward student-centeredness is: to what degree?

A distinction between a weak version and a strong version of CLT was proposed by Howatt in 1984. He stated that the weak version promotes integrating communicative activities like information gaps and controlled dialogue practice into a broader or existing language teaching program, and that the strong version “advances the claim that language is acquired through communication (p.279).” In other words, the strong version focuses on providing students with opportunities to communicate with the language from the very beginning, and helping them figure it out as they go along. As he summarized it, “If the former could be described as ‘learning to use’ English, the latter

entails ‘using English to learn it’ (p.279).” Liao (2000) adds that “the weak version is one which attempts to integrate a communicative component into a traditional language program, (p.15)” and that the strong version is more independent of traditional elements such as grammatical explanation, error correction and drills. He comments, “Teachers who have been used to the traditional method may find the weak version easily [sic] to understand and use than the strong version. This is perhaps a reason why the strong version is less popular than the weak version (p.15).”

Whether to implement a weak or a strong version of CLT is, in some cases, a matter of instructors doubting whether their students are capable and/or willing to engage in the autonomous conversation that strong CLT seems to call for. They may fear a ‘deafening silence’ in the classroom when suddenly students have no script to read, no word lists to memorize. Or, they may wonder how they can assign grades fairly without testing for mastery of language forms. Some instructors are looking for ways to engage their students in communicative tasks, but are confronted with a perceived lack of linguistic ability or confidence in their students, so they revert to, at best, weak forms of CLT. As Littlewood (1981) put it, these weak forms focus on classroom tasks that “aim to equip the learner with some of the skills required for communication without actually performing communicative acts (p.8).”

The classroom setups such as the one outlined by Murphy (2013a, 2013b) represent a shift from the so-called weak version of CLT toward the strong one. I wish to emphasize the word *toward* here, because “strong” is not necessarily better than “weak,” and a classroom design need not be exclusively one version or the other. It is my intent, however, to present a case that adds to Murphy’s (2013a, 2013b) assertion that a ‘stronger’ implementation of CLT *is* possible in Japanese university EFL classes, even mandatory ones and at lower proficiency levels.

3. A Strong CLT Classroom Design

Murphy’s classroom setup evolved from an impromptu mid-semester experiment. A classroom routine for higher-proficiency classes at one university was introduced to a class of lower-proficiency students at another university, in an attempt to get the lower-proficiency students to engage in conversation

for longer periods of time. Murphy (2013b) found that students’ speaking times during oral tests increased when they were freed from feeling that they had to adhere to using words and phrases modeled in textbook dialogues. Under this new classroom routine—one that promoted in-class conversation practice as the number-one priority—these lower-proficiency students became more engaged in classroom conversation practice activities as well as in speaking tests. Subsequently, the instructor abandoned the textbook-based activities that used scripted dialogues altogether, developed this group-discussion/debate classroom routine, and implemented it in all of his classes.

It is tempting to refer to this classroom design as the “Murphy Method” because it alliterates well and is easy to remember. However, while the particular classrooms Murphy (2013a, 2013b) describes may be unique, the idea of devoting large amounts of class time to practicing English conversation is not unprecedented. Azra, Ikezawa, Rowlett & Vannieuwenhuyse (2005) refer to the Immediate Method, whereby “material taught in the class is immediately used in order to have conversations on the spot (p.1).” In the classroom design outlined by Azra *et al.* (2005), a topic and appropriate language are introduced, followed by sequenced conversation practice in pairs and groups. Murphy’s (2013a, 2013b) design is similar in principle and, interestingly, was devised for similar reasons. The Immediate Method was developed by French teachers at the University of Osaka, who encountered in their classroom environments

large groups; low personal motivation; great differences in knowing and speaking the language among students in the same group; bad homework habits; no opportunities to speak the language except in the classroom; few teaching hours; no lab, no audio or video material; no guarantee that students will attend each week (Azra *et al.*, 2005, p.3).

There are, however, some differences between the Immediate Method and Murphy’s (2013a, 2013b) design. For example, in the Immediate Method described by Azra *et al.* (2005), conversation content is relatively simple (“When is your birthday? How was your vacation?”) and use of the L1 is permitted and encouraged (“What is _____ in English?”) Murphy’s design, on the other hand, assumes students can already handle basic language structures and more complex conversation topics; if some students appear unable, it assumes they will learn from other students

who can as they go along. Also, although use of L1 is not strictly prohibited in the in-class conversations, it is expected in the conversation tests. The commonest ground between the two designs is that they both invest heavily in the hypothesis that interaction is essential to the process of language acquisition (Long, 1996) and, accordingly, in the idea that conversation tests are an integral part of the EFL learning experience (Azra *et al.*, 2005).

It may therefore be tempting to refer to Murphy's classroom design as a variant of the Immediate Method. It should be noted, however, that the term *method* has various definitions with respect to language teaching and learning. Lange (1990) observes that foreign language teachers' attraction to the term began in the late 1950s as a way to remedy 'language teaching and learning problems.' (p.253). The philosophy of *method* fits well, perhaps, with behaviorist theories about how people learn language—not unlike the way organisms respond to stimuli—that were popular at the same time that the notion of the language teaching method came into vogue. Bell (2003) also comments that the term *method* is challenging to define. He states,

Methods with an uppercase M seems to mean a fixed set of classroom practices that serve as a prescription and therefore do not allow variation. Brown (2000) defines method this way when he argues that "virtually all language teaching methods make the oversimplified assumption that what language teachers 'do' in the classroom can be conventionalized into a set of procedures that fits all contexts" (p. 170). For Kumaravadivelu (1994), a method "consists of a single set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a single set of classroom procedures directed at classroom teachers" (p.29). Richards and Rodgers (2001) add that methods are relatively fixed in time, leave little scope for individual interpretation, and are learned through training (p.326).

Murphy's (2013a, 2013b) classroom design is, therefore, better thought of not as a method but as a framework, with the potential fit any classroom context where the instructor wishes (a) to maximize student speaking time and (b) to focus on developing students' conversational competence and confidence. The only assumption necessary on the part of the teacher is that even low-proficiency students *can* and *will* use English in conversations in the classroom, for extended periods of time, if they are provided a sufficiently accommodating and encouraging environment.

3.1 Classroom Design Element #1: Group Discussion/Debate

The first element of the discussion-debate classroom design is small-group discussions on a topic that can be argued from opposing standpoints. Are video games a good thing or a bad thing? Are mandatory English classes useful or a waste of time? Should parents raise children with a 'hands-on' or a 'hands-off' approach? Any topic is potentially viable, as long as it can be argued from differing viewpoints. Instructors may introduce topics any way they like, pursue them to whatever depth they choose, using whatever materials, activities and language they deem appropriate. The goal is to set up a framework of a discussion that students can explore, add to and build on with their own ideas and their own language.

After the topic and a few example statements have been introduced, students form groups of three and must engage in a conversation. The rules are simple:

(1) Members must use their best English. "Best English" means whatever English they can muster, and whatever English makes sense to the others. This includes imperfect or grammatically incomplete English. Students' English must be considered "good English" as long as other group members understand. Instructors are free to offer "better English" to whatever degree and frequency they like. In cases where students don't understand one another, a prime opportunity exists to encourage the use of communication strategies, such as asking for repetition, clarification or definition. In the context of the Immediate Method, Azra *et al.* (2005) and Marchand (2010) refer to these as 'meta-communication'.

(2) Members cannot all agree. Regardless of what students might actually think, they are required to stock arguments from both sides of a topic. Taking positions on a topic is first-come, first-served. For example, one of the three students might say "I think video games are really great!" A second might agree: "Me too!" The third student is left to argue from the "video games are not good" viewpoint. Members can try to persuade the others, but the all-can't-agree rule must be upheld throughout.

(3) Members must keep the conversation going. Ideally, the goal is to argue from a given standpoint by cross-examining what the person(s) with the opposite standpoint say(s). This interplay can approach a "debate" when enthusiastic students try to "win" the argument,

however, ultimately the goal is simply to keep the discussion going by asking and responding to questions. For students with lower proficiency and motivation, participating in a conversation in English for over five minutes without long pauses or breakdowns is a considerable achievement.

Group members are rotated frequently, and the conversation starts over each time. Between group rotations, the teacher may solicit arguments and answer questions from students, add to or refine student-generated language, and record relevant elements on the blackboard for students to copy. During iterations of conversation, the instructor may circulate and monitor, as well as jump in to conversation and demonstrate arguments. This is particularly helpful for groups who may be struggling to keep the conversation going and need individual guidance.

The group discussion routine, with its three basic rules, attempts to treat two persistent afflictions that can fuel students' reluctance to speak. The first is fear of making grammatical errors. Since pre-tertiary education focuses so heavily on preparing students to take examinations, most students have been trained to think that making grammatical mistakes, or producing imperfect language, is bad. Further, and perhaps particularly in Japan, it can be embarrassing to make mistakes in front of classmates and/or a teacher. In this group-discussion activity, however, accuracy of language form is downplayed: If an utterance makes sense to the other person, it is good enough. If it doesn't make sense, in order for the conversation to proceed, clarification must be

sought and the statement rephrased until it does make sense.

The second is fear of having to express personal opinions that might run contrary to others. Again, this may be a particularly sensitive fear in the Japanese context. In an EFL class, being spotlighted and compelled to utter an opinion with only rudimentary linguistic ability, and with people one might not be familiar with, can be a jarring experience for some students. In this group-discussion system, language mistakes are not penalized, and ad-libbing and role-playing are encouraged. Since not all members of a group can agree, and since a preferred or easier-to-argue viewpoint might be snatched by the other two group members before the third says anything (e.g., many university students enjoy video games), it is necessary to be ready with defensible arguments from both sides of the topic. What one truly thinks about any given topic is, therefore, sufficiently protected. After all, the other group members might be role playing—deliberately taking the position opposite to what they really think.

3.2 Classroom Design Element #2: Group Rotation

The second element of the discussion-debate classroom design is group rotation. Students are put into groups of three, and systematically and frequently rotated to form new groups with new members. Figure 1 provides an illustration of this group rotation in a classroom with a typical desk layout and 30 students. In addition to groups of three, one pair and one group of four are included for illustrative purposes.

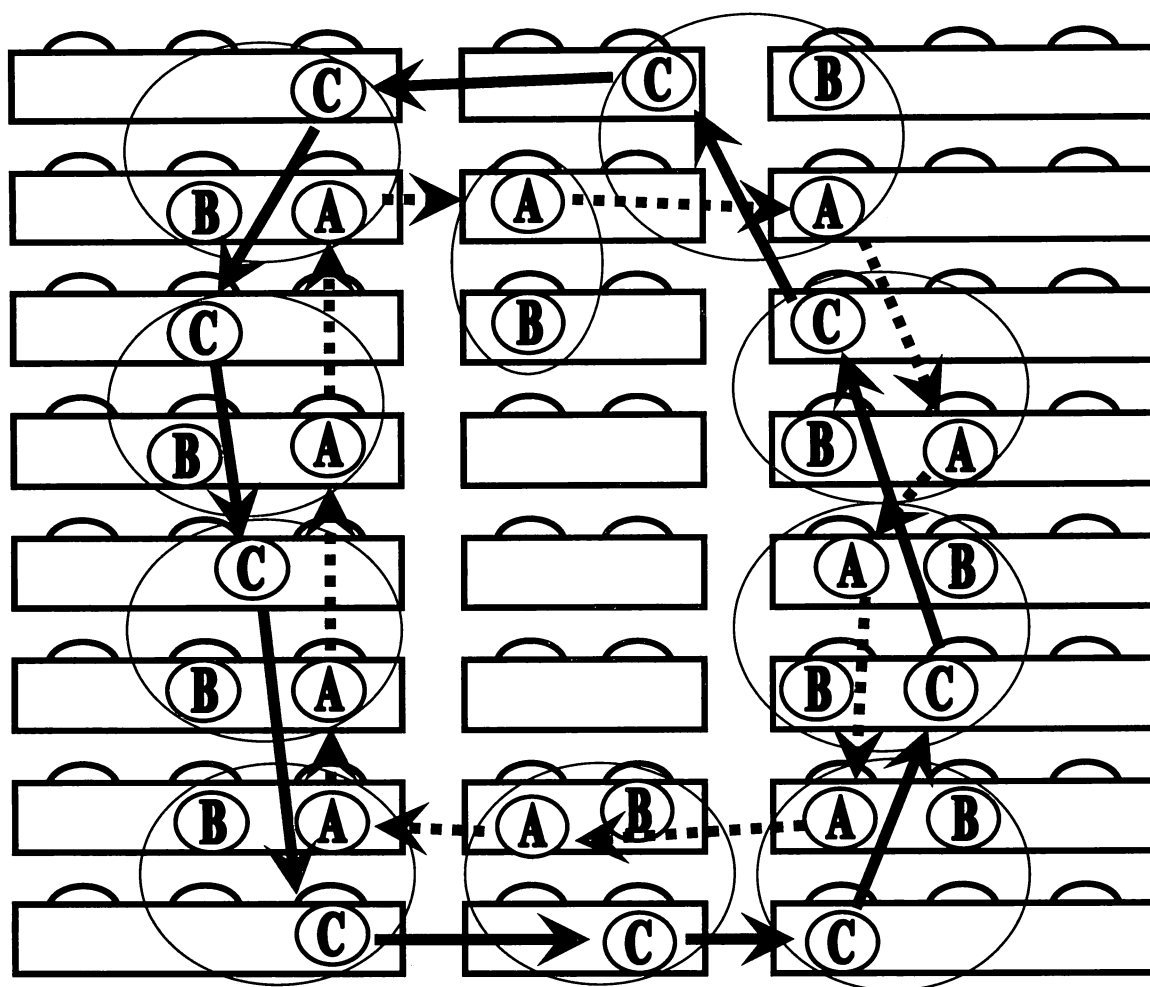


Figure 1. Group Rotation

“A” students move clockwise and “C” students move counter-clockwise (or vice-versa). “B” students stay seated. For classes whose numbers are not divisible by three—for example a group of 25 or 26 students—one or two groups of four are possible. Pairs are possible, however, pairing puts two students directly at odds with one another, which may be alarming for very shy or very low proficiency students. In a group of four, one of the three letters “A” “B” or “C” can be doubled. In a pair, there are only “A” and “B.”

The instructor has the option of assigning letters to students or, when students get used to the routine, allowing them to choose their own letters. When the instructor chooses, it allows him or her to assign the stationary “B” position to less confident, less proficient, or otherwise less motivated students, who may initially feel intimidated by or averse to moving around to other groups.

Groups may be rotated any number of times, at whatever intervals the instructor deems

appropriate. On average, each round of conversation lasts about 7-10 minutes, but the instructor can switch groups whenever it seems like students are slowing down. Rotating groups achieves two things: 1) it promotes randomness, avoiding cliquing and clustering of students, and 2) it makes it difficult for students to avoid participation—or rather, it allows other students to become active models of active engagement with the speaking task. Ideally, this sense of active participation becomes infectious. This routine alone can easily fill a standard 90-minute university class period, and is sustainable over any number of weeks, depending on the number of topics the instructor wishes to cover and on whatever supplementary activities the instructor wishes to include.

3.3 Classroom Design Element #3: Testing

Testing includes two parts: A written test and a conversation test. In a class of 30 students or

fewer, both parts can be accomplished within one 90-minute class period.

Written tests. The written test is given during the first 20 minutes of the test period. Students must list five positive and five negative arguments about a given topic. Phrases are acceptable. After that, students must write a hypothetical conversation where members of a pair or group disagree. An actual sample test is provided in Appendix A.

Conversation tests. Conversation tests are conducted within the remaining 70 minutes of the test period. The conversation tests follow the in-class pattern exactly: groups of three students are chosen at random, must navigate a discussion on a topic in English, and cannot all take the same position.

Grading. Grades are a 50-50 average of the two parts. For the written part, students are individually given an A, B or C based on (a) how much they write, (b) how many statements or ideas they generate, and (c) how well they

argue from both sides of a topic, in the context of a conversation. For the conversation part, students are individually given an A, B or C based on (a) how much they contribute to the conversation, and (b) how well they argue from the position they choose. Table 1 presents sample grading criteria and an illustrated sample grading scale.

Grading criteria and scales are adjustable, as well as the degree to which the grader chooses to include accurate language form in the assessment. It should be reiterated, however, that the goal of this classroom design is fluency over accuracy; imperfect written English, just like imperfect spoken English, is worthy of credit as long as it makes sense to the grader. The grader may offer “better English” in the form of feedback comments to whatever degree he or she thinks appropriate. When students’ written ideas are completely unclear to the grader, they can be marked as such (“What do you mean?”).

Conversation (50% of grade)	
“A”	Talks a lot, leads conversation, asks questions, asks for clarification (What do you mean? etc.), argues from point of view, helps others “build” or “balance” conversation, offers original ideas.
“B”	Participates in conversation, answers & asks questions, asks for clarification when doesn’t understand, argues from point of view.
“C”	Participates a little in conversation, but avoids topic, answers questions with simple responses. Isn’t familiar with points of view / possible arguments.
Writing (50% of grade)	
“A”	Writes a lot. Includes many arguments from both points of view. Includes original ideas as well as those reviewed in class in a creative conversation.
“B”	Writes some, includes some arguments from both points of view, Includes arguments discussed in class.
“C”	Writes some, but goes off topic. Not many arguments from both points of view. Not much element of ‘discussion / debate’.

Speaking	A+	A	B	C	C-		
Writing	A+	A	B	C	C-		
Total	A+	A	B+	B	C+	C	C-
	105	100	90	80	70	60	50
	最優	優		良		可	

Table 1. Sample Grading Criteria

Grading considerations. For conversation tests, accommodating a class of 30 requires efficient engineering. For example, 10 groups of three students each within a 70-minute time frame allows an absolute maximum of 7 minutes each, including time it takes for groups to change. Azra *et al.* (2005) comment that the presence of onlooking peers may be one of the main pressures that cause students to fear speaking, and so in the Immediate Method oral testing is, when possible, conducted apart from other students (p.8). If, as I have done, the instructor chooses to conduct the tests outside of the classroom—for example, in an empty adjacent classroom—a maximum 6 minutes per group is more realistic. Oral feedback about performance is desirable during classroom practice sessions, but during tests the teacher says nothing except in extreme circumstances, and assumes the role of silent observer and note-taker.

Instructors who experiment with this classroom design may feel at first overwhelmed or bewildered by the task of grading. Conventionally, language tests assign points to correct language forms. Language forms lend themselves well to point values because they are concrete, consistent, and quantifiable. Because this classroom design de-emphasizes accuracy of language form, a more holistic approach to the grading process must be adopted. In principle, the idea is to add points for language and ideas that students are able to produce, rather than to take away points for language or ideas that students have been taught but fail to remember.

Instructors will have to find an appropriate balance between correcting students' written and oral language forms and recognizing students' contribution of arguments and ideas. They will also have to find the appropriate amount of feedback to provide. Instructors may wonder how much of this feedback is actually taken in by students, or whether it is worth the effort. Volume of feedback aside, perhaps the most important element is demonstrating the act of providing feedback. Even a few short comments and corrections on written tests are an indication that the instructor is giving personal attention to the language that the student has generated. Just like during oral practice in class, it is not feasible or necessary to correct every student error. If something is genuinely unintelligible to the instructor, he or she can indicate so by commenting "What do you mean?" This helps demonstrate the "ask for help/clarification" communication strategy.

The underlying philosophy of this testing

system is that the tests are an integral part of the learning process. This philosophy reflects that of Azra *et al.* (2005), who state,

In itself, the conversation test is an essential piece of oral practice. Students face a teacher and have to perform. They are naturally nervous at first but experience has shown that they feel a real sense of achievement after succeeding in the task that was assigned to them: conducting a conversation, however simple, in a foreign language (p.8).

In both classroom practice and in tests, all four English skills are covered: students listen and speak to each other, and they read and write what is on the blackboard and on handouts. Testing is simply a more formal, intimate sampling of the group discussions that go on in the classroom.

4. Classroom Design Implementation

Implementation of Murphy's design in my own classes was gradual, and not without trepidation. My experience teaching at the Japanese university level has been primarily with non-English majors in mandatory English classes. This classroom atmosphere has included low language ability, low motivation toward language study, and minimal engagement during presentation and controlled practice of basic language structures. "I can't get them to talk," "My students are so apathetic," "They just won't do anything" were frequently heard complaints among colleagues teaching similar classes.

I had been working on developing a syllabus that focused on practicing communication strategies through timed pairwork activities. These activities were generally popular even in classes with lower motivation, and tended to generate short "bursts" of engagement in English. In reality, however, the total classroom speaking time was minimal. A form of semi-controlled practice, the activities required little creativity from the learners, and language patterns and speaking content became very predictable. Further, my tests seemed inconsistent with what went on in the classroom. Oral and written tests superficially covered the four skills. However, for example, many in-class activities involved student-student pairwork, while oral testing was student-teacher (see Rian, 2009).

What I really wanted students to do was speak as much as possible in English, in class. Murphy (2013b) had noticed that, using a textbook-based conversation format that required students to memorize portions of textbook script, his students would often attempt to "complete" the conversations with as

little language and in as little time as possible. This may have been an effort on the part of students to minimize the risk of using incorrect language. After he switched to an open-ended conversation design, where there were no scripts to memorize, he noticed that students were more willing to talk for longer periods of time, using whatever language made sense to the other group members.

The idea was appealing to me, however, I as a teacher was also avoiding risk. I, too, had fallen into the trap of blaming the students—believing that some of my classes were incapable of anything more than manipulating and reciting simple language patterns. In other words, I too was “fully vested in the idea that lower-proficiency students could not—or would not—handle open-ended speaking tasks, or anything beyond controlled practice of basic language forms (Murphy, 2013b, p.85).” Further, I concluded that my materials and syllabus, while they were teacher-designed, were at best an amalgam of tasks whose only unifying element was that they somehow dealt with English, and had been generally popular among students whom I had *perceived* as being not able or willing to handle something more challenging.

I first experimented with the design in one class, an elective course titled “practical English” (応用英語, *Oyo Eigo*) I was teaching at the time, with about fifteen 2nd and 3rd year humanities-major students. They had varying levels motivation and proficiency, but had explicitly commented to me that they wanted “more chances to speak in class” than the short timed-conversation activities I had planned.

I experimented with a variety of topics, including fast food, movie theaters, illegal downloads of music, school uniforms, *juku*, entrance exams, attendance policies, voting, TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership, a multinational trade agreement that is currently a contentious topic in Japan), and mandatory English classes. The topics were only loosely related in some cases, some borrowed directly from debate-focused textbooks, and ranged from the mundane to the esoteric. For each topic, I prepared a very simple worksheet with two columns for “plus” and “minus” aspects. I

provided vocabulary only as necessary, and let the students come up with most of their own arguments. We covered one topic per week for the last six weeks of both Spring Semester and Fall Semester 2011.

Two observations struck me about the experiment with this classroom routine: (1) that I was doing less talking during class, and (2) that sometimes I found myself interrupting and cutting off student conversations in order to rotate partners or groups, otherwise they would just keep talking. I spent more time wandering around the room, dropping in on conversations and offering advice. It was also the first time I tried student-student speaking tests, rather than teacher-student. During conversation tests, the same thing happened: in some cases I had to cut them off, or we would run out of time and not be able to finish all tests during the class period.

The following year, I continued the experiment in five English classes at Hokkaido Information University (HIU), which are mandatory for 1st year students and elective for 2nd – 4th years. I retained most of my previous syllabus, but condensed the material to open up the final five weeks of Fall Semester 2012. I used two topics that had been popular in the first experiment: attendance policy and mandatory English. Each topic took two weeks, and the final fifth week was devoted to writing and speaking tests. This time, there were 25-30 students in each of five classes.

It worked well enough that I decided to keep going. I edited out half of my syllabus to open up all of Fall Semester 2013 for the classroom design, and implemented it in all six of my mandatory English classes.

Further, I added a warm-up activity that offered practice with making questions and asking other students opinions and experiences. An excerpt from the handout on the topic “mandatory English” is provided in Table 2. In this activity, students circulate and must convert the statements to questions, asking other students until they find someone who answers “yes.” They then record the answerer’s name. Free talk guided by follow-up questions like “Why?” as well as note-taking are strongly encouraged.

<i>Find someone who . . .</i>	Name	Follow-up / Free Talk NOTES
... enjoyed English classes in high school. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ Why?
... hated English classes in high school <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ Why?
... has used English in the <u>real world</u> . <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ When? Where? With whom?
... thinks that all Japanese students should study English. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ Why?
... wants more <u>opportunities</u> to practice speaking English in class. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ Why? How?
... prefers <u>teacher-centered classes</u> . <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ Why?
... wants <u>something to change</u> in English education in Japan. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		→ For example? → Why?

Table 2. Excerpt from “Find Someone Who” activity handout

In the Table 2 example, some words that may be unfamiliar to students are underlined. These may be glossed briefly before the activity begins. The circulation time may be for as long as the instructor sees fit. Ten minutes is a good rule of thumb, but this can be shortened or lengthened according to student engagement. After students sit down, the instructor can solicit responses and jot them on the blackboard, highlighting and/or adjusting any language as he or she sees fit. As a segue to the group discussion activity, the instructor may wish to categorize some student responses into “plus” and “minus” columns on the blackboard. These statements may be used by students as arguments in the group discussions.

5. Student Response to the Classroom Design

I have noted that student responses to experimental implementations of the design have been positive enough to continue working with it. However, this is a teacher perception. Studies by Gorsuch (2000), Samimy & Kobayashi (2004), Taguchi (2005), Kurihara & Samimy (2007) and Nishino (2008) have examined factors that influence teachers' perceptions of CLT, highlighting teachers' feelings that CLT is difficult to implement in an environment that puts priority on teaching to exams. On the other hand, Savignon & Wang (2003) observe that

Whether communicative language teaching is seen to be difficult, effective, or is rejected as

inappropriate, reports on its implementation have been based mainly on teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching (Li 1998). Only a few studies have investigated learners' views (for example, Schulz, 1996), and fewer still, learner views of communicative practices in the classroom (p.225).

Savignon & Wang (2003) examined the perceptions and attitudes toward EFL of 174 Taiwanese first-year Taiwanese university students' perceptions and attitudes toward EFL based on their pre-tertiary experiences. Results indicated that

learners expressed negative attitudes toward grammar-based instruction and positive attitudes toward a more communicative approach. These findings corroborate those of Huang (1998) who found Taiwanese senior high school students' view of the ideal way to learn English to be through the use of English (ibid., p.239).

Huang's (1998) and Savignon's & Wang's (2003) studies dealt with student perceptions and attitudes toward EFL learning in the high school context. Two subsequent studies by Yoshida *et al.* (2012) and Gamble, Aliponga, Koshiyama, Wilkins, Yoshida & Ando (2013) modified Savignon & Wang's (2003) questionnaire and surveyed Japanese university students about their attitudes and perceptions of CLT not at the pre-university level, but at the university level. Where a contrast between traditional teaching methods and CLT is concerned, the studies by Yoshida *et al.* (2012) and Gamble *et al.* (2013) both yielded a result similar to Savignon & Wang's (2003) study: that students strongly favored CLT over

traditional, grammar-based instruction.

While these studies have responded to the call for more research into how learners perceive CLT classroom practices and have suggested that students generally prefer CLT to traditional form-focused learning, they do not give a detailed account of what those classroom practices are. Murphy (2013b) reported an increase in student's speaking output as a result of switching from textbook-based classroom activities to the group rotation design outlined above. However, he observed also that "It is one thing for the instructor to look at test data and to surmise the efficacy of the lesson, but another for the students to report whether they felt their language ability improved and whether the teaching material and class style were beneficial (Murphy, 2013b, p.421)." In order to assess his students' attitudes toward the classroom design, he administered a short pilot survey to 138 of his students in Fall Semester 2012. The survey included 11 Likert-style items, but in addition, a final, open-ended question solicited student comments about what they thought about the class. Several are excerpted below.

- I can speak English a little. I like speaking English more. I thank this class.
- Speaking English connects with confidence.
- 毎回、必ず、英語でコミュニケーションをすれる機会があつて良かった [Every time—without fail—there was a chance to communicate in English, which was good].
- このクラスでspeaking abilityが上がった [My speaking ability got better in this class]. (p.426)

Murphy (2013b) reported an overall positive survey response, commenting that "The survey data in this report suggests that cobuilding spontaneous dialogue with classmates helped students improve ability and left them with a higher sense of accomplishment and positive attitude toward their ability to communicate in English (p.427, my underline)."

Because I had adopted his classroom design for an entire semester in Fall 2013 and had been perceiving a similar uptick in student engagement and language production compared to the classroom activities I had been using before, I thought it appropriate to solicit my students' attitudes toward the activities with a pilot survey of my own.

During the 12th week of Fall Semester 2013, I gave a survey to students in all six of my general English classes at HIU. Accounting for absences, 125 out of a possible 155 responded, a response rate of 81%. 93 were first-year students, and the remaining 32 were mostly second-year students. English is not mandatory for 2nd year students at HIU, however, two

years of language study is mandatory, and many choose a 2nd year of English to fulfill this credit requirement. Since I had not had the 2nd year students in my first-year class the previous year, I used exactly the same syllabus as the first-year students.

Five items surveyed whether students felt, as a result of being in the class,

- (1) that their confidence with English conversation improved,
- (2) that their ability to express themselves in English improved,
- (3) a sense of accomplishment from having communicated in English,
- (4) that the class design was an effective way to practice speaking English, and
- (5) that training in communication strategies was helpful for the conversations.

Students were asked to rank how much they agree with each of the statements on a scale of 1 to 5. Each statement—which I translated to Japanese and had checked by a Japanese native—had a space for comments below. Comments were encouraged—in English or Japanese—but I emphasized that they were not required. A final two open-ended questions solicited comments about (1) what students liked most about the class, and (2) how they would improve it. Although the first five items were set up in Likert fashion, it is a pilot survey and does not attempt statistical treatment. I have presented the results of the five Likert-style items as simple counts.

The studies by Savignon & Wang (2003), Yoshida *et al.* (2012) and Gamble *et al.* (2013) employed a large survey instrument (more than 50 items) that relied on Likert data exclusively for student responses. Dörnyei (2003) observes that responses to open-ended questions are difficult to code in a reliable manner, and so many professional questionnaires avoid them. At the same time, he notes that open-format items can provide a far greater 'richness' of answers than only quantitative data, and so he recommends experimenting with them (p.47). Further, Savignon & Wang (2003) comment that "the statement of learner attitudes and beliefs about classroom language teaching practices on a Likert-type scale may or may not be an accurate reflection of learner attitudes (p.240)." Student comments offer a more personal appraisal of what they think about the classroom design they experienced. I have presented student responses and comments to the five Likert items, unabridged and verbatim, accompanied by my English translations [in brackets] in Table 3. A summary analysis follows.

ITEM 1. (N=125) As a result of taking this class, I felt my confidence with English conversation improved. この授業を通じて、英語で会話する自信が向上した。	強く思う	思う	どちらかと言えない	思わない	強く思わない	回答なし
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	21	50	48	4	2	0

Comments:

- (1) 5－そう思います。[I think so.]
- (2) 5－街中で外人さんに話しかけられた時に臆病にならず、ちゃんと質問に答えようという気持ちになった。この授業で自信がついたおかげ。[When a foreigner talked to me in town once, I was able to answer without getting nervous, thanks to the confidence I got in this class.]
- (3) 5－苦手意識がなくなった。[I lost the sense that (speaking in English) was difficult.]
- (4) 5－できないできないと思ってたけど以外と出来る！ [I totally thought I couldn't (converse in English), but after all, I found I actually could!]
- (5) 5－自分なりに英会話が出来たかも、と自信がついた。[At least, maybe I got the confidence that I was able to talk using my own English.]
- (6) 4－ほんの少しだけど自信がついた気がする。[Even if only a little, I thought I got a little bit of confidence.]
- (7) 4－まだまだ。英単語を覚えなくちゃいけないと自分は思っている。そうしたら、もっともって英語表現力だったり、英会話能力が上がると思う。[Not yet. I have to remember more words. If I can do that, I'll be able to converse better.]
- (8) 4－てきとうな単語でも通じることがわかった。[I understood that even approximate words convey meaning.]
- (9) 4－教科書の英語をただ読むだけではなく自分で文章を作らなければならないから。[(It raises confidence) because rather than just reading textbook language you have to make your own statements.]
- (10) 4－むしろ自信過剰になりそうです。lololol [Rather, maybe I got too much confidence! Lol]
- (11) 4－アメリカにいったら何とかなりそうです。[If I went to the U.S., for example, maybe I'd be able to manage.]
- (12) 4－素晴らしい。[Wonderful.]
- (13) 4－この英語でも伝わったのでそう思います。[Even this (kind of) English conveys, so I thought (I got confidence).]
- (14) 4－コミュ障だからそもそも会話。[I have a communication disorder, so conversation (is difficult for me)]
Author's note: sentence was unfinished.
- (15) 4－最初のころより英語力が身に付いた。[I got more conversation ability than at the beginning (of the class)].
- (16) 4－外国の人とも会話ができた。[I was able to talk to a foreigner.]
- (17) 4－実際に会話できた、外人さんと。[I was able to talk to a foreigner.]
- (18) 4－英語で会話する機会がないから良いと思う。[We (normally) don't have any chance to speak in English, so I think (this experience) is good.]
- (19) 3－自信とまではいかないが耐性になっていたと思う。[I can't go so far as to say I got confidence, but at least I was able to handle it.]
- (20) 3－話す、ってなったらテンパる (笑) [I get carried away when I talk. :-)]
- (21) 3－日本人同士ならOK かも。[(Talking in English) is OK, perhaps, if it's with other Japanese.]
- (22) 3－少しだけ [A little.]
- (23) 3－逆に自分の英語力の無さを自覚したので、もっと勉強しようと思う。[Rather, I understood how little ability I had, so I want to study more.]
- (24) 3－実戦でどうなるかわからない。[In actual life I don't know how well I would do (in conversation).]
- (25) 3－まだニガテな思いが大きい。[I still have a strong feeling that I'm not good at it.]
- (26) 2－そこまでの自信はつかなかった。[I didn't get that much confidence.]

ITEM 2. (N=125) As a result of taking this class, I felt my ability to express myself in English (表現力) improved. この授業を通じて、英語表現力が向上した。	強く思う	思う	どちらかと言えない	思わない	強く思わない	回答なし
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	28	77	17	3	0	0

Comments:

- (27) 5－話すことの大切さを知れた。[I understood the importance of speaking.]
- (28) 5－したと思う。[I thought so.]
- (29) 5－簡単な英語で文法が作れるようになった。[I became able to make simple sentences.]
- (30) 5－通じる英語を学べた。[I learned comprehensible English.]

- (31) 5－Absolutely.
 (32) 5－Thank you.
 (33) 5－自分で英語をしぼりだして会話しなければいけないので、自分なりの英語をたくさん話せるようになった。
 [(In the class activities) you have to squeeze out your best English and converse. I became able to use my best English.]
 (34) 5－話せる単語が増えたと思う。[I think the number of words I can say increased.]
 (35) 5－特に相手の言ったことをもう一度言ってほしいときに使う英語を使うことができるようになった。[In particular, I became able to use English (phrases) for when you want the other person to repeat (what he or she said)]
 (36) 4－伝わるかは別として向上しました。[Whether I make sense to the other person aside, (my ability) went up.]
 (37) 4－少しずつ表現力がついた気がする。[Little by little I got the ability to express myself (in English).]
 (38) 4－それなり。[To the best of my ability.]
 (39) 4－正しくなくても良いので知っている単語でできた。[Because I didn't have to speak perfectly, I (conversed) using the words I know.]
 (40) 4－伝わる英語を考えようとするのでいいと思う。[I think (the class) was good because you think of English that communicates.]
 (41) 4－英語を使う事に抵抗力が減った。[My resistance to using English diminished.]
 (42) 4－もう1回質問する時とか「ゆっくり話してほしい」とかの英語がこれから役に立ちそう。[English phrases such as asking (the other person) repeat their question, or asking (the other person) to speak more slowly seem like they will be useful in the future.]
 (43) 4－わかる単語でしゃべればいらいしいので。[(I agree) because using the words you know to talk seems good.]
 (44) 4－簡単な英語を少しずつ覚えることができた。[I gradually learned simple words.]
 (45) 4－表現の仕方に工夫が以前よりできるようになった気がする。[It feels like I became able to create (English) expressions more than (I could) before.]
 (46) 4－英語も向上したが日本語やコミュニケーション能力が上がった。[Not only English, but my ability to communicate in Japanese also went up.]
 (47) 4－とにかく英語にしてみようと思えるようになった。[Anyway it was the first time I wanted to try putting things into English.]
 (48) 4－今までは定形文のみの英会話でしたが、この授業でアドリブ力というものが確実に向上しました。[Up until now I had only experienced English conversation in formulaic script, but in this class my ability to ad-lib definitely went up.]
 (49) 4－英語力がなくても、うまくやれた。[Even without English ability, I was able to participate.]
 (50) 4－いいアイデアが思いつくようになった。[I was able to come up with good ideas.]
 (51) 4－言い換えや簡単な英語で言うと伝わりやすくなることもある。[Restating and speaking with simple English helps you convey meaning.]
 (52) 4－簡単な言葉に直せば話せるということがわかった。[I learned that you can communicate by restating things in simple words.]
 (53) 4－ジェスチャーを交えて会話することができるようになった。[I became able to do English conversation by mixing in gestures.]
 (54) 4－分からない英語が出てきたとき、ライオンが教えてくれるし、話してて楽しいから向上したと思う。[When I couldn't think of the English (in class), the teacher stepped in and helped. It was fun to talk, so I think my ability went up.]
 (55) 4－少し上がってると思う。[I think (my ability) went up a little.]
 (56) 4－話す気にはなれる。けど自分の知ってる単語しか使えない。[You start to want to talk (in this class). But I could only use the words I knew.]
 (57) 3－基礎英語のような授業より身になる。[I remember more (English in this class) than in the other Basic English class (I have).]
 (58) 3－英語を頑張って話そうとするようになった。[I began to want to try speaking English.]

ITEM 3. (N=125) As a result of taking this class, I felt a sense of accomplishment with English conversation. この授業を通じて、英会話ができたという達成感があった。	強く思う	思う	どちらかと言えない	思わない	強く思わない	回答なし
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	26	66	21	6	0	6

Comments:

- (59) 5－Absolutely.
 (60) 5－とても話せるようになった。[I became able to talk a lot.]
 (61) 4－完璧な英語じゃなくても良い。[You don't have to use perfect English (in this class).]
 (62) 4－そこそこに。[Barely.]
 (63) 4－あまり英会話をしているという感じはしなかった。[I didn't really feel like I conversed in English.]
 (64) 4－This class very interesting!
 (65) 4－少しだけ。[A little bit.]

- (66) 4－文法を習うだけで英会話をすることがなかったので達成感があった。[(The class) felt like it was not only about learning grammar, so I felt a sense of achievement.]
- (67) 3－自分で満足できるレベルにはなっていない。[I'm not at the (English conversation) level I'd like to be.]
- (68) 2－つまることが多かったのでそうは思わなかった。[I got tongue-tied a lot, so I don't think (I felt a sense of accomplishment.)]

ITEM 4. (N=125) I think this classroom design is an <u>effective way to practice speaking English</u> . この授業方法は、英会話練習に効果的だと思う。	強く思う	思う	どちらかと言えない	思わない	強く思わない	回答なし
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	64	55	5	1	0	0

Comments:

- (69) 5－英会話の表現を学ぶのも大事だと思うけど、それより話す方が自分の力になると思う。[I think it's important to learn conversation phrases, but for me speaking practice is more effective.]
- (70) 5－And I was becoming want to study English more.(sic)
- (71) 5－考えさせることが良いと思う。[I like that (the classroom method) made me think.]
- (72) 5－実戦経験も必要。[Practical training (like this class) is also important.]
- (73) 5－聞いて話すとの大切さがわかった。[I understood the importance of listening and speaking.]
- (74) 5－英語だけで話していくので力がついたと思う。[We talk only in English, so I think that improved my ability.]
- (75) 5－自分の英語は相手に十分に伝わるので効果的だと思う。[My English made sense to the other person, so I think (the classroom design) is effective.]
- (76) 5－いかでも話すからおぼえると思う。[We talk a lot, so it's easy to remember.]
- (77) 5－これ以上ない方法です。[There's nothing better than (this classroom design)].
- (78) 5－多数の人と英語を話す事ができた。[I was able to talk to many people.]
- (79) 5－たくさん話すことが会話力UPにつながった。[The fact that we talked a lot is connected to improved conversational ability.]
- (80) 5－会話中心の授業なので効果的であると感じました。[The class is conversation-centered, so I felt it's effective.]
- (81) 5－実践することはとても大事だと思います。[I think actual (conversation) practice is very important.]
- (82) 4－Yes, but I think depends on our speaking skill.
- (83) 4－I understand English convasation (sic) is not so difficult.
- (84) 4－「相手に通じれば、何でもいい」っていうのが、効果的だと思う。[I think the statement "Anything goes as long as the other person understands" is effective.]
- (85) 4－少しずつ慣れてきた気がする（英会話に）[I have a sense that, little by little, I got used to (English conversation)].
- (86) 4－話そうっていう気持ちになる [It made me want to talk.]
- (87) 4－英会話に慣れることは、とても自信をもてると思う。単語力や文章力もやっぱり必要だと思うことが多い。[(This classroom design) really gives you confidence that you can get used to English conversation. (On the other hand,) I often felt the need for ability with vocabulary and sentence structure.]
- (88) 4－中々良いと思います。[(This classroom design is) pretty darn good.]
- (89) 4－この授業はすばらしかった。[This class was wonderful.]
- (90) 4－今までしゃべるのが無理だった自分でもできたのでそう思います。[Even I, who thought I could never speak (in English), could do it, so I think (the classroom design is effective)].
- (91) 4－自分的に苦手であるが、相手のよい所を聞けるのでよい。[Personally I still think (speaking is) difficult, but I could listen to other people so I think it's good.]
- (92) 4－英会話をめったにしないからとてもためになった。[We almost never get the chance to talk in English, so I think it's worth it.]
- (93) 4－会話スキルのレベルが上がる。[Our conversation skill level goes up.]
- (94) 4－何かをしゃべろうと思えるので英会話が上達すると思う。[I want to (try to) say something, so I think that English conversation ability improves.]
- (95) 4－学習する事によりたしよなりとも外人とコミュニケーションがとれる。[Rather than just studying we get a little chance to talk to a foreigner.]
- (96) 4－楽しくできて効果的だと思います。[I thought (the classroom design) was fun, so I think it's effective.]
- (97) 3－でも日本人が英語を話しているだけで実際に外人と話したら伝わりにくいと思う。基礎的な英文が欲しい。[However, (in class) Japanese are speaking (in English) with other Japanese; it might not be understood if we were talking with a foreigner. I'd like more (practice with) basic English sentences.]

ITEM 5. (N=125) Communication strategies (e.g. "What do you mean?") were useful in in-class conversations and tests. コミュニケーション・ストラテジー(What do you mean?など)は、授業中の英会話の中で役だった。	強く思う	思う	どちらかと言えない	思わない	強く思わない	回答なし
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	54	55	15	1	0	0

Comments:

- (98) 5-コミュニケーション・ストラテジーで会話が成り立つ。 [Conversation is successful with communication strategies.]
- (99) 5-自然と使える様になった。 [I started to use them naturally.]
- (100) 5-最低限の困った時の一語、という使い道で使い所があるのでとても役立ちました。 [As a last resort, when I was at a loss (in a conversation), (strategies) were helpful.]
- (101) 5-相手が何を言いたいのかが分からないままになることが少なくなったと思う。 [I think the number of instances when I didn't know what the other person meant and I left it at that declined.]
- (102) 5-And I want to use outside.
- (103) 5-英検とかにも使えそう。役に立った。 [I used them in (the) Eiken (interview in English). Useful.]
- (104) 5-Communication is link.
- (105) 5-これがあるから授業がなりたっていると思います。 [We can use these (strategies), so that's why I think the class is successful.]
- (106) 5-相手に聞きかえしたり、何言っているか分からないときに聞きなおすことができるようになった。かなり役だった。 [I was able to task the other person to restate when I didn't understand, and also to restate what I said. Very useful.]
- (107) 4-よく使っています。 [I use (strategies) a lot.]
- (108) 4-意味が分からない単語、言葉にたくさん膳用 [=善用] できた。I made good use of (strategies) when I didn't know (what others') words (meant).]
- (109) 4-正直、あまり使っていない。 [To be honest, I don't use them much.]
- (110) 4-実際に使うことができるので good。 [They're something you can actually use, so (I think they're) good.]
- (111) 4-困った時につかえるので役に立つ。 [They're useful when you're at a loss (in English conversation).]
- (112) 4-役立つフレーズを覚えることができた。"Say again, please!"など。 [I learned useful phrases like "Say again, please!"]
- (113) 4-困った時に使えた。 [I used them when I was at a loss (in English conversation).]
- (114) 4-使いました。 [I used them.]
- (115) 4-たまにパッと出てきて使う。 [Once in a while they just come right out.]
- (116) 4-一街で外人さんに話しかけられても対応できた。 [When a foreigner talked to me in town, I was able to respond.]
- (117) 4-実際に使えるから良い。 [(Strategies are) good because you can actually use them.]
- (118) 4-助けられた。 [(Strategies) were helpful.]
- (119) 3-あまり使わなかったけど、使ってる人もいた。 [I didn't use (strategies) much, but others did.]

Table 3. Student Responses to Items 1-5

6. Discussion of Survey Data

For all numerical responses to items 1-5, positive answers (agree) outweighed neutral and negative answers (disagree). Positive answers to Item 2 (English expression ability improved), Item 3 (sense of accomplishment), and Item 4 (classroom design effective) significantly outweighed neutral and negative answers. Generally, this trend suggests that even non-English-major students of lower proficiency and in compulsory English classes perceive a "strong CLT" classroom design as a means to practice and to build confidence in communicating in English. The comparatively higher incidence of neutral answers in Item 1 (confidence toward English conversation) may reflect an innate Japanese tendency to self-efface, or to avoid display or admission of

self-confidence. In other words, it may reflect hesitation to admit confidence in general, not only toward communicating in English.

When it comes to getting lower-proficiency students to practice speaking English in class, several students offered these comments:

- #3 [I lost the sense that (speaking in English) was difficult.]
- #4 [I totally thought I couldn't (communicate in English), but after all, I found I actually could!]
- #90 [Even I, who thought I could never speak (in English), could do it, so I think (the classroom design is effective)].

Two interesting contrasts also emerged: First, many students indicated the refreshing nature of not being required to use correct grammar, or the realization that imperfect English can in fact be communicative (#5, #8, #13, #33, #39, #61, #84). On the other hand, others observed

out that they realized firsthand how little English ability they had, how limiting that imperfect knowledge can be, or that they need to study more in order to converse better (#7, #23, #56, #67, #87, #97). Second, some students indicated they value the practical nature of the group conversations, in some cases as a refreshing change from other classes that center on language form and reading from a textbook (#9, #18, #48, #72, #79, #81). Other students pointed out, however, that the group conversations are between native Japanese speakers, and so students may feel that the experience might not be as effective as if it were with other speakers, for example, with native English speakers (#21, #24, #97).

Further, numerical responses to Item 5 (communication strategies helpful) were significantly positive. Communication strategies—including the usefulness of asking for help, restating, and using gestures—were mentioned in comments to Items 1-4, in

addition to the comments for Item 5. This seems an encouraging indication that the inclusion of communication strategy training in the syllabus is perceived as valuable. This feedback tentatively supports Dörnyei & Thurrell's (1991) position that strategy training builds confidence, facilitates improvisation skills and linguistic creativity, and is fun for students (p.22). I believe, therefore, that the usefulness of explicitly teaching and practicing communication strategies for this particular classroom design deserves the attention of future research.

The two open-question items (“What did you like most about the class?” and “How would you improve this class?”) garnered 171 written comments, which are too voluminous to include here. I have broadly categorized many of the responses under several themes, and excerpted several salient comments from each of the items, in Table 4. A brief commentary follows.

OPEN ITEM #1. “What did you like most about the class?”	No. of Responses
この授業のよいところは何かと思いますか？(なるべく具体的に教えて下さい。)	
The class was fun, exciting, not tiresome.	26
The teacher was energetic, motivated, helpful.	15
Interaction with other classmates is good.	19
The classroom design offers practicum, a chance to speak English.	18
Class is not language-form focused, demonstrates that imperfect English can be communicative.	32

Excerpted comments

- (1) クラスのみんなと一番かわれたりするところがとてもいいと思いました。自分も積極的に会話に参加できるところなどもいいと思いました。[I thought it was great to be able to interact with everyone in the class, and that I was able to actively participate in the conversations.]
- (2) 正しい英語を使うことが大事なのではなく、相手につたえることを第一とした英会話の授業は、英語が苦手な自分にとっていつもより親密的に英語にふれることができた。そこが良かったと思う。[For someone with an aversion to English like me, being in a class that focuses not on using correct English but rather on the act of communicating to the other person afforded me more of a closeness with English than usual. I thought that was good.]
- (3) 固い(難しい)英語を使わなくてもいい。伝わるまで何度もしゃべれるし、正しい英語を言わなくてもいい。[You don't have to use stiff (difficult) English. You can restate things until the other person understands, you don't have to use correct English.]
- (4) とても自由なところ。文法にとらわれることがないから英語が苦手な人でも、参加しようという気持ちになれる。[(I liked) the strong sense of freedom. You don't get hung up on grammar, so even people who aren't good at English feel like they can participate (in conversation).]
- (5) 高校までは文法を作ることや単語力に自信がなかったけど、この授業を受けたことで、簡単な英語でも人につたえることができるとわかるため、みんなにうければいい良い授業。[Up through high school I didn't think I could make sentences or remember words, but after taking this class, I learned that even simple English conveys to people, and (so I think) everyone should take this class.]
- (6) 英語を勉強ではなく会話として体験できること。[(I like the fact that this class is) not English study but conversation experience.]
- (7) 自分の考えつかないようなひょうげんが周りから学べる。[I learned expressions from others that I couldn't come up with on my own.]
- (8) とにかく会話を成立させることに重点を置いているので、英語の勉強であることを意識せずに自然な調子で英会話に参加することができる。[The main goal is to achieve successful communication, so you participate in conversation naturally without feeling like you're studying.]

- (9) 固定概念にとらわれず、自分なりの英語表現で(英文法が間違っている)相手に通じればよい点。簡単な単語だけで会話できる点。[(I like) the point that you can have conversations even with only simple words, and that, without getting stuck on stereotypes, you can use your own English expressions and it's OK if it makes sense to the other person, even if it's not correct grammar.]

OPEN ITEM #2. "How would you improve this class?" この授業をより良くするために、あなたは何を改善すべきだと思いますか？(なるべく具体的に教えてください。)	No. of responses
Nothing	21
Go slower, use easier topics, etc.	7
Introduce / teach more words, expressions.	13
Improve student participation	5

Excerpted comments

- (1) あんまり人と積極的にかかわりたくない人にとってはきついかもしれないと思ったので、そういう人のことも考えてやればよいと思いました。[I think that there are those who are not very outgoing and don't want to interact with other people, so it might be good to take these people into account.]
- (2) 後期になって同じことしかしてないからあきる。[During fall semester we only did the same thing over and over, so it got boring.]
- (3) 日本語の禁止にもっと力を入れるべき。知っている単語しか使えないため、どうしても会話がワンパターンになってしまう。[More emphasis should be put into prohibiting Japanese. Since we can only use the words we know, conversations become repetitive.]
- (4) 自宅でも、トピックスについて考える時間をつくる。辞書をもってきて、自分で考える時間をつくってから会話にはいると、アイデアがでて、もっと話しやすいかもしれないと思った。[It would be good to have homework or out-of-class time to think about topics. I thought, if students brought dictionaries and were given preparation time before conversing, there might be more ideas and it might be easier to converse.]
- (5) 3人で毎回英会話をするが、時にはやり方を変えてみるのもありだと思います。もっと単語を教えて欲しいという気持ちもあった。[We converse in groups of three, but it might be a good idea to change the pattern sometimes. I also wished we would learn more words.]
- (6) なれてくると、会話をせずに近場の友達と話していたりする人もいて、そのグループは会話ができなくなる。これを改善できたら良いと思う。[Some students, once they get used to the routine, just chatter in Japanese with neighboring students, so they can't engage in English conversation. This is something to fix.]
- (7) よく話せる人がほとんどよく散らばるようにすれば、全体のレベルが上がると思います。[If you make sure to rotate the students who can speak well, I think the level of the entire class would go up.]
- (8) 自分からさんかする。[I want to participate (in conversations) of my own will.]

Table 4. Student Responses to Two Open Items

Responses to Open Item #1: Many students indicated the class was fun, however, the most frequent comments indicated that students liked the fact that the class activities were not language-form focused, and they demonstrated that imperfect English can be communicative.

Responses to Open Item #2: While many students indicated no change to the classroom design was necessary, some took the trouble to suggest improvements. It is crucial to carefully consider comments such as these, because they are the best representation of what other students might be thinking but not be willing to say. It is also important to acknowledge that, despite teachers' best efforts, not every student will become enthusiastic about engaging in English conversation. Not all students will want to participate. Comments #1 and #8 hint at this, however, in some cases reticence may point to

an aversion to communicating at all, rather than to communicating in English, and may reflect the type of student who is perfectly happy with the student-passive, teacher-centered nature of traditional lecture classes. Poor attendance among a few students (for example in morning classes) can also be problematical. Some comments suggest that things which irritate instructors—for example, poor attendance or poor effort on the part of some students—may be just as irritating to other students as it is to instructors. Finally, as comments #3 and #5 suggest, constant consideration of how much attention to appropriate vocabulary and language form to introduce is important, even in a “strong CLT-based” classroom design.

7. Considerations and Limitations

The results of this survey would seem to

indicate strongly that even lower-proficiency learners are welcoming of a CLT-based classroom design, and tentatively support findings by Savignon & Wang (2003), Yoshida *et al.* (2012) and Gamble *et al.* (2013) that students favor CLT over traditional, grammar-based instruction. It must be firmly acknowledged, however, that the survey results presented above are teacher-solicited, and so one must remain mindful of a potential “halo effect.” Students may have answered the survey items in a way they think they “should,” or in a way they think the instructor might “like.” Further, the survey instrument used in this pilot study is small, as well as the number of students surveyed.

A future study needs to ask more questions to a larger number of students, preferably periodically over time. A future survey instrument could employ the categories in the Open Item #1 and #2, or use recurring words and phrases in student comments, to generate new survey items. Or, if time allows, a direct repeat of the survey instrument used by Yoshida *et al.* (2012) and Gamble *et al.* (2013) would allow for a contrastive analysis between student populations.

If we take the student responses to this pilot survey at face value—that even lower-proficiency students value, can deal with, and even enjoy a CLT-based classroom design—then it would seem that whether or not to implement it is not only a matter of whether the students can handle it but also whether or not the instructor can handle it. I have already discussed that some teachers perceive CLT as inappropriate in Japan because it does not maximize a focus on teaching and testing language forms—something that is requisite for preparing students to take high-stakes, written examinations. At the university level, the pressing need for perfecting language form among students is greatly diminished, but the mindset among instructors may not be. Language forms are easy to attach point values to, and thus they may afford a more objective and fair means to generate students’ grades.

Some teachers may fear allowing “incorrect” English to “fossilize” in students. I would argue that allowing a fear of speaking English at all to “fossilize” in less proficient, less motivated students is, in many cases, a greater worry. Finally, there is a perception that CLT places no importance on language form altogether, which is untrue. As Thompson (1996) observes, “the exclusion of explicit attention to grammar was never a necessary part of CLT (p.10).” The classroom design outlined in this paper allows

for whatever degree of attention to form the instructor wishes to include. In my opinion, first-year university Japanese students have already encountered enough language forms to enable them to communicate in a simple conversation. Many of their other university English classes, meanwhile, sufficiently continue the traditional form-focused classroom designs.

In many ways, the classroom design discussed here reflects the nature of English in real life. For example, while it may be unnatural for Japanese speakers to speak English with fellow Japanese speakers, it is far more likely that students will encounter opportunities to communicate in English with other non-native speakers, and with others whose proficiency level is not the same as their own. Further, students will not always do well. Good conversations may happen one day and not-as-good ones may happen another. Conversation test partners are in some ways a luck-of-the-draw, and so students will have to learn to deal with a variety of idiosyncrasies of conversation and interaction with other students.

The design may also, at times, seem like a lot of work for the instructor, mentally and physically. Handling oral and written conversations with butchered grammar may test the temperament of even the most patient instructors, particularly those who might otherwise want to micromanage the language output of their students. On the other hand, however, amid the rubble of broken English can sometimes be found treasure. Students will generate unique arguments and turns of phrase that may never have crossed instructors’ or other students’ minds. These can be harnessed and recycled in future iterations of conversation by both students and instructors. In other words, it is an opportunity for the instructor to learn from the students as much as for students to learn from the instructor and from each other. Finally, while both students and teachers will at times become aware of the limits of their communicative competence, they may also in turn discover hidden ability.

8. Conclusion

The current literature suggests that CLT has been generally difficult to implement in the Japanese context. Although the results of this and other surveys have indicated that students want or prefer CLT-based classes, others have hinted otherwise (e.g. Matsuura, Chiba & Hilderbrandt, 2001). I have outlined my implementation of this particular classroom

design, and provided student responses that suggest it works well and is valuable even among a population of lower-proficiency non-humanities-major students. How it can be improved and/or implemented in other classrooms is a matter for future research and exploration.

The best lesson we can learn from this classroom design is, perhaps, that anyone can do it and make it work. It is at the same time a classroom design as well as a philosophy, soundly rooted in the notion that students whom we might label as low proficiency or low motivation can—and will—speak English in the classroom, given the right conditions and with the right encouragement. It suggests, too, that those conditions depend largely on how willing the teacher is to create and allow them, and of instructors having confidence in students as much as students having confidence in themselves.

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Appendix A: Sample Written Test

英語表現 I・II ライオン J.P.

Name (ローマ字 or 筆記体)

Fall 2013 Writing Test #2

Sample Student

1. プラス・マイナスをまとめよう。

"Yutori Education"

- 1. We can take a rest.
- 2. Heart grow up!!
- 3. hobby time is happy
- 4. We can help our mother.
- 5. free time is we can relax.



- 1. We don't study hard.
- 2. Adolt people say "Yutori Education" is but!
- 3. "Yutori" = "can't study" image. o.o
- 4. life rithm(?) is but.
- 5. can't study alone people is Saturday can't study.



2. AさんとBさんの対話を続けよう。

内容は自由が、ナンセンス・筋が通らない会話を避けよう。

Hint: AさんもBさんも説得されず、ずっと対立しつづけることとして会話を作ろう。会話を「完成」しないように!
Hint: For example を使うのが便利。

1つを選ぶ

A: I think "Yutori Education" is (a) a good idea. (b) a bad idea.

B: Oh really? I think a bad idea.

A: why?

B: Yutori Education is not good, because, Adolt people say "Yutori people is can't study".

A: Oh. But, Yutori Education is very happy. Because, We don't go to school on study.

B: I must study... Yutori is can't study hard.

A: Study is not all. Kind heart is important things.

B: What do you mean?

A: Yutori = we learn to not study things.

B: But, I want to study more!! I want to be a teacher.

I want see something classes.

A: But, many people is not to be a teacher.

we want take a rest, I'm tired Monday between Friday.

B: I feel not tired.

A: free time is we can study, hobby time, help our mother, and take a rest.

free is not can't study!!

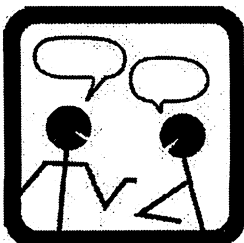
B: I can't study alone. I want to study in school.

A: why?

B: I study in my home,

つぎ

スペースが足りなければ、裏側へ →



Speaking	A+	A		B		C	C-
Writing	A+	A		B		C	C-
Total	A+	A	B+	B	C+	C	C-
	105	100	90	80	70	60	50
	最優	優		良			可