TAKING IT TO TASK

The newsletter of the JALT task-based language teaching SIG. Volume 2 Issue 2–December 2017

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our second issue of the second volume of Taking it to Task! From 2016 we have decided to change our regular publication to a digital newsletter format. We hope to be able to accept a greater variety of submissions than we did with OnTask, which will still include theoretical articles and practical lesson plans that were the heart of OnTask, but also opinion/think pieces, book reviews and TBLT-related news.

In this second issue of the second volume, we are pleased to include a report on our mini-conference by Michael Lin (Kobe Shoin, Konan, and Konan Women’s University) as well as two lesson plans, one by Charles Bell (University of East Asia) and the other by Ran Niboshi (Kwansei Gakuin University).

The TBLT SIG mini-conference took place in July, and it consisted of a workshop by Dr. Lourdes Ortega and five poster presentations. The report well summarizes the highlights of the mini-conference. We truly hope that you will enjoy reading the report and that it might also stimulate your appetite to attend our biennial conference in 2018!

The first lesson plan by Charles Bell introduces an interesting task to raise students’ awareness of different communication strategies. In particular, the target strategies allow L2 learners to seek help when they do not know how to say something in English. The second lesson plan by Ran Niboshi centers around the idea of a book making project. In this lesson plan, she nicely lays out the steps to implement the project and provides insights into the use of this task-based project based on class observation.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue, and if you have a TBLT-related article, lesson plan, book review or opinion/think piece that you would like to submit for consideration in a future issue of Taking it to Task, please contact us at tbltinasia@gmail.com

Shoko Sasayama, Publications Chair Kurtis McDonald, Associate Editor

ANNOUNCEMENTS

JALT TBL SIG Biennial “TBLT in Asia” Conference in June, 2018

We are pleased to announce that our biennial “TBLT in Asia” Conference will be held at Ryukoku University, Kyoto on June 23rd and 24th, 2018. This conference features two plenary speakers: Hayo Reinders (Unitec, NZ, Anaheim University, USA) and Natsuko Shintani (Kobe Gakuin University). We accept three types of presentations: a paper (25 mins), a workshop (40 mins), and a poster session. Areas of interest include but are not limited to: (a) the compatibility of TBLT in Asia, (b) language teacher professional development and TBLT, (c) the evaluation of TBLT in classrooms, and (d) TBLT and CALL. The past three conferences offered a lot of food for thought and provided an ideal platform to expand networks. Call for papers is open until March 15th, 2018, and we highly recommend you consider putting in a proposal! For more information, please visit our special conference website at https://tblsig.org/conf/
REPORT ON JALT TBL SIG MINI-CONFERENCE: TASKS IN PRACTICE

The JALT Task-Based Language Teaching Mini-Conference: ‘Tasks in Practice’, held on Saturday, July 29th, 2017 at TUJ (Temple University Japan) Osaka Center, between 1:30pm to 5:00pm was a well-attended mini conference hosted by the JALT Task-Based Learning SIG. The afternoon started with an hour session of poster presentations covering a range of practical ideas applying to TBLT (Tasked-Based Language Teaching). They were followed by a lecture and facilitated workshop on “Tasks in Practice” by Dr. Lourdes Ortega who gave the audience thought-provoking and practical training on how to become better task based language (TBL) teachers. In this conference report, the author will report on five poster presentations shared and highlight lessons learned from Dr. Ortega’s presentation.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS REPORT

The poster presentation session took place at the beginning of the mini-conference and lasted an hour with five poster presentations presented simultaneously. Attendees could listen, ask questions, and interact with the presenters.

David Faulhaber from Kanda University of International Studies gave a poster presentation entitled “The Text IS the Context: Suspending Disbelief in the TBL Classroom with SMS Messaging.” He revealed a fascinating task in which students at Kanda University of International Studies engaged in a simulated SMS (Short Message Service) texting activity planning a day out with a “visiting foreign exchange student”. Using an app, the students successfully participated in this meaning-oriented task, while simultaneously focusing attention on adverbial participles such as bored versus boring.

Gretchen Clark from Ritsumeikan University presented “Project-Based Learning in the University Business English Classroom.” Her project was a combination of a PBL (project based learning) and TBL approach utilized by second- and third-year upper-intermediate international business course students. The PBL approach emphasized that a project should possess a meaningful problem or question to solve. Her students were tasked with presenting a real-life company that embodied the characteristics of an ideal workplace. Clark highlighted several steps that made the task effective: pre-task priming, discussion, modeling of the task, research by students, student presentations, and a time for feedback and reflective learning.

Kazumi Araki from Saitama Prefectural University presented “Task-based learning: a link between Japanese traditional education and current foreign language education.” Araki explained the similarities between TBL and Japanese traditional education, “Gojyu Kyoiku” and stressed how both could be used to facilitate English language learning. (Gojyu Kyoiku is traditional Japanese education in which Japanese children learned by finding their own place to study, found their own teachers, and reported stories orally on what they had learned). Using a TBL approach with a link to Gojyu Kyoiku, Araki had students form groups and tasked them to make a video clip or newspaper report interviewing somebody from their community.
Nicholas D. Marx, a graduate student at the University College London, shared his research on the “Effects of Oral Communicative Task Complexity on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety.” Seventy-seven Japanese junior high school students studying compulsory English classes participated in the study in which three language activities were compared: a reading task, a simple oral communicative activity, and a complex oral communicative activity. The results of the study showed that task complexity affects overall classroom anxiety levels with the simple group showing decreased levels of overall anxiety and the complex group showing slightly higher post-test anxiety. While task complexity could enhance student performance, Marx recommended that teachers create suitable ways to introduce complexity into lessons.

Thomas Stringer from Konan University presented on, “Global Topics Project Outline: Energy.” Stringer described a task in which advanced high school students collaboratively engaged on a global issue (e.g., “Japan should switch to 100% renewable energy by 2030”) and made a presentation. The main task consisted of 4 mini-tasks: pre-task reading of a level-appropriate article and focused target language, pre-task research and preparation for group poster presentations and Q & A sessions, performance, and a final lesson reflecting and revising the presentation for improvement. Stringer achieved his goal of enabling his students in becoming more proficient at thinking and talking about global issues. If the reader is interested in learning more about the tasks he designed, please refer to the June issue of Taking it to Task 2017.

**Lourdes Ortega — Tasks in Practice Report**

The “Tasks in Practice” presentation by Lourdes Ortega was both a presentation and a workshop on TBLT that lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes. Ortega facilitated her presentation and discussion time in a collaborative style that helped her audience gain knowledge of TBLT and increase skill in practicing TBLT. The main goal of Ortega’s presentation was to explore important and vexing questions about tasks.

Ortega’s first topic was, “How can we tell a task when we see it? What is the ‘signature’ of a very good task?” During discussion time, a good task was described as requiring student input, having goals and an outcome, using language from previous exposures, relevancy, fun, realness, familiarity, intuition, and flexibility for ambiguity. Ortega exemplified how to make an ordinary information-gap task in which each student is given a different map of a zoo with incomplete animals, cages, and landmarks into something more meaningful. One idea was to add another layer to the task and ask the students to reach consensus on the location of new animals (Van Den Branden, 2009). Ortega emphasized that a good task provides opportunities where students can surprise one another or experience surprise (Willis, 1998).

The second topic that Ortega explored was: “What are the characteristics in you (the teacher) and/or your professional environment that made you into a fan and expert in TBL?” Teachers who thrived using a TBLT approach had a propensity for creativity, were optimistic, non-traditional, had positive parental characteristics, and had a strong desire for authenticity and honesty. A flexible learning environment
and environment in which assessment was not just limited to grammar acquisition was viewed by the audience as beneficial. Ortega raised interesting reservations and criticisms of TBLT and contrasted those reservations and criticisms to Asian EFL realities and TBLT ideals. Ortega’s slides in this part of her presentation were especially stimulating due to its relevance.

The workshop concluded with Ortega leading one final discussion on how language instructors could help students who do not intend to learn or use English. Ortega opined that teachers should more frequently conduct needs analyses of their students to help identify needs or purposes for learning English.

CONCLUSION

The JALT Task-Based Language Teaching Mini-Conference: ‘Tasks in Practice’ was a mini-conference in which many ESL/EFL language teachers could learn more about tasks in the classroom, share ideas, and connect with one another. The mini-conference attendance showed a tremendous amount of desire and sincerity by language instructors to learn more about TBLT and sharpen their practice of TBLT in local ESL/EFL contexts. Ortega answered the call by providing a wealth of educational information and leaving a memorable impression with her interactive and practical style. All the presenters of the poster presentations left their mark by presenting with passion and creativity. As the future of TBLT continues to grow, it will be beneficial for the JALT Task-Based Learning SIG to continue organizing mini-conferences.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Lin is a part-time adjunct English instructor from Los Angeles, CA at Kobe Shoin, Konan, and Konan Women’s University. He has been teaching ESL/EFL in the Kansai area since 2011. His research interests include TBLT, vocabulary acquisition, content based instruction, teacher and student motivation, and self-access learning.

REFERENCES


Communication Strategies

Charles Bell – University of East Asia

- **Key words:** Communication strategies
- **Level:** Lower-intermediate and above
- **Age:** High School, University
- **Preparation time:** 15 minutes
- **Activity time:** 60-80 minutes
- **Materials:** Task sheets (see Appendices)

**INTRODUCTION**

In this task, students are asked to discuss a number of different communication strategies that they can use in conversation when they find a gap in their linguistic knowledge. The strategies described in the task are based on Dörnyei’s (1995) work on the teachability of communication strategies. This task is an awareness raising activity, encouraging students to think critically about the effectiveness of different communication strategies, as well as how to avoid resorting to using L1 (first language) in class. Provided the students have learnt how to do so, the task also gives students an opportunity to practice various communicative functions such as asking for and giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, and justifying decisions. The post-task can be a fun way to personalise and experiment with the English language.

**PRE-TASK 1**

Before giving the students the task sheets, put them in pairs or small groups and ask them to make a list of the different ways that they deal with communicative problems inside and outside the classroom in English. Be forgiving, the technical language used to discuss this is quite difficult, so allow the student to discuss in L1 if their level is low. In a longer class (80 mins+), students could be asked to present these ideas in English with the help of dictionaries, and other electronic resources (mobile phones) if available, or with the teacher’s assistance. In shorter lessons, you could ask one or two volunteers for their ideas, in English if they have the resources, or in Japanese if it is more conducive to your teaching style, and write these ideas in English on the board. In classes I have taught, even lower level students have come up with ‘ask the teacher’, ‘explain’, and ‘speak Japanese’ as potential solutions.
**PRE-TASK 2**

Hand out the task sheets. Either individually or in pairs, ask the students to match the eight communication strategies on the left-hand side with the most appropriate target language item on the right-hand side by drawing a line between the two (see Appendix A). If necessary, demonstrate this by eliciting the target item for the first strategy from the class and drawing a line on the task sheet. After the students have completed the exercise, elicit the answers and put them on the board. Strategies number 3 and 5 may cause some confusion, but this is actually conducive to the main task. Students will hopefully realise that giving up and using vague language are not the most effective strategies.

**MAIN TASK**

As a group, students have to rate the communication strategies from the pre-task by perceived usefulness on a scale of 1 (very useful) to 5 (not useful) if they were talking to an English speaker who does not speak Japanese. Make sure that the students provide reasons for each of their decisions. A table for their ideas is provided in the Appendix B. To promote more discussion, let the students decide their ratings and reasons individually before the group discussion.

**PRESENT**

Get the groups to present their results to the class. In a shorter class you could ask students to only talk about the best and worst strategies and why. In a longer class, students can be asked to present their ratings and reasons for each of the eight strategies. In larger classes (30+ students) this can take up a lot of time, so it might be a good idea to split the class in half and get groups to present their results to their respective half. To make sure that the other students are paying attention during the presentations, ask them to make a note of the other groups’ ratings. This information can be used to find out the overall highest ranked strategies in the class.

**POST-TASK**

In pairs, get the students to practice using the different communication strategies to explain the pictures in the post-task section of the task sheet (see Appendix C). This can be done like a game, where for each correct guess the student explaining the word gets one point. Tell the students to avoid using strategy 8 (use of L1). For strategy 1 (ask for help), get the students to call you over and they can ask you for help. The pictures were deliberately chosen so that the students will not know all of the words in English, hopefully giving them a bit of extra motivation to participate in the task. The students will probably be quite eager to know the real answers, which you can tell them after they have finished the task. Alternatively, if there is more time available you could have students make their own list of words for their partner to guess. Upon completion the students should have a better understanding of which
strategies work best. Make a note of any good or particularly interesting strategies that the students use to share with the whole class after the task. One example of making a word that often pops up is ‘fire mountain’ for volcano, a perfect example of how the right communication strategy can work almost as well as using the correct term.

From my own experience this lesson is a great way to raise the students’ awareness about the different ways they can overcome gaps in their linguistic knowledge, some they may know about and use already, some they may have even used in their L1 as children. It also helps the students to realise that their intended meaning can still be comprehended from an inaccurate utterance. If you have any opinions on how this lesson can be adapted or improved, I would be very willing to hear your opinions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Bell teaches at the University of East Asia in Yamaguchi, Japan. He is completing an MA in TESOL with the University of Birmingham, UK. His current areas of interest include authentic listening, increasing students’ willingness to communicate in English, and developing online materials for blended task-based learning.

REFERENCES

## Appendix A: Pre-task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Target item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How do you say “一輪車” in English?</td>
<td>a rowing boat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) A pin-mouse</td>
<td>elbow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I give up!</td>
<td>a snowman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) [touch elbow]</td>
<td>a unicycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) It’s a thingy</td>
<td>a saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) A ship</td>
<td>a plunger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) A tool used for cutting wood</td>
<td>a combine harvester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) 雪だるま</td>
<td>a hedgehog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Solutions

1) a unicycle
2) a hedgehog
3) any of the target items
4) elbow
5) any of the target items
6) a rowing boat
7) a saw
8) a snowman

Appendix B: Main Task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Type</th>
<th>Rating (1 ~ 5)</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) ask for help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) make a new word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) give up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) gesture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) use vague language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) use a similar word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) describe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) use L1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Post-Task

- A) an anchor
- B) a bushbaby
- C) a tandem
- D) a pinecone
- E) a pestle and mortar
- F) a comet / a meteor
- G) a cell
- H) a sun lounger
- I) a duck-billed platypus
- J) a chicken
- K) peace
- L) a syringe
- M) a power plant / a chimney
- N) a badger
- O) a volcano
- P) love
- Q) a pylon
- R) a spear
- S) a corkscrew
The Book Making Project

Ran Niboshi – Kwansei Gakuin University

- **Key words:** book making project, task-based learning, task sequence, group work, project reflections
- **Level:** Intermediate
- **Learner age:** University students (and potentially younger)
- **Preparation time:** Thirty minutes to 1 hour
- **Activity time:** three and a half 90 minute classes plus homework
- **Materials:** Level-appropriate multiple pathway readers, a story map, blank B5 size sheets for book templates

**INTRODUCTION**

Language teaching is a complicated endeavour; it requires various approaches to intrigue and entice students. According to Noels, Clément, and Pelletier (1999), motivation towards English learning can be boosted when the learners find joy in the learning process and have some goals in L2 (second language) learning. Since making a story is enjoyable to many people, and students have a goal to accomplish in the task, they are likely to be motivated to work hard.

The purpose of the project described below is to provide students with a chance to output what they have already acquired and strengthen their English skills through making a story. Furthermore, students gain a sense of accomplishment by getting feedback from peers, and be able to notice their language errors through peer feedback. In this paper, I will report on my observation of the class where this lesson plan was actually implemented.

The class that was observed was composed of 25 second-year Japanese university students. These intermediate level students had applied to take this cross-faculty class as more challenging alternative to the compulsory English classes offered in their faculty. Hence, they were highly motivated. Additionally, at the time this lesson took place, the teacher had already been implementing a task-based approach for a semester and a half three times a week, so they were able to engage in the tasks outlined below with limited language support and guidelines.
PREPARATION

1. Prepare appropriate books for your target students.

In the project described below students read multiple pathway readers, published by Atama-ii Books, online using Xreading (https://xreading.com/), a paid online extensive reading website. The students used online graded readers because they had access to Xreading in class. However, the books can be replaced with paper books.

2. Give each group a story map for brainstorming and planning their story.

You can create your own story map template tailored to your particular context or use one available for free on the final page of any of the “Printable PDF Extras” provided by Atama-ii Books on their website at <http://www.atama-ii.com/resources/>.


Each book requires 22 sheets of B5 paper for making a 44 page long book, but the pages should not be stapled together. This allows students to split up the pages and work individually.

TASK 1

Read and discuss Atama-ii Books in groups

Give the students access to Atama-ii Books, either in digital or paperback form. Other multiple pathway readers, such as Survive from the Oxford Bookworms Library, could also be used. Students read the books in groups of 3 or 4 and discuss what choices to make and decide which pathway to take together. Students are encouraged to discuss the story with each other rather than merely reading the story alone. In the class that I observed, the teacher did not give explicit guidelines, but rather walked around to monitor groups and ensured that the students were on task. The teacher could also inform students that after reading the book, s/he is going to ask each group about the story they read, choice they made and why, so that it will encourage students to read the book together and talk to each other. While this group-based reading itself does constitute a task, it also serves the important functions of getting the students to understand the style of the book and priming them for the central book making task.

Report

To increase students’ understanding of the stories and of the concept of multiple pathway readers, the teacher has the students retell the stories and talk about what pathways they chose. It is also enjoyable for students to see what choices each group made. Additionally, students can share multiple endings with their classmates. Furthermore, one of the primary
purposes of this reporting phase is to check that the students have grasped the concept of pathway readers.

**Brainstorming/planning**

Having read a book from the Atama-ii Books series and reported back to the teacher, and the other students are ready to start working on their own stories. First, make groups of four or five students and distribute a story map to each group, and then students start thinking about the plot line of the story. If the students are struggling to come up with the idea of what to write, the teacher could encourage them to check short stories on the internet or give them some choices. For example, the most popular topics in this class were: school stories, love stories, and adventures. After deciding the plot line of the story, students write key-words in or around the boxes on the map so they can track the story. Many students found that making 8 endings was the most difficult part. The map enables students to track the story, helping alleviate this difficulty. It also exposes students to the very important skill of brainstorming.

**TASK 2**

**Write a book**

When students finish planning their stories, they start writing using the book templates. The teacher can encourage the students to split up the book and work individually on the writing task so that it allows every student to have a role in the book making process. While the students are writing, the teacher advises them to ensure that the book is coherent as a whole. Having spent one 90-minute class on task 1, the students are given two more 90-minute classes to finish the project. Some groups may find it difficult to finish it within two classes, so they can work outside of the class time. One potential problem that can arise is that students take pages home and are absent from the next class. If this happens, the group will have to work on a story with missing pages. To prevent this, it is a good idea to warn students that if they work individually, stories can sometimes be incoherent. The teacher should encourage students to talk to each other in a group, and read the book together to make sure that the book is coherent. It is recommended that teachers decide how many classes are allocated to finish the books by judging the speed of students’ work. Different groups tend to approach this task in different ways. For example, in the class I observed, one group took pictures of themselves acting to use as their visual aids, while some groups drew pictures and others downloaded images from the Internet. Many students said pictures and drawings helped them to understand the stories more when reading other groups’ books. One student reported that because of the visual aids, he was able to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.
Feedback from the teacher

Once students finish their books, the teacher collects them and checks for errors and checks the content. The teacher simply highlights the errors to allow students to correct them on their own. This could help students to develop editing skills and encourages them to pay more attention to their errors. Most of the students in the class reported that they prefer self-correcting. They said that they would not have looked at their mistakes carefully if they just had been corrected by the teacher. At the same time, students appreciated that the teacher gave feedback on some of the most common mistakes that were found in the books. These mistakes included:

1. Mixing of tenses - While it is possible and often natural to mix tenses, the teacher found that the books sometimes jumped between past and present tenses in an unnatural way.

2. Errors in numbering/story mismatches - There were instances where the reader would be instructed to go to page #, but the story on page # was not a continuation of the previous page. Once the errors were identified, students were encouraged to correct them by themselves. To minimize this kind of errors, the teacher should ask students to read the book several times with different pathways to check if the book is coherent with any pathways to take.

3. Mixing of 1st and 3rd person voice - There were instances of students suddenly and unnaturally changing from 1st to 3rd person voice.

While self-correction was encouraged, the teacher also intervened and offered corrections when the students could not self-correct.

FLOW OF THE PROJECT

The students are given a 90-minute class for the final editing. A total three 90 minute classes are conducted with the flow down below.

The first class: make groups of four or five students and distribute a story map to each group. From this stage, students start working in groups. First, discuss what kind of story they are going to write. When students have an idea of what to write, they write key-words in or around the boxes on the map. After that, split the book and students work on their own parts. If students find it difficult to finish the book within the class hour, they can work outside of class.

The second class: bring their parts together and make one book. Students check their English and the coherence of the book, and if they are happy with each other’s work in the
group. At the end of the class, all the groups hand in the book to the teacher. The teacher check their books, mostly their English and the coherence of the book.

**The third class:** the books are given back to the students. The teacher could give feedback to the entire class, in this class, the teacher explains the common English errors found in the books. After that, students correct the mistakes by themselves. At the end of the class, they hand in the book to the teacher so that the teacher can bring all the books to the next class for peer reading.

After those three classes, the students finally read other groups’ books and talk about them.

**PEER FEEDBACK**

After three classes of making a book, students finally read other groups’ books. The following questions should encourage students to be active in this speaking activity:

1. Which story did you like the best? Why?
2. Which book was the most attractive (artwork and pictures)?
3. Did the artwork and pictures help you to understand the books?
4. What could you do to improve your own book?

Students seemed to enjoy reading the books made by their classmates and they used their dictionaries, or asked for help, when they encountered words they did not know.

Although making visual aids takes time, pictures certainly help students to understand the stories more and entice them to read. After students read all the stories, the teacher assigns students to discuss their books as well as the project as a whole. At this time, the teacher gives students discussion topics such as:

1. What did you find to be the most difficult aspect of making the book?
2. What part did you enjoy the most?
3. Did this project help to improve your grammar/vocabulary?
4. The teacher gave you feedback on your book, but you also had to self-correct, was self-correction difficult?
5. Would you prefer to self-correct or for the teacher to tell you your mistakes directly?
6. Do you think this project improved your English? If so, what skills did you improve?
After the students talk about those questions, the teacher picks one student from each group and form new groups. Students then share what they have discussed in their initial groups. This presents an excellent opportunity to share thoughts and opinions with people from different groups. The teacher not only has students talk about the project, but also ask them to respond to the same discussion questions in writing for homework. Students submit the writing assignment online so that their opinions toward book making project could be evaluated by the teacher.

**CONCLUSION**

Feedback was collected from all 25 students who engaged in this project. From their feedback, the commonalities in their opinions were divided into four categories.

1. Improved English skills.

Students reported that they improved their vocabulary, grammar, writing, and reading skills through this project. Since most of their stories were related to everyday life, such as university life, relationships, and club activities, students were able to learn everyday English. In terms of vocabulary, they learnt the difference between some synonyms, such as *play* and *hang out* or *see* and *look*. They also learnt where and how to use those terms. One student commented that she would like to use those expressions in a real English conversation. Moreover, some students mentioned that they did not usually have the opportunity to write a lot in English so this project boosted their writing skills as well.

2. Being able to see error patterns.

When the teacher found commonalities in student errors, he gave feedback on some of the common mistakes found in their books. Other than that, the teacher allowed the students self-correct. Some students expressed a sense of achievement by correcting their own errors. Most of the students expressed a preference for self-correction over teacher-correction, saying they will remember the errors that they made and not make the same mistakes in the future.

3. Feeling the joy of making a story

In English classes in Japan, teachers often give students a topic for writing practice which is teacher-centred and controlled. With this project, however, the teacher let students decide everything about the books they wrote, from the content of the stories to the visual aids that accompanied them, thereby making the project student-centred. Students were self-motivated to work on this project, and they said the project improved their imagination as well.
4. Learning to work as a team

Since the book making project was engaging, students felt a sense of responsibility to finish their roles. One student reported that her group built a strong bond through creating a book together. Moreover, a great number of the students reported that sharing ideas and working with the group was the most enjoyable part in the project. One student wrote “This plan [the book making project] was not only just helped my English progress [sic] and let me realize the importance of teamwork”.

To sum up, the book making project not only improves students’ English skills but it also motivates students to use English more in the classroom. While the specific project outlined in this article was conducted with university students, the same type of book making project can be readily adapted to a wide range of ages and language levels. For example, I have also observed a modified version of this project being carried out with a group of bilingual children aged 9 to 11 at an international primary school. At that time, students made two different endings instead of eight to simplify the project. Although young learners needed extra support with writing, they seemed to enjoy bringing different ideas and making their own fantasy stories. No matter the age, students can broaden their horizons by accomplishing the task of writing a book in English.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ran Niboshi is currently pursuing her master’s degree in TEFL at the graduate school of language, communication, and culture at Kwansei Gakuin University in Japan. Her research interests include EFL and motivation.

REFERENCES