TAKING IT TO TASK

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tbltinasia@gmail.com

www.tblsig.org
EDITORIAL

Welcome to our first issue of Taking it to Task! in 2020.

This issue features an article by Rintaro Sato from Nara University of Education which offers a slightly different view of task-based language teaching than those often published here. The article is a critique and we want to be a publication that welcomes such critiques, but we also welcome any readers to counter the arguments made in follow-up papers or provide other views concerning TBLT. We are open to all sides in the discussion of this subject.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue, and if any of you have a TBLT related article, lesson plan, book review or opinion 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

Rick Derrah, Publications Chair

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE CONCERNING THE CANCELLATION OF TBLT IN ASIA 2020

As you are no doubt aware, the COVID-19 virus has become a pandemic, and has meant that many countries have travel restrictions or bans in place. After considering the situation closely during the early stages of the pandemic, it became clear that it was not be possible to hold the TBLT in Asia 2020 conference after all. We had many participants coming from overseas who were subject to travel restrictions, are were also aware of the potential health implications of bringing people together at this time. Therefore, we took the difficult decision of canceling the conference. We apologize to those who had taken the time to submit papers and workshops over the last few months.

Above all we hope that you are able to stay safe during this extremely difficult time. We will announce any developments regarding future TBLT in Asia conferences as soon as possible.
Student-Centered Learning in the Japanese EFL Environment: Concerns about TBLT and Active Learning

Rintaro Sato, Nara University of Education

Abstract

Student-centered, discovery-based learning has garnered considerable attention, and is now encouraged for Japanese EFL classrooms. In task-based language teaching (TBLT)—a logical development from communicative language teaching—students learn to speak a new language by communicating instead of receiving explicit instructions from a teacher or engaging in deliberate rote-learning practices. In the active learning approach, students are required to think for themselves through dialogue or conversations, and hopefully learn more profoundly. TBLT and active learning, an embodiment of student-initiated and centered learning, can affect their educational outcomes. However, in terms of the Japanese EFL environment and the characteristics of these students, some concerns require revisiting. This paper examines the potential problems related to student-centered, discovery-based learning in junior and senior high schools with the primary focus on TBLT and active learning; thereafter, a possible alternative approach that may be suitable for Japanese EFL learners is suggested.
Introduction

Student-centered learning is now widely recognized after gaining plenty of recent attention throughout the teaching profession. As the importance of improved practical communication skills grows, the trend has been moving away from traditional teacher-centered approaches, including presentation-practice-production (PPP), toward more student-centered learning methods, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBLT). In these approaches, students learn by actually “using” the target language rather than learning “how to use it.”

Parallel to this trend, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has encouraged teachers to adopt active learning techniques that foster in-depth learning by encouraging students to think for themselves through dialogue and discussions. These forms of experiential and discovery-based learning may sound effective for improving thinking, creativity, and imagination. Indeed, this method has become an educational trend. However, for educators, it is necessary to further analyze their actual effects on Japanese EFL students’ English learning outcomes.

Like many learners worldwide who regard the process of learning a foreign language to be considerably challenging because of the failures they frequently experience (Horwitz, 2001), Japanese learners also face several difficulties in learning English, thus resulting in unsatisfactory proficiency levels. In fact, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard—an international benchmark for second language proficiency featuring six proficiency levels (C2, C1, B2, B1, A2, A1)—about 80% of Japanese learners are categorized as A2 basic users (Negishi, Takada, & Tono, 2012).

As most students are lower-level learners who are yet to acquire even the basic fundamental skills in English, expecting them to learn primarily through experience or self-discovery may be unreasonable and less effective. Despite the trends, there is still room for skepticism about TBLT and active learning in the Japanese EFL environment; therefore, effective alternatives for teaching English to junior and senior high school students in Japan are suggested.

TBLT

The New Course of Study (MEXT, 2018) stipulates that the English language should be learned by actually using it in communication, which may possibly be realized through a TBLT-based approach. Presently, there are multiple definitions of “task.” Ellis (2019) suggests the following four criteria:
1. The student’s primary focus must be on meaning. In other words, students must try to use the language rather than learn it.

2. There must be some kind of gap. The gap motivates the exchange of information or opinions.

3. The students must rely primarily on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to perform the tasks. That is, they must utilize whatever language skills they already possess as well as other methods such as gestures or expressions to convey meaning.

4. There is a communicative outcome. The task is completed when the outcome is achieved. Successful completion does not depend on correct use of the language.

TBLT is a logical development from CLT, and students can learn to speak better by conversing more (Nunan, 2004). In other words, they can “learn by using it,” without receiving direct instruction or engaging in deliberate practice, that is, “learn to use it.” Ellis (2019) emphasizes the importance of incidental and implicit language learning. This “learning by using it” instead of “learning to use it” principle can be compatible with second language acquisition (SLA) theories and most methods through which native or first language (L1) is developed. In addition, this approach can improve student motivation by stimulating their curiosity and interest. However, as Doughty (2001) suggests, some are skeptical of whether Japanese EFL learners have the cognitive resources to learn by noticing the gaps between their interlanguage speech and the target speech being used around them when they focus primarily on English meaning.

Sato (2011) examined whether intermediate university students could identify and interpret language forms while focusing on meaning. The results revealed that most students did not notice the grammatical errors of sentences shown on the computer screen when they were asked to read and understand them for the purposes of communication, possibly implying the difficulties of learning through this method. In another study by Sato (2010), fifteen of twenty-two university students failed to use the target structure (present perfect) for the task, and their open comments about the task showed that many did not feel they had adequately learned English. Instead, they enjoyed the conversation, often by using Japanese instead of English. These two studies did not totally dismiss the influence of TBLT on English learning because the students managed to use some English in their conversations with each other. However, we can argue that students were less likely to retain knowledge related to the new language through this type of task.
Active Learning

The New Course of Study (MEXT, 2018) advocates implementation of in-depth learning in all subjects aimed at motivating students to independently identify problems and solutions through debate and presentations. As one of the objectives of foreign language education, it requires teachers to educate students to use English independently and autonomously. The active learning approach, in which learners are encouraged to think for themselves through dialogue and discussions, is required in the New Course of Study. In this approach, teachers are not required to impart knowledge, teach specific skills to students, or directly answer explicit questions. Instead, teachers expect students to find answers on their own through activities such as discussions or debates with their peers and teachers. This discovery-based, student-centered learning may embody holistic learning as it results in students building rapport with teachers and fellow students based on trust and cooperation. However, to be successful, students should ideally be self-motivated autonomous learners who can monitor their own learning, identify and solve problems themselves, and simultaneously support other students (Ozeki, 2019). The concept of teachers educating students to be autonomous learners rather than spending time teaching them knowledge or skills may seem ideal on the surface. However, as Christodoulou (2014) reports, numerous learners without sufficient knowledge, information, or skills failed to learn through this approach. Therefore, the effectiveness of this approach has not yet been well evidenced. In addition, as most Japanese EFL students are either beginner or lower-intermediate learners with limited self-motivation and autonomy and are unable to monitor their own learning, there are reasons to be skeptical of the student-centered approach for this specific environment.

As learning styles differ between students, we can assume that some Japanese learners will not perform well, and thus will be deprived of learning opportunities due to their failure to understand and adapt to learner-initiated, discovery-based techniques. This concern applies similarly to TBLT. Overdependence on incidental, implicit, and discovery-based learning can impede student improvement.

In public education, it is very important for teachers to ensure that students are learning and maximizing their outcomes in the few classroom opportunities they receive. As English classes are limited, teachers may need to expedite the process by providing information or imparting knowledge explicitly and directly before asking students to practice what they’ve been taught, followed by practical application of the new knowledge. Although this may seem exaggerated, the introduction of active learning and TBLT may be interpreted as a social issue because the role of
after-class learning would become much more pronounced. Specifically, attending *juku* (cram schools) or attending programs offered by private companies—in which students explicitly learn English to perform better on standardized exams—would play a much more significant role. Those who cannot afford after-school private classes may lag behind under the discovery-based active learning method, thereby creating a social dichotomy between the wealthy and other classes because of the widening education gap caused by disparate availability.

If we refer to Christodoulou (2014), profound learning can only occur by acquiring additional knowledge and applying that which has already been gained, especially in junior and senior high school. Therefore, it seems as though methods to teach the core required knowledge directly to EFL students should be prioritized.

**Suggestions and Conclusion**

A possible suggestion for effectively and efficiently teaching English to beginner and intermediate-level junior and senior high school learners is to reconsider a more traditional PPP-based approach. This approach involves beginning with explicit explanations of specific new forms and meanings (presentation stage), followed by practices that mainly focus on accuracy (practice stage). Finally, the class proceeds to the production stage, in which “learners would be required to produce language more spontaneously based on meanings they want to express” (Skehan, 1998, p. 93). This approach is regarded as teacher-centered receptive learning rather than student-centered discovery-based learning. However, with some revisions, this approach can be made even more effective. For example, in the presentation stage prior to explaining the desired learning outcomes, teachers may start by discussing something that incorporates a certain grammatical structure that the students will be taught in that lesson. This creates an opportunity for students to identify the structure in real contexts. Mechanical (i.e., rote) imitation and repetition during the practice stage in traditional PPP can be followed by exercises to include more meaningful communicative practices in the given context to connect language forms with meanings.

In the final stage of production, teachers can start with a closed and focused task in which students are required to use specific structures that adhere to a particular format. After successful use of the target structure, an open and unfocused task can then be assigned, in which students are free to select appropriate grammatical items and demonstrate how to use them properly. Such a lesson design that gradually introduces new concepts over numerous stages is more likely to
guarantee positive learning outcomes, especially when classroom sessions are limited. This is only one of many examples of effective teacher-centered receptive learning techniques that can be more effective than TBLT or active learning in the Japanese EFL environment. Furthermore, it can be argued that TBLT and active learning, which are advocated by MEXT (2018), are not identical, but share the same principle of learner-centered, discovery-based learning. However, student-centered approaches should not be discarded entirely. With some revisions to TBLT and active learning, we may possibly be able to conduct effective discovery-based teaching that can broaden students’ thinking, creativity, and imagination far beyond mastering the linguistic aspects of English. In this paper, I have expressed my concerns about unrealistic expectations and overdependence on student-centered, discovery-based learning, and have suggested one possible alternative for teachers that may benefit their students. We must strive to establish better balance by revising the two teaching-learning approaches for the Japanese EFL context.

References


LEsson plan:

Creating a Successful Video Advertisement

Peter A. Chu, Kindai University

This is a multi-week series of activities aimed at intermediate to advanced learners culminating in the presentation of a TV- or online-style video advertisement that incorporates elements of good advertisements. The tasks can be spread out over the course of three to five weeks, depending on pacing and production requirements. I have used this plan with good results as one of the final modules in a media course.

Goals

- Discussion of what goes into a successful, persuasive advertisement
- Gaining familiarity with the storyboarding process of creating an advertisement
- Designing original slogans to market a product
- Creating and sharing a video-format advertisement incorporating elements previously analyzed
- Promoting interpersonal communication and teamwork, and autonomous learning in using modern video editing technology
- Presentation of collaborative work to be assessed by peers

Materials

- Selection of magazine advertisements, including both famous brands, advertisements with somewhat vague imagery, and examples of failed advertising campaigns
- Two or three examples of TV/online commercials
- Projector and A/V equipment for showing videos
- Smartphone (at least one student in each group will need to have a relatively new smartphone for ease of video creation)

**PREPARATION WEEK 1**

Select several famous slogans from well-known companies from past and present marketing campaigns (Appendix A). Some selections can be somewhat vague, so when they are presented out of context, they may be difficult to identify. In addition, print out a variety of full-page magazine advertisements (enough so that each group can examine a different one simultaneously) of varying degrees of complexity and clarity, as well as some examples of failed advertising campaigns (Appendix B). Finally, print the accompanying worksheets (Appendices C and D).

**PRE-TASK**

Introduce the theme of advertising by showing a few famous slogans and asking students to discuss which ones they know and what companies they are associated with (Appendix A). Students share their initial thoughts on slogans and what makes a good slogan. This topic will be revisited in the following week.

**STAGE 1**

Assign pairs or groups. Using a worksheet (Appendix A), students confirm the meaning of advertising-related vocabulary.

Following this, they use a mind map to brainstorm different methods of advertising. (In the first week, magazine advertising will be focused on, and in the second week, television and online commercials are the focus. The reason for this order is that in a previous unit of this media course, the students studied magazines, with a focus on cover designs. In practice, other forms of advertising can be chosen, but the easy access to full-page magazine adverts online makes this format a practical choice.) Share their thoughts as a class and identify magazine and TV commercials as the two formats that they will be exploring in depth.
STAGE 2 – Examining Successful and Unsuccessful Models

Distribute the selection of printed magazine advertisements (a different one for each group) and have groups examine them and answer the following questions (Appendix C): What is it advertising? What is your impression of the ad? During this segment of the lesson, students should begin making connections between imagery, language, and the product or service as well as identify what makes an advertisement appealing. If some ambiguous images were part of the selection, one option is to cover or cut out the brand or company name to increase interest by making identification more challenging.

Introduce the phrase ‘faux pas’ before distributing the next round of advertisements. In addition to the previous questions, students should now also try to guess why the images shared are considered to be faux pas and unsuccessful advertising campaigns. There is a small handful of well-known examples which can be found on-line and most are related to poor localization (Appendix B).

Transition into discussion questions to expand on the theme, having students discuss what products and services they use on a daily basis and how they are advertised, what their current favorite advertisement is, and also what regulations should be applied to advertisements to protect consumers.

STAGE 3 – Online / TV Advertisement Example

In the final step for the overview portion of this unit, show a TV or online commercial in its entirety and have students discuss the same questions as before (Appendix C). For this class, which I always conduct in the weeks prior to the winter break, I always use a personal favorite: a Polish viral video with a Christmas theme. The language spoken is English, but it centers around an old Polish gentleman who takes up English study in a highly motivated manner, although his motivation is initially unclear. Using a worksheet to keep them focused, students watch the video, tick the boxes of the study methods the man uses, and then discuss similar questions to those before: 1) What is your impression of the advertisement? 2) Do you think it is a “successful” ad? The second question usually proves quite difficult to answer, as students are usually caught up in the drama and are unable to say what was actually advertised. This ad can of course be replaced with any other that is conducive to discussion.
This concludes the first week overview of advertising. Distribute the storyboarding handout and instruct the students to read the explanation in preparation for the following class (Appendix D). The blank template on the back will be used for planning in the next week. Several vocabulary items are in boldface and students should be encouraged to look up any words they are unfamiliar with. This lays the groundwork for the task, which will be detailed in week two.

Preparation Week 2

Find two or three copyright-free storyboards on the internet or design your own. Choose two or three short television/online commercials to give students an idea of what they might themselves attempt to make. Showing advertisements that the instructor themselves made in addition to both good and poor examples of student productions from previous classes is a good way to demonstrate what is possible and set reasonable expectations.

STAGE 4 – Storyboards, Slogan Creation, and Models

After going over the homework reading, distribute the storyboard example. Students work in pairs to narrate the story. This can be repeated if necessary with other examples shown via projector. The templates will be used in the task to create storyboard candidates for the advertisement project.

Following the storyboards, distribute the final handout (Appendix E). Look over the rules of thumb for designing slogans, addressing any issues in understanding. Have students work in groups to come up with a suitable slogan for one of the three pictures on the handout. Assign two or three groups per picture. After the designated amount of time, have a representative from each group write their slogan by the appropriate image. As a class, vote on the class’s top picks, reinforcing the idea that it is important to both think of several different ideas for a single product and also to get input from others.

For the final pre-task activity, show two or three examples of tv/online advertisements. Showing a good example from a prior year as well as the teacher’s example (around 80 seconds each) can stimulate creativity and interest. It is not necessary to discuss these as a class, although groups can certainly do so together. Distribute an outline of the video production task to the students.
TASK

- Create a TV/online format video advertising either a real or imaginary product or service
- Advertisements must be made in groups of three or four
- All members should be involved in storyboarding, video creation, and the presentation afterwards
- Video must be 30 seconds in length minimum (to emulate real TV advertisements)
- Video needs to include a product name and slogan and appeal to a certain target audience
- Video will be shown on the class presentation day, at which point the group will also talk about the thinking behind each of their key decisions

Review all the elements that make a good advertisement. Allow the students to create their own groups (or assign students to groups) and give them the rest of the class to plan, discuss, and storyboard their ideas. Ensure that the students are aware of the demands of the project

WEEK 3

Students will likely need more than one week to complete the task, so devote a good portion of the following class to allow more time for planning and discussion amongst their groups. There are a plethora of free video editing applications readily available online, so students might benefit from pooling their knowledge and advice on recommended apps for adding sounds and music or captions, etc.

As these video files will be too large to send via email, instruct the students to bring them on a USB memory stick, and possibly upload them to a cloud service, like Google Drive, as a backup.

POST-TASK

WEEK 4

If possible, download all of the groups’ videos to the classroom computer before beginning the presentations to streamline the process and cut down on changeover time. Have each group come up in turn to both play their video and give a short presentation about it. How they choose to do so
is up to them: they could show the video first and discuss it afterwards, or vice versa, or show it in
the middle of their presentation. Encourage students to recycle the key vocabulary from each of
the previous stages whenever possible. Their peers should be encouraged to ask questions after
each presentation. Optionally, they can be enlisted to evaluate each group’s presentation with a
grading rubric to keep them focused.
APPENDIX A

Advertising I - Overview

“Impossible is nothing.”  “I’m loving it.”  “Built for drivers.”

“The Power of Dreams”  “Inspire the Next”  “No More Rules.”

1. What are these phrases? Which companies are they associated with?
2. Why do companies use slogans? What makes a good slogan?

Vocabulary

In pairs, discuss the meaning of the words in bold. Try to understand from the context if you are not sure.

The company had a new product to sell so it decided to [1] run an advertisement to get some [2] publicity.

Many advertisements are only effective because they [3] persuade people that they need products or services when in reality they don’t.

Sometimes advertising is [4] deceptive; they are not 100% true. Don’t [5] fall for them!

If an advertisement [6] goes viral on social media, thousands or millions of people will see it. That means the company’s [7] brand awareness will skyrocket!

“The movie will be released next year. We need to build some [8] hype for it. Let’s advertise on social media and start prescreening showings for [9] word of mouth, too.”

The company had just enough money in their budget to buy a slot on [10] prime time TV, but only for ten seconds.
APPENDIX B

Examples of Magazine Advertisements (Successful / Faux Pas)

-enlarge and print on A4, one per sheet to accommodate the number of groups
Faux Pas in Advertising / Marketing

1) suffocated children

2) Chevy Nova: marketed south of the border in Mexico without localization, where the English name “Nova” interpreted as Spanish means “does not go”

3) Gerber baby food sold in Africa where the label shows the contents of the jar
Advertising II – “What is it advertising?”

A) Look at the advertisements and use the questions below to start a discussion on them.
1. What is it advertising? (i.e. what product or service)
2. What is your impression of the advertisement?
   - I love it. It’s very striking!
   - I like it. The colors are nice.
   - It’s interesting. I like the chimp in the background.
   - I don’t really like it. The picture is strange…

   - I think it’s an advertisement for …
   - I guess it’s an advertisement for …
   - Maybe this is advertising …
   - This must be selling …

B) Look at and discuss the unsuccessful advertisements, including the question below.
3. Why do you think the advertisement was a faux pas and unsuccessful?

C) Discuss the questions below about advertisements.
4. What are some products/services you use every day? How do companies advertise them?
5. What’s your favorite advertisement right now? Why do you like it?
6. What regulations (rules or laws) should be applied to advertisements to protect the consumer (the people who use them, i.e. you and me)?

D) Find and label the vocabulary items in the picture below.

   - slogan
   - logo
   - brand name
   - image
   - poster

Who is the target audience of this advertisement?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogetBqMgau0

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCI9S_Wo9w (2016)
Advertising - Storyboard

Polish Online Advertisement ⇒ Viral Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUSRnd-HM6A

E) Watch the online advertisement linked above. As you watch, check the boxes of the methods the Polish man uses to study English.

- take a class
- watch movies/TV
- listen to music/radio
- go to a language school
- translate
- flashcards
- labels
- talk with a language exchange partner
- repeat/say vocabulary
- use a textbook/CD
- other:

F) After watching the advertisement, discuss the questions below.

1. What’s your impression of the advertisement?

2. Do you think it is a “successful” advertisement? [Think about these aspects:
   1. Did it give you any strong feelings, thoughts, or reactions?
   2. Did it make you want to buy a product or service? Was it convincing?
   3. What was it advertising? Do you remember the name of the product, the service, the company, the slogan, or the logo?]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKNTCP-ctGw [The AXE Effect – Women –Billions]
Almost every TV commercial, TV show, or video began as a storyboard. It is a sheet of paper that breaks down the parts of a video production into what you see and what you hear. Think of the storyboard as a comic strip. It is usually divided into eight boxes, called frames or panels or blocks. Each box will contain the next step of the commercial.

Each frame of the storyboard has an action and a line or two of dialog. You can draw pictures or write a description of the action in the blocks. For each action, write a script or summarize the action for the characters in your commercial. Then write in the words or sound effects heard below that box. This is the audio. It can be the spoken words of actors on camera, the words of the narrator, or captions (words that appear on the screen). Sometimes it’s a combination of all three.
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Advertising Storyboard Template
APPENDIX E

Advertising IV - Tips for Creating a Slogan (and Logo)

- Keep it **short** and **simple**. → No more than 10 words.
- Make it **memorable**. → It puts an image in your mind and is easy to remember.
- Explain **what you do** and how it benefits the customer.
- Use **keywords** for your business. → Use a **thesaurus**.
- Be **creative**!
- Get **input** from others. → Make several and ask which is best.
- For **logos**, keep the **shape** **clear** and **simple**.

In pairs or small groups, write a slogan for the three pictures. Decide what the product is and use your imagination to make appropriate slogans.

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Advertising Presentation Project

You and your partner (or group members) should be prepared to speak about your mock-up (pretend) advertisement in class. Your presentation should be approximately four or five minutes in length, with each person speaking an equal amount of time. Your advertisement can be in the form of a video (TV commercial), a radio advertisement (sound recording), a flyer (an insert for a newspaper, or for other distribution), a poster, or a page in a magazine. You should include a brand name, a slogan, and a logo.

Things you should do in your presentation:

- explain your choice of product/service
- talk about the thinking behind your storyboard
- describe the target audience, and how the advertisement is designed to attract them
- discuss the brand name, the slogan, and the logo

Grading

Your peers (classmates) will give you a score based on:

- the advertisement – design, content
- your presentation style – voice, eye contact, gestures, content

The teacher will also grade your presentation. You must submit a copy of your presentation script. Please note that if your classmates give unreasonable grades, then only the teacher’s grades will be used. (i.e. DON’T give everybody a perfect score!)
LESSON PLAN:

Improving Conversations by Writing Dialogues

John Carle, Kansai University

This task can be used with all levels of learners and can be adopted for use with any oral communication textbook by simply “tweaking” a discussion or questionnaire section. The task takes between 20 to 40 minutes.

GOALS

- Have students reflect and revise an initial conversation and write an improved version
- Promote collaborative learning by having students work together to create the dialogue
- Have students push output by incorporating new vocabulary into their dialogues
- Culmination of the task in the form of a creative performance in front of their classmates

MATERIALS

Any oral communication textbook would probably work fine. The following example is from my own textbook, The English Gym*, written under the pen name Jon Charles (Appendix A). Basically, you’ll need some conversation starter questions, ideally focused on real world discourse.

In this article, I will give an outline for the task procedure, followed by specific examples from the textbook for illustrative purposes.
Students should engage in a discussion using starter questions or discussion topics. This could be in the form of a questionnaire or interview.

In this example, I will use material from Unit 11, Summer Vacation. To see the full unit, a downloadable PDF can be viewed online here www.englishgymjapan.com by clicking on the Sample Unit 11 button (Appendix A). Also, an animated video of this task can be viewed by clicking on Video Tutorials for Teachers and scrolling down to GYM Tutorial Page: Our Conversation. In this particular unit, students have a conversation about what they did over their summer break.

Here are a few sample conversation questions from the unit:

#3. What was the best part of your summer break?
#5. Did you work?
#8. Did you go anywhere else?
#10. What would you like to do next summer?

As the students ask these questions, they should take brief notes of their partner’s answers. Students should be encouraged to give long answers, make comments, have reactions, and ask follow-up questions.

This conversation will be used as the basis of the main task to follow.

PRE-TASK EXAMPLE

Let’s say the students choose to focus on question #5 “Did you work?” as their target. Their original conversation may have looked something like this:

A: Did you work?
B: Yes, I did.
A: I see. Where did you work?
B: At a ramen shop.
A: OK.

Their original notes may have looked something like this:

Yes / ramen shop

This would be a typical exchange for false beginner students. The students are using full sentences, there is a reaction, a follow-up question, and an appropriate response. Certainly nothing spectacular, but by implementing the following task, the students will make significant improvements.

TASK

STAGE 1: WRITING

After students have finished their discussions, have them focus their attention on one of the questions and their partner’s initial answer. The teacher could either assign the questions to each pair of students or have them choose the most interesting response. Students should use their notes for reference.

Next, give the students the task of writing an improved version of their original conversation. Students will have approximately 10 minutes for writing and one minute to practice. These dialogues will be performed in class.

Encourage students to work together to create a dialogue that incorporates key vocabulary. They should also try to write something that is either, funny, dramatic, or entertaining in some way. And, try to have the students write as much as possible. The amount will depend largely on your students’ levels of proficiency. For low to intermediate students, I tend to have them write about 75 to 100 words. Stronger students of course, will be able to write more.

As students work on their written dialogues, the teacher should go around and offer support and advice. It may be helpful to have some sort of timer visible, so students do not take too long to finish writing. I will usually project a countdown timer on a screen during the last 2 minutes or so.
STAGE 1: WRITING EXAMPLE

The students look at their original notes and try to write a better dialogue. Here is what they might come up with:

A: Hey, Miho.
B: Hey, Taro. Long time no see!
A: Yeah. Long time no see!

(Students have added a greeting including vocabulary terms found in the unit.)

B: Did you have a good summer?
A: Oh, yeah, but I was pretty busy.
B: Oh, did you work?

(Students have included the target question.)

A: Yeah, I worked at a ramen noodle shop.
B: That’s cool. I love ramen. Did you work a lot?
A: Um..., about four or five days a week.

(Students have included more vocabulary terms form the unit and expanded the conversation.)

B: That’s a lot. You must be rich!
A: Yeah, I’m a rich man, now! (ha, ha, ha)

(Students have added a bit of humor to the dialogue.)

STAGE 2: PERFORMANCE

After the allotted writing time has expired, have the students practice reading their dialogues aloud with their partner. A minute or two should suffice. The teacher may ask the students to memorize their dialogues, or at least try not to just simply read off the paper. Students should make eye contact by looking up at their partner when speaking.

Performances can be conducted in two ways, in small groups or in front of the whole class. If time is limited, small groups of four students would be ideal. Two students stand up and perform their dialogues, while the other pair watches. Then, the other pair performs. In this scenario, several pairs of students would be performing at the same time.
If there is plenty of time, each pair could perform in front of the class. If you choose this option, I would suggest using a lottery system to decide the order of the performances. This will naturally generate a sense of anticipation and excitement. In my own classes, I will use a deck of playing cards to decide the order, drawing a new card after each performance.

In either scenario, students will have the experience of performing in front of their peers. Not only does this give them a valuable public speaking opportunity, but also keeps them accountable for trying their best when writing and performing. If this task is repeated in several lessons, students will definitely improve their communication skills.

POST-TASK

After each performance, or as a final summary, the teacher could bring attention to some of the more interesting exchanges of dialogue. These could be written on the board with students taking notes. Alternatively, students could be asked to write down and offer their own observations and comments on the performances. As a finale, students could vote for “Best Performance”, or “Funniest Performance”, or “Best Use of Vocabulary”.

SUMMARY

By having students reflect on their initial conversations and trying to create a richer and more detailed dialogue, students become aware of ways to enhance their way of communicating. Students can incorporate key vocabulary and also change the conversation to add a bit of humor or drama to the exchange. In this particular task about summer break, students should gain more confidence and be able to talk about their experiences with greater depth and complexity.

VARIATIONS

The dialogue writing stage of the main task could be assigned as homework. Students would need to collaborate either face-to-face, or via a messenger service such as LINE, to complete the dialogue. In the following lesson, students would complete stage two of the task; the performance. This potentially gives students more time to complete the writing, but limits teacher feedback during the process.
NOTES

The full lesson of Unit 11 Summer Vacation includes a great deal of priming material for students to work with. These include an audio recording of a parallel discussion, useful vocabulary that learners may utilize for talking about the topic, common mistakes that Japanese learners often make when discussing the topic, and a short form-related activity. The textbook also includes a tape script of the audio section, providing students with a model to work from if needed.
APPENDIX A


Website: [www.englishgymjapan.com](http://www.englishgymjapan.com)
LESSON PLAN:

Country Poster and Presentation

Bill White, Kwansei Gakuin University
and Ted Ostis, Kindai University

This is a two-week task aimed at upper beginner to lower intermediate learners.

GOALS

- Learn how to use Wikipedia or The World Factbook for simple research purposes
- Create a poster for presentation
- Give a poster presentation

MATERIALS

- A PC and projector
- Poster sized paper
- Internet connected devices, ideally PCs
- Markers and pens/pencils (colored optional)
- Printer (optional and color is preferred)

PRE-TASK

Ask the students to give ideas of countries they know little or nothing about (you may add some of your own ideas if need be). Compile a list of the countries either on paper or on a black/white board. Ask them what kinds of information they would like to know about these countries. Again, compile a list on the previous paper or board. Please include this and other information you require the students to include in their presentation.

See Appendix A
Give a poster presentation or show a previous student’s poster presentation so students have an example of your expectations for the task.

**TASK**

**Class 1**

**Part 1**
Have students choose or assign one country from the list of countries you have compiled. (If you plan to have students do presentations in small groups, then more than one student can be assigned the same country if need be.)

**Part 2**
Using a PC connected to a projector, show the students how to use the find function and use Wikipedia (English site) or The World Factbook to find their countries. Pre-teach the language that the students will need to find the required information.

**Part 3 (Optional)**
If you are allowing students to print out pictures, show them how to copy and paste images into a word document or image application for editing before printing.

Conclude the class by confirming students have found the required information and have recorded it into their notebooks or word document. Then hand out the poster papers and have them design the posters for homework.

*See Appendix B*

**Class 2**

**Part 1**
Check that the students have completed their posters.

**Part 2**
Have about 1/4 of the students put their posters on the four corners or four walls and stand by them. Next, have the rest of the class split up and be the audience to the students as they talk...
about their countries. Encourage students to ask questions about the countries. Repeat until all the students have presented.

Variation on Part 2
Divide the class into four groups. Send each group into a corner to present to each other. Conduct the presentations as stated in Part 2. Then split each group in half and have them rotate to the next group to present another two times, if time allows.

You can adapt this to almost any topic of your liking.
APPENDIX A

1. Population
2. Capital City
3. Location (southeast, northern, central, etc.)
4. Annual Per Capita Income (in US $ or Japanese Yen)
5. Currency $ (the Euro, the Peso, etc.)
6. Three Famous Foods
7. National Sport (judo, football, etc.)
8. Language (French, Spanish, etc.)
9. Religion (Islam, Buddhism, etc)
10. Three Things To Do (landmarks, museums, natural attractions)
11. Music or Instrument (Samba, Flamenco, Sitar, Didgeridoo)
The population of ___________ is _______________ and the capital city is ________________

The currency is the _________ and the per capita income is $_______________

It is located in ____________________ and the language is ________________

The religion is ____________, and the national sport is _______________

Some popular foods are ____________, ____________ and ______________

If you go to _______________ you should ____________, ______________  and _______________

(you can use these words: see, visit, try, climb, hike)

The indigenous music of ___________ is _______________.

or: The local music in _______________ is _______________.

or: A musical instrument of ____________ is the _______________.