Co-operative communities: Kids at play together

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Reference Data

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In a communicative English language program the teacher acts as a task designer and facilitator. If the task is prepared with communication criteria in mind and appropriate materials, the teacher has only to facilitate the activity while students pursue the communication task independently, cooperating with each other and having fun while practicing English. Communicative card games work particularly well with junior high school students who tend towards a kinesthetic learning style and enjoy games that connect meaning to physical response. This workshop demonstrated a junior high school first year lesson of present tense questions and short answers, adapting the card game "Go Fish" and a second year lesson on occupations, focusing on two card games to pre-teach the vocabulary expressions *likes*— and *likes to*—.

コミュニケーションのための英会話のプログラムでは、教師は、タスクデザイナーとファシリテータ(進行係)の両方を演じる。コミュニケーションの基準と適当な教材が思い浮かんだら、教師は、生徒が自らコミュニケーションタスクを追求し、他の生徒と一緒になって楽しく英語を練習することができるように、進行役を務めれば済む。コミュニケーションのためのカードゲームは特に、意味を体の反応に結びつけるような動的な学習スタイルを好む中学生向いている。このワークショップでは、「Go　Fish」というカードゲームを使いの中学一年生、現在形の質問とその答えのレッスンを、そしてlikes…とlikes to…を教えるための二つのカードゲームに焦点をおいて二年生の職業についてのデモをしました。

A communicative English language program

I am a native English teacher in a Japanese junior high school involved in an English language communication program that began in 1996. The program's methodology came about through shared teaching experience with other native English teachers, continuous adaptation to the learning community, and action research. The aim of the program is to make English language communication an enjoyable experience for students so they will want to continue studying and improving. Presently, the

program is engaged in a communicative approach that shifts away from language forms and structures and focuses on completing tasks in the target language. The teacher's role is chiefly task designer and class facilitator (Beale, 2003). Students are asked to use the language they have learned in their regular English classes, understand the content of the classes, participate actively and foster cooperative relationships with other students. Class activities vary widely, including every possible combination of group and pair work. Games are a particular favorite, and I shared some card games in the workshop at JALT 2006.

Communicative card games

The workshop was concerned with card games. Card games work well with junior high school students who are often kinetic learners and enjoy games that connect meaning to physical response (Center for Collaborative Education, 2006). From my experience, the card game should be designed with certain criteria in mind to keep the communication flowing or it risks deteriorating into a hand of *babanuki*, or Old Maid (a junior high school favorite). Beyond the speaking task, the communicative game design should:

- include a listening component
- engage individual students as much as possible
- be non-threatening, yet challenging
- have a clear set of rules.

A listening component should be incorporated in a communicative game because it is a necessary skill for communication and it acts to keep students productively engaged in the game (Saricoban, 1999). A common activity I have observed in my students' regular classes is students presenting results or a story to the class. While the presentation is engaging for the student speaking, the audience, when not responsible for what the speaker is saying, quickly ceases to pay attention. The same goes for games: while a pair is engaged in the game dialogue, students waiting their turn will lose interest in the game if they have no reason to be in on the dialogue as well. Giving students something to listen for keeps all individuals engaged. Game groups should be kept small to ensure games are non-threatening, yet challenging. With small groups of 4 or 5 students, individual turns come more quickly, thus games are more challenging and less threatening (Center for Collaborative Education, 2006). Although enthusiasm for noise is gradually overcoming my students' fear of speaking before the whole class, I have observed Japanese students are not comfortable speaking English before a large audience. They are, however, willing to take risks in more intimate group settings. All the same, a game should not ask students to reveal information they would rather not share with others nor to perform tasks they find embarrassing. This is particularly important for junior high school students who are very sensitive to how others view them (Center for Collaborative Education, 2006). Although the card games I introduced in the workshop don't require such a precaution, in other communicative games I usually provide students with an out, an opportunity to forfeit the play without losing face, if they find it too difficult to respond. Finally, a clear set of rules prevents the game from becoming confusing, delaying the play and requiring lots of teacher attention.

Even if the purpose of the communicative game is for students to determine for themselves how the language works, they should not have to waste time figuring out how the game itself works. Also, games played for the sake of a particular conversational exchange, lexicon or grammatical focus, with no definite goal, are inauthentic and transparent to students (Galloway, 1993). If the game objective is too narrow, students soon catch on and lose interest.

Cards

The following information is based on my experience of making and using cards in junior high school. Cards should be prepared with the needs of the game and criteria mentioned above in mind. In order to facilitate smaller groups a teacher needs to make many decks of cards (8 decks per 40 student class). Most card games require opaque cards that conceal information on the other side. Cardstock works well, but ordinary computer paper also works if an opaque backing is printed on the reverse side (numbers or color-coding to keep decks separate) and it is laminated. Lamination is a good idea because it prevents ink from coming off on players' hands and protects the cards for future use.

Go Fish

Based on a card game played by American children with an ordinary deck of cards, "Go fish" can be adapted to handle any number of questions requiring a Yes/No response (e.g. Do you—? Did you—? Can you—? Have you ever—?). To match the original game, a deck of close to 52 cards is needed or 26 items for pairs. In the original game the objective is for players to empty their hands of cards first, play continuing until one player is stuck with cards. I changed the objective to players collecting as many pairs of cards as possible. One empty hand stops the game and the count-up of cards (1 point per matching pair) determines the win. This change means players don't passively lose cards, but actively seek cards and stay in play. In addition, although players can ask for a card in their turn only, they are allowed to ask any player, not just the player to their left or right. This introduces active listening into the game: players can discover the card they need by listening to other conversations and later ask for that card in their turn.

In the workshop I introduced a "Go fish" game for first year junior high school students to play in the fifth or sixth week of classes. By this time students are familiar with the grammar and some of the vocabulary from their regular English classes. Before the game, students are introduced to the three questions that will be used: Do you like (food)? Do you play (sport)? Do you know (person)? In a pair practice situation, and using a prepared printout to respond to their partners' answers, students practice asking a variety of these questions and responding with Yes/No answers. After this practice, students are ready to begin the game. Students get into groups of 4 or 5 and the cards are distributed (Figure 1). To introduce the game, the teacher joins one group and the other groups gather around to observe. After a couple of hands, students return to their groups and play the game.

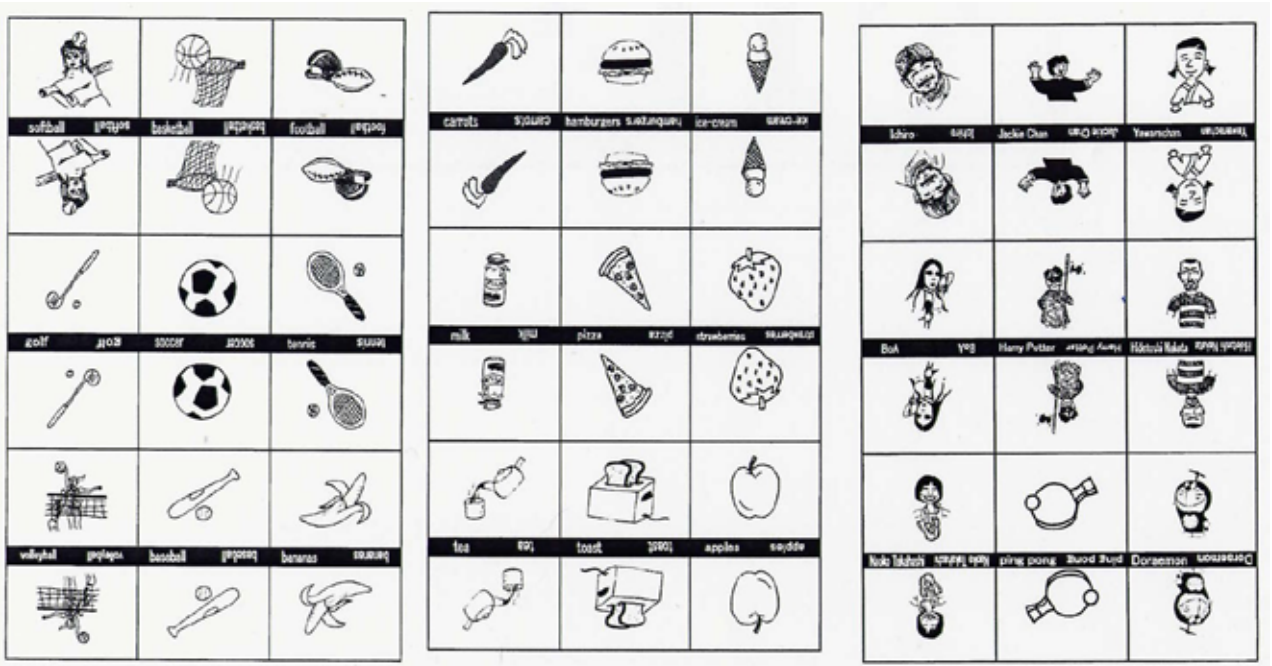

Figure 1. Go Fish cards

The group dealer shuffles and deals 5 cards to each player. The remaining cards are placed face-down in a stack in the middle of the playing space. This is the fishing pond. Players place any pairs they have in front of them as points. The player to the left of the dealer begins and the game proceeds clockwise. Player 1 (P1) asks any player in the group a question (from the options, "Do you like (food)/play (sport)/know (person)?") according to the card he/she is seeking to make a pair with. If the other player has this card, s/he responds, "Yes, I do." and gives the card to P1. P1 now has a pair and places it on the table. If the other player does not have the card, s/he responds, "No, I don't. Go fish!" In this case, P1 takes a card from the top of the fishing pond. Then it is P2's turn. The game continues in this fashion until one of the players empties their hand of cards. At this point, the game is over and players count up their pairs of cards as points. The winner is the player with the most pairs of cards.

Concentration and karuta

Concentration can be played with any information that can be put into pairs, for example, occupations and their preferences; advice with *should* and related problems; present tense verbs and past tense forms (especially good for irregulars). *Karuta* (based on the Japanese game, the objective is to be the first to slap a card of a *hiragana* syllable heard in a reading) follows naturally for good listening and speaking practice.

In the workshop I demonstrated a second year junior high school warm-up activity I introduce in the middle of the school year when students are working on expressions *want to*— and *like to*—. The game is used to give students a source of information and practice for a later job information gap activity. There are 20 cards used in the games. 10 occupation name cards have phrases like "A pilot likes to—" or "A teacher likes to—"; and 10 occupation activity cards finish these phrases as "…fly airplanes." or "…teach children." The concentration game is used to introduce the vocabulary (occupations) and the grammar focus (*likes to*). The *karuta* game gets students involved in listening for these target phrases and later, in speaking the information aloud.

In groups of 4 or 5 members, students make a table with their desks, and each group receives a set of job cards (Figure 2). A group's first task is to match the occupation name cards (with small type) with the correct occupation activity (with large type). The students are given about 3 minutes to complete this task. The teacher checks student work by leading with, "A pilot likes to—" and eliciting the response, checking comprehension if necessary. After going through all the occupation cards, the teacher has the groups play a game of concentration, a pair in the game being a match between an occupation name card and its correct occupation activity card. This should take between 5-10 minutes for most groups to complete. Students with the most pairs are the winners.

Next groups divide their card sets, putting aside the occupation name cards and spreading out the occupation activity cards face-up on the playing space. Students are told they will be playing a *karuta* type game. The teacher leads with "A pilot likes to—" and students slap the correct answer, the first to do so keeping the card. This is done for all the occupations. Winners are the students with the most cards and become the callers for the next round. The

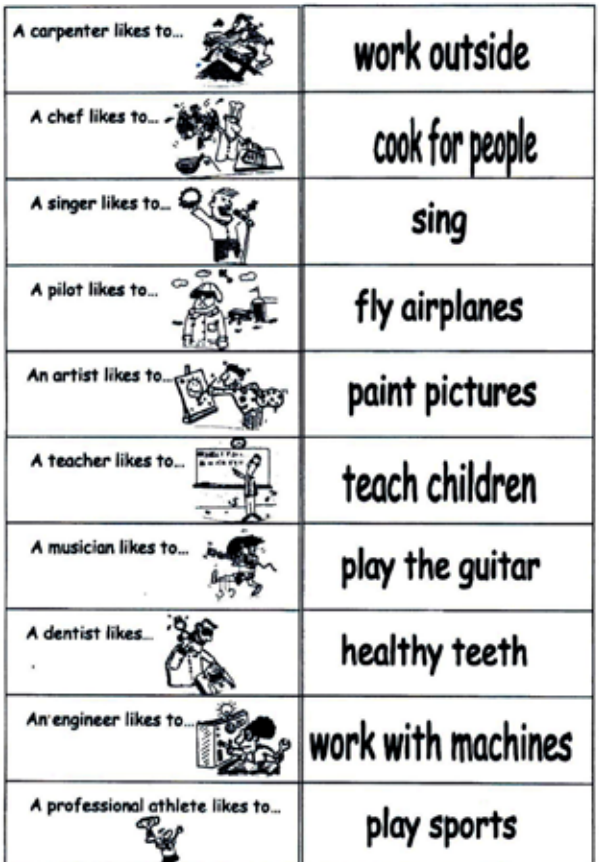

Figure 2. Job cards

game can also be played in reverse, with the occupation name cards face-up and the callers leading with occupation activities.

Conclusion

In line with my language program's aim to make English language communication a good experience for students, card games have proved to be a lot of fun for junior high school students and a great way to get all the students involved in speaking and listening to English. In the workshop, participants played a hand of each card game. Although they were adults and strangers playing a grammatically and lexically simple game, they quickly grasped the idea and got into the spirit of the game. Some participants in the workshop who worked with young adults in universities expressed doubt as to usefulness of card games in their classes. While I agreed such games are not the answer to every language teaching situation, and certainly do not constitute an entire lesson (Beale, 2003), adults are not immune to enjoying a game together. Applying the earlier listed communication criteria, I have used card games in university classes and in classes of older, preliterate adults, and have found if they were not overused or overplayed, students willingly participated and used English. Used as a lesson warm-up or back-up activity card games can help to keep students engaged and make language learning an enjoyable experience.

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Teacher) program since 1999. She is a co-author of the Inuyama city book series *Speak Up!* (Books one, two, and three), currently in use at Inuyama city junior high schools. She lives in Inuyama, practices and teaches karate, and occasionally climbs mountains.

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