



More community and motivation through coloring

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This paper discusses and presents activities to strengthen the community of a small group of elementary-level university repeater-students. The paper also suggests how to enhance their motivation based on their reading textbook of English anecdotes. The main activities consist of coloring the monochrome illustration of each story at the end of the class, and exchanging impressions of these pictures colored by students. The paper concludes that the activity seems to enhance students' motivation and contribute for their language improvement.

この論文は、大学英語初級レベルの再履修生クラスにおけるアクティビティーを紹介し、議論するものである。また、そのアクティビティーを通して学生達がどのように学ぶ意欲を高めていけるかを考察する。主なアクティビティーは、英語寓話集のリーディングテキストに描かれている白黒のイラストをユニット終了毎に塗り絵し、その塗り絵について学生同士で意見交換や質疑応答を行うというものである。最後に、この塗り絵アクティビティーは、学生の学ぶ意欲を高め、言語の上達にも貢献していると結んでいる。

This year I was assigned to teach English to a repeaters' class in a university. Those students had previously failed the basic English course for various reasons. They therefore needed more and different support from the teacher compared to regular students. In order to motivate these repeater students, I had to choose a suitable textbook for them and create interesting activities based on that textbook.

In this paper, I will introduce a coloring activity based on an elementary-level textbook of English anecdotes. The textbook had a monochrome illustration for each story on every double page spread, and students were assigned to color the illustration towards the end of class, once they had completed the reading practice and relevant exercises and understood the story fully. After this coloring activity, each student examined the work of the other students, asked them questions, and exchanged their impressions with

one another. These activities aimed at strengthening the community among classmates and enhancing their learning attitudes towards the English language.

This paper also introduces the student work, presents their ideas about the stories in the textbook, and explains how much they improved their English based on their final presentations.

Literature review

Brain boom and relevant exercises

Recently, there have been a number of books about the brain and its function. Because of this brain boom, the publishers have issued more books to describe how to make the brain function more flexibly. Workbooks for brain exercises for adults have also become popular recently. For example, in stores, you can find different types of coloring books, workbooks of dye-cut pictures, unique origami books, and books to trace the texts of traditional poems and stories.

Last year, I attended a *collage-art* workshop. In this workshop, each participant cut out collage pieces from all kinds of magazines and pasted them on a B4/A3 paper. We also gave our creations titles and explained the reasons behind the name. After working for two hours, the participants shared their work and explained the pictures in detail. This seemed to be the highlight of the workshop because all the participants felt the satisfaction of expressing their backgrounds and feelings through their pictures. Moreover, through this workshop, the participants also gained the respect of others by discovering their unique characteristics or events that had occurred through their lives.

In terms of Gardner's (1983) *multiple intelligences*, we first used our *spatial intelligence* to visualize information, synthesize data, and concepts into visual metaphors, and then our *interpersonal intelligence* enabled us to understand and communicate with each other (Campbell, Campbell, & Dickinson, 1999). Richards and Rodgers (2002) state that the "MI classroom is one designed to support development of the 'whole person,' and the environment and its activities are intended to enable students to become more well-rounded individuals and more successful learners in general" (p.120).

According to our workshop-instructor, Jungi Mizoguchi, a professor of Tokyo International University, the goals of this collage-making activity are creativity, imagination, concentration, high motivation, pleasure, organization, and achievement. He also told us that this collage workshop as well as other workshops using music, drawing, and clay modeling, is used in psychotherapy. These therapies make the patients feel more relaxed and comfortable so that they are likely to continue coming for treatment.

According to Snyder (2002), the advantage of art therapy is to give patients an opportunity to improvise. This improvisation requires no training or special ability, therefore, it enables patients to express their oppressed feelings through art in a natural way. By observing such improvised art works, they are able to see their abilities, reflect, and face with reality in a safe environment. Snyder also states that improvisation in art therapy is like play, and patients are able to feel the pleasure of making their art works.

As Lightbown and Spada (1999) point out, we can make a positive contribution to student motivation towards learning

if teachers create a friendly atmosphere in which students are able to enjoy themselves.

Coloring

With this in mind, I considered adapting an art activity for this class since these students required more motivation to attend class and needed to maintain their eagerness towards learning English until the end of the semester. While I was thinking about how to effectively apply the collage-making activity, coloring activities immediately sprang to mind. As coloring does not require any materials other than color markers or crayons, it can easily be conducted right away in the classroom. Moreover, the only thing teachers need to do is to select suitable textbooks with illustrations to color.

Fincher (2006) indicates in her coloring book that coloring brings relaxation, healing, and self-understanding. Moreover, Suenaga (1999), who has run an atelier for both children and adults for many years, points that coloring eases stress and produces motivation towards learning. He believes that using and enjoying colors people feel most comfortable with generates fresh excitement and then stillness. He calls this action “brain saliva” that is like a dopamine. He insists that coloring affects the function of the right brain so that Japanese youth who came to his class were able to maintain a good psychological balance and overcome difficulties when they were going through tough competition to enter prestigious high schools or universities.

In language education, students often face vocabulary problems in understanding stories in textbooks. In such cases, visual images are quite helpful. In the words of

Georgia O’Keefe, “I found that I could say things with color and shapes that I had no words for.” (Campbell, Campbell, & Dickinson, 1999, p. 95). Similarly, Berger (1972) believes that “seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (p. 7). These views suggest that coloring could offer some help for students who struggle to explain their ideas in a foreign language.

Research questions

Upon conducting the coloring activity with my repeaters’ English class, the following questions arose in my mind

- Does completing a coloring activity in English class motivate students’ learning attitudes?
- Does the coloring activity contribute to increasing respect among students to create a cooperative atmosphere in which to learn together?
- Does the coloring activity contribute to an improvement in students’ English and give them more confidence?

Methodology

Participants

The participants were six female sophomore university students. They all failed the same course with a different teacher using different materials in the previous semester due to non-attendance or participation, family problems, and so on. Both level and motivation were low, and they had a tendency to skip classes.

The period of study

The study period of this course was April-July 2006. The students met twice a week, 26 times in total, and each class lasted for 90 minutes.

The flow of the class

- 1) Reading practice and checking translation
- 2) Exercises
 - Three questions among Q & A, crossword puzzle, arranging pictures, filling in blanks, multiple choice questions, etc. (depending on the unit)
- 3) Coloring activity
 - Color the monochrome illustration of each story for about 10 minutes with crayons or color pencils
- 4) Sharing the colored pictures in a circle formation
 - Passing each picture to the next person, the receiver would comment or ask questions about that picture.

Presentation

At the end of the course, I assigned students to type a summary and reaction based on two stories from the 21 units they had studied and to submit these papers with their textbooks. On the final day, they presented their papers in front of the class for 10-15 minutes. A Q & A session was conducted after each presentation.

Students' comments

For the last ten minutes of the final class, I gave the students an open-ended questionnaire to comment on the coloring activity.

Measurement

I counted the absences of the students, took notes during the discussion session, analyzed their colored pictures and presentation scripts, and examined their comments.

*Results**Attitudes*

Although these students exhibited a tendency to skip classes at the beginning of the course, in the latter half, they tried not to be absent, or informed their classmates of their absence and checked with them about the assignment for the next class. Among these six students, one student was absent more in the latter half, two students remained the same, and the absence ratio of the other three was reduced from 1/3 to zero. The students forgot their textbooks or dictionaries at the beginning of the course, however, this behavior gradually subsided.

The facial expressions of the students also changed dramatically. I saw more smiles towards the end of the course. During the discussion session, they showed their surprise or excitement by saying "Oh!" or "Wow!" each time another participant commented on their colored picture.

For their final papers, the students were willing to fix errors before turning them in. Moreover, they asked me to check their presentation scripts before the final day.

On the final day, each student was well prepared and was proud of doing the presentation in front of her classmates. The others concentrated on listening to their classmate's presentations with excitement and applauded each time a presentation was over. The students actively asked questions to the presenters afterwards.

English ability

The written and spoken English of these students seemed to have improved. In the first four or five units, their reactions to the stories were mostly written in Japanese. In the discussion session, they also used Japanese most of the time to express their opinions (See Appendix I).

In the latter half of the semester, however, they tried to write most of their reactions in English, and they wrote an average of 2-3 A4 pages of reactions (which was more than I expected) as their final work (See Appendix I).

English vocabulary

Unit 12 is a story of two boys. Mike, an older boy, and Ted, a visiting cousin, have a competition to see whose hands are dirtier. When Mike says that his hands are dirtier, Ted agrees because Mike is a year older than him.

In the illustration of this story, there is a big window behind Ted and Mike. One student colored it yellow. Another student noticed and asked her, "Why it's yellow?" The student who colored the window yellow answered, "Because it's a living room, and there are many people. Yellow means enjoy....the party?"

Another interaction that I would like to report is one in which one student asked about the colors of the boys' clothes. The student who colored Mike's T-shirt orange and Ted's yellow, suggested it was "because Mike is *shuyaku* (the main character)". She said she wanted make Mike the more impressive of the two. "I also colored Mike's shoes purple and Ted's shoes gray in the same way", she said. Through this interaction, I was able to introduce new words such as *main character* and *impression*.

The most interesting comments concerning this unit were about the color of Mike's hands. One student colored them black, writing in her reaction paper: "because I wanted to represent the dirt on his hands". She also wrote: "I colored Ted's hands brown, because I wanted to represent less dirt compared to Mike's hands." In the discussion, a student who colored Mike's hands gray said that he played with *clay dough*. The other one said that he played in the *sand box*. Moreover, a student who used many colors to color Mike's hands wrote in her reaction paper: "I painted Mike's hands various colors. I thought if an interesting picture drew in hands, because Tim was enviable of it and Mike didn't like washing hand to keep a picture...." She said in the discussion that Mike enjoyed painting the picture all over his hands. Through this discussion, the students were exposed to new vocabulary such as *dirt*, *clay dough* and *sand box*.

In another example, Unit 16 is a story about an older woman and a younger woman. The older woman happens to be a former patient of the younger woman who works as a nurse. When the younger woman saw the older woman trying to cross the street, she stopped her because the light was red. The older woman comments, "I can easily cross the street alone when the light's green."

The students used different colors to create certain images of each character appearing in this story. The image of the older woman's age varies; one student who colored her jacket and skirt blue-gray said, "she is 70 years old", and another who colored her jacket bright green said, "she is not so old". I also encouraged one student to imagine what the older woman was doing at the intersection. According to this student, the older woman was not going to cross the street but "she is looking at the man in the car" because "he is her boy friend".

In fact, in the illustration, there is a man in a car who seems to be looking at either the older woman or the nurse. I therefore asked the other students who they thought the man was, and they all reacted differently. One said *tanin* (a stranger), and another student said *okyaku-san* (a customer of a taxi) "because I colored the car yellow", she said. I introduced the English words of *stranger* and *customer* during this Q and A session.

As for a nurse, I received two comments: 1) she was escaping from work to do some shopping 2) the nurse was meeting her boyfriend or thinking of going on a boy-hunt. These comments encouraged other students to continue the conversation and create a deeper background for the characters in the story.

Feedback on coloring activity

The feedback, in Japanese, from the students about the coloring activity was positive: all students reported that they enjoyed the class because of this activity. One student commented that she did not get nervous to accept the English language environment because coloring created a

relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. Another student was glad that the textbook became easier to see each time they colored the illustration. For her, it was also good to discover new stories based on the discussion about the content and colors. Furthermore, one student really appreciated various comments her classmates made. To another student, coloring brought back a long-lost memory. She also mentioned that she came to like English a lot even though she had hated it in the previous semester. Another student honestly told me that she was very confused with this activity of coloring in English class at first. However, she did not lose her interest, but maintained her motivation until the end of the semester because she liked the way English was taught through the coloring activity in this class (See Appendix II).

Discussion

Research into using this coloring activity in the English class revealed that the activity motivated students and contributed to their language improvement. As Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson (1999) state, "learning is more productive and enjoyable when students feel a sense of belonging and the classroom functions as a caring community" (p. 161).

I would encourage teachers who teach less-motivated students in a small class to try this activity of coloring. In larger classes, it would be better to ask students to bring coloring materials by themselves. The teacher would also need to divide the class into small groups of five or six, ask one or two students to be a supervisor or a facilitator, and have someone present the results to the rest of the class at the end of the activity.

Coloring has the potential to be used not only as a brain exercise or in psychotherapy, but also in language education. I hope other teachers try this activity with students of different ages and levels, develop more interesting thoughts on each story studied, and thereby find coloring useful for their students.

Miori Shimada has been teaching English to various age groups in various schools for more than ten years. Her research interests include: application of picturebooks for EFL setting, global issues for young learners and expansion of textbooks. She currently teaches at Keisen University and Tamagawa University.

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Appendix I

Students' written comments of the story in the beginning, middle and the end of the course

Student A

Unit: 5

Date: May 12, 2006

エンジンが見えるかどうかは関係なく、窓際の席の方がいいと思った。席を少しの間譲ってくれた男性は親切だと思う。私も飛行機からしか見えない景色を見たいけど、エンジンにはあまり興味がない。

Unit: 11

Date: June 2, 2006

Jone's thought are childlike.

I am surprised her saying.

Because step brother is unusual.

This story is funny.

Unit: 7

Date: July 14, 2006

After Bill and Fred woke up early morning, they ate the same bread with birds. Then they went fishing in the river

as they planned at once. Since Bill was good at fishing, he proposed doing the same to his friend. But Fred didn't get anything. Because he hasn't been fishing before.

They came back to the trailer after they had finished fishing. Then they broiled and they shared their food. They ate fish they had fished. Fred got nothing, but he ate Bill's.

Since T thought imagined the day was very fine day, they went to camp, I painted the sky blue. And I painted the trailer little primary color in order to represent seem to America.

Bill's father lend trailer to his son so I felt that he is ever so I felt how nice of his father to do that he is ever so nice! Then I'm amused at the idea that small pieces of bread on the roof of the trailer at the night. And I felt Fred is so clever. However if I were him, I would take an alarm clock in the camp. I thought there was no cellular phone when this story had been written. Because it must have functions as an alarm clock.

Finally, I thought that Bill and Fred are very good friends traveling together. I painted their clothes and bedspreads with the same color. Because I wanted to represent their friend relationship. I wanted to emphasize that no matter how they are different from color of hair and skin, they can be friends.

Student B

Unit: 1

Date: April 14, 2006

公園の看板の注意書きは本気なのかジョークなのか迷うほどウソっぽいので、最後にジミーが「そんなふうには見えない」といった気持ちさがすごくわかりました。注意書きを書くなら367人なんてウ

ソっぽい数ではなくて10人とカリアルな数を書くか、池に落ちた人がたくさんいるので気をつけて遊びましょう。とかに書きかえればいいのと思いました。田舎と都会は遊ぶ場所も違うし、山や川も都会だと見つかりにくいので、ジミーもやっと見つけた公園の池近くで思いっきり遊べないのは残念だろうと思いました。

Unit: 16

Date: June 14, 2006

I thought that Mrs. Herman is malice a little, Maybe. She was disappoint to Alice. Alice was very popularity in her hospital. Mrs. Herman is old woman. I thought that Mrs. Herman want speaking friends.

Unit: 3

Date: July 14, 2006

The reason why I chose this story is that it is funny. Children often confuse dreams with real world. Because Teddy was only six years old boy, he would probably have confused dreams with real world. He did not say jokes. He honestly believed that his mother had seen the same dream as Teddy's.

I thought that Teddy wanted to go to the zoo with his mother. That's why he dreamed about the zoo. His dreams had to be happy. I imagined his happy dream like the following.

Teddy saw lions, elephants, giraffes, zebras, monkeys and rabbits with his mother. Then he took pictures of those animals. He ate lunch which his mother fixed. And then he fed animals with carrots and cabbages. (These are animals' food.) At last he made friends with those animals. Perhaps he had never been happier, so he was confused with his dream and real world. This dream was too memorable for Teddy.

I colored Teddy's dream's background sky-blue in this text book, because I wanted to represent his memorable dream. In the same way, I also his mother's clothes purple in his dream, because I wanted to represent how she dressed up. Yellow and red's clothes was the casual clothes for her.

At the end of this story, Teddy's mother smiled "Yes, Teddy." She said. "So I think that I will go to the zoo with you!"

Appendix II

Students' reactions on the coloring activity (English translation is provided in brackets)

英語は楽しかったし、英語にとりいれることによって英語をかまえることなくできたし、受け入れやすかった。(Coloring was fun. I was able to study English in a relaxing atmosphere, and it was easy to accept English studies since coloring activity was incorporated into the class.)

色を塗るのは楽しかったし、テキストが見やすくなって良かったと思います。色や話について皆でディスカッションすることで、新しいストーリーが見えてきて良かったです。(I enjoyed coloring, and I'm glad that the textbook became visually attractive. It was good that we were able to create new stories through our discussions on colors and contents.)

色ぬりするのはとっても楽しかったです。ぬり絵みたいで懐しかったです。英語キライだったから1年の時に落としてしまつて不安だったけど私でもすごいなしかったです。英語がスキになりました。これからがんばります!(I really enjoyed coloring.

It brought back good memories. I failed the course when I was a freshman because I hated English. So, I was nervous at first, but I extremely enjoyed and liked English at the end. I'll keep up my studies.)

今までにないやり方に戸惑いましたが楽しくできました。あとテキストの文章も短いものだったのでやる気が萎えずにできました。(I was confused with this new way of teaching which I had never experienced before, but I enjoyed it. Because the textbook had many short stories, I didn't get bored and could keep my motivation high till the end.)

今までにやったことのない形式の授業で遊びをとりいれながら!! という感じがおもしろかったです。皆の意見とかも聞けたし好きな授業でした。(This class was something I'd never experienced before. What was interesting about this course is that it blended some playful activities. It was one of my favorite classes because I was able to hear many opinions of my classmates.)