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Graduate students and teaching assistants are invited to submit compositions in the form of a speech, appeal, memoir, essay, conference review, or interview on the policy and practice of language education. Master's and doctoral thesis supervisors are also welcome to contribute or encourage their students to join this vibrant debate. Grounded in the author's reading, praxis, or empirical research, contributions are expected to share an impassioned presentation of opinions in 1,000 words or less. Teaching Assistance is not a peer-reviewed column.

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In this issue's Teaching Assistance column, a recent master's degree graduate who majored in English Education describes a classroom activity that helped her students to increase the number of words they could utter within a set time limit. Putting her study abroad experiences with Global Englishes and language education theories into classroom practice, she facilitated roundtable discussions and non-confrontational debates to develop learner confidence and increase fluency. She explains how these novel classroom speaking activities improved her learners' fluency by shifting their focus from how many mistakes they were making in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary to how many words they were communicating.

Three-Way Debates Promote Measured Vocabulary Growth

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Prior to studying at graduate school in Japan, I lived in cosmopolitan London. There, I met people from all over the world. I felt welcomed in the polyglot multicultural society as a temporary resident from Japan who could communicate in English. I tended to interact with ethnic minorities from many different countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. We freely spoke together in English with accents influenced by our various mother languages. I enjoyed the way we exchanged opinions as a group. Suenobu (2010) suggested that although there are differences in the pronunciation and grammars of people speaking English around the world, we can communicate smoothly with each other when we share good intentions and make sincere efforts.

My Global Englishes Class in Japan

When I returned to Japan, I hoped to incorporate Rose and Galloway's (2017) concept of Global

Englishes and vibrant roundtable discussions into my English language classroom practice. I applied for an instructor position teaching an English communication course to nursery school and kindergarten teachers-in-training. There were 31 students enrolled in this course and their ages varied greatly; about half had just graduated from high school and the other half were in their 20s to 40s.

Higuchi and Shimatani (2007) emphasized that the main goal of English courses in Japan is to get students speaking English in all junior and senior high schools. Unfortunately, the first-year cohort that entered my classroom in this private college indicated to me that this goal had not yet been achieved. I had also thought that all my students would have had experience debating at high school. According to the needs analysis survey that I conducted, however, only two students had previously debated in English. From the outset, several students told me they were not confident in their English abilities. They said they were ashamed of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes and in the classroom, hidden behind masks, I noticed many of their voices would often falter when speaking in English. Guided by Hirata's (2019) practical advice for underperforming students at universities, rather than start with discussions and debates, I assigned remedial study of English from textbooks during the first semester starting April, 2020.

In the second semester, as the fear of COVID-19 lessened, I had students form groups and assigned communicative tasks such as visiting sightseeing spots and doing role plays of tour guides. In this latter example, the students would practice describing the local sights to a foreign visitor. Toward the end of the semester, these students were asked to challenge themselves by debating a topic and to also try roundtable discussions.

Debating in English in Japan

Debates, as an educational method developed in British universities, are expected to be active and exciting. The standard format for a debate is to have two opposing teams pitted against each other while a team of judges keeps time and observes the

exchange of opinions. When I lived in London, I interacted with people from the UK where individuals are expected and encouraged to have different opinions. I soon became comfortable with sharing my opinions.

McMurray (2018) demonstrated in his university and high school classrooms that three-way roundtable debate was suitable for Japanese students. Allowing discussion in the form of presentations, questions, and answers to flow from team to team to team is slower paced and less confrontational than traditional head-to-head debating. In Japanese culture, the sharing of common values in groups and communities is often highly important.

Methodology

I hypothesized that pitting two confrontational teams against each other might not be an effective strategy for encouraging students to communicate in my class. Having one group's opinions on a topic quickly refuted by an opposing group might descend into classroom chaos or worse, utter silence. Therefore, I also formed a second hypothesis to test. I felt that a roundtable discussion with three successive teams—perhaps building on one another's creative ideas, questions, and answers—could work more effectively as a debate. To test these two hypotheses, I chose to record the number of utterances for two-team style debates as well as for a three-team, roundtable style of debate.

Adopting the principles of McMurray's (2018) Active Learning guidelines, the students and I jointly decided upon ten guidelines for our class. Allowing them to set the rules and schedule may have reduced their fear of speaking, and it did seem to increase their motivation to participate.

1. Five two-way debates would be held during the first five weeks of classes, followed by five three-way roundtable debates, which would then be held during the next five weeks of classes.
2. Students were to be divided into groups of those who would compete in the two-way style debates or those who would participate in the three-way roundtable debates.
3. The remaining students in the class were assigned roles such as judges, moderators, recorders, and timekeepers. All students were expected to take part in a debate.
4. Four students would be asked to form one group and decide on the order in which each member would speak.
5. The topics to debate were given at the beginning of the class. For example, two-way topics

included: "Beds are better than futons" and "Cats make better pets than dogs." Three-way topics included: "Kindergarteners must wear uniforms, can freely choose their own fashion, or can alternate between uniform and free-style," and "Tokyo Olympics should be called off, postponed, or held."

6. Although individuals might have different opinions about a proposed topic, they had to agree as a group to start by using one of the solutions suggested for the debate topic.
7. Each speaker on the team would have one minute to speak in English.
8. The first speaker selects a solution, the second asks questions to the others, the third answers the other team's questions, and the fourth speaker summarizes the group's opinion.
9. The order of speaking in roundtables was decided as: 1st speaker of Team A → 1st speaker of Team B → 1st speaker of Team C → 2nd speaker of Team A → 2nd speaker of Team B → 2nd speaker of Team C → 3rd speaker of Team A → 3rd speaker of Team B → 3rd speaker of Team C → 4th speaker of Team A → 4th speaker of Team B → 4th speaker of Team C.
10. When students were debating, all of the utterances would be recorded and the number of words in every utterance would be counted. The initial and highest number of utterances by each person were tabulated (Table 1).

Observations

As an example of student discourse that was recorded for the three-way school uniform topic, the teams made successive statements: "I am team A. If they don't have uniforms, it must be tough for them to choose clothes at ceremonies"; a speaker from team B suggested "Their clothes should be their own because young children get their clothes dirty very easily"; a Team C participant added, "They can put on uniforms at ceremonies, but they can put on their own clothes in daily life." Team A uttered 20 words, Team B said 15 words, and Team C reported 18 words in one minute.

Results

The students who participated in the three-way roundtable debates had a word growth rate of 257%, which was higher than the 218% achievement of the two-way debates. Table 1 shows: student No. 8 spoke seven words during one minute in her two-way debate. She said, "I don't want to do Tokyo Olympic" (meaning to say no one wants it

to be held). The highest number of words she was able to speak during one of the five debates was 17 words during one minute. Student No. 2 uttered 18 words in his first two-way debate. He said: “School uniform is expensive, and children become big very fast, the money is *mottainai* (a waste). What do you do?” This debater reached a high of 42 words. Table 1 shows that the students numbered 1 to 16 who participated in a series of five general debates spoke a narrower range of words: between a low of seven and a high of 52 utterances. Students numbered 18 to 31 who participated in three-way roundtable debates uttered from a low of 8 to a high of 91 words.

Conclusion

Even though this was the first experience of debate for 29 of the 31 members, the fact that everyone participated was encouraging for me as a new language teacher. I noticed that every student uttered more words, and some spoke a lot more once they became used to a classroom activity that involves student communication and interaction. An increase in vocabulary suggests that the roundtable discussion encouraged students to speak out. The students said that they enjoyed the flow of the three-team roundtable debates. The number of words spoken within one minute increased. This seemed to demonstrate that three-way roundtable debate is an activity that encourages conversation. In a final survey, 20 students answered that the rules of the less-confrontational three-way roundtable debate seemed more aligned with Japanese culture than the more confrontational two-way debate. I was satisfied with these comments. I would like to continue collecting data during the next academic year to further validate these results and to analyse what other genre of classroom discussion is effective for students.

References

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Table 1

Comparison Between Two-Way and Three-Way Debate Utterances

Debate type	Student No.	Utterances in the first debate	Maximum number of utterances achieved in one of the other debates (second to fifth)	Growth rate (%)	Average increase (%)
Two-team face-to-face debates	1	8	20	250	218
	2	18	42	233	
	3	24	51	213	
	4	19	27	142	
	5	25	35	140	
	6	9	16	178	
	7	17	23	135	
	8	7	17	243	
	9	13	18	138	
	10	11	24	218	
	11	16	25	156	
	12	21	50	238	
	13	13	31	238	
	14	17	43	253	
	15	18	41	228	
	16	19	52	274	
Three-team roundtable debates	17	11	35	318	257
	18	8	21	263	
	19	14	30	214	
	20	22	51	232	
	21	21	58	276	
	22	15	42	280	
	23	16	39	244	
	24	22	55	250	
	25	32	68	213	
	26	34	85	250	
	27	28	52	186	
	28	18	56	311	
	29	28	64	229	
	30	30	91	303	
	31	19	53	279	