Pollard, A. (2015). Increasing awareness and talk time through free messaging apps. *English Teaching Forum*, *53*(1), 25–32.

Steinberg, M. (2020). LINE as super app: Platformization in East Asia. *Social Media + Society*, *6*(2), 1–10. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2056305120933285

Van De Bogart, W., & Wichadee, S. (2015). Exploring students' intention to use LINE for academic purposes based on technology acceptance model. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *16*(3), 65–85. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v16i3.1894

White, A. R. (2017, July). User acceptance of the Line application in an educational context. *CreTech 5th International Conference on Creative Technology Conference Proceedings*.

[JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS


Mari Nakamura & Marian Hara

The Younger Learners column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.yl@jalt.org

Maximising English Use in Craft Classes

Frances J. Shiobara

Kobe Shoin Women's University

fshiobara@shoin.ac.jp

Ran Niboshi

Kyoto Sangyo University

ran.niboshi326@gmail.com

Craft and project work are an integral part of many English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. These activities are valuable in increasing the motivation of young learners and often introduce other skills, such as fine motor skills, which are useful for writing. However, sometimes these activities lack a clear language acquisition goal. As the time most young learners spend on foreign language learning is limited, maximizing the opportunities for language acquisition is essential.

In view of this, the authors sought to identify ways to increase language learning in craft and project work. The classroom activities and management were then adapted to encourage foreign language acquisition. The results were observed and noted by the authors. This paper is a description of this process and the results gained over a year. All observations were carried out over a year in a class of 23 7- and 8-year-olds in an English Saturday school program for elementary school students. Most of the students studied in Japanese elementary schools Monday to Friday and attended the English Saturday school program from 9am to 3pm for 34 weeks per year. The teachers were a native English speaker with more than 30 years' experience teaching English to Japanese children and a Japanese native speaker, with extensive experience teaching young learners as well as studying and living abroad.

Students had three skills-based classes comprising reading, writing, speaking, and listening, plus one class focusing on hands-on activities, which was observed for this research. They also took physical education and computer classes taught in English. The students' English abilities ranged from intermediate to advanced for their age. Based on student application forms, five students had lived in English-speaking countries, 15 had attended full-time English medium schools for kindergarten, and four of them were growing up in multilingual families. This research investigated ways in which language acquisition could be increased in a project class through increasing comprehensible input and pushed output. The students were not tested formally, and results are based on the authors' observations. The coordinator of the program granted permission for classes to be observed. All students' parents or guardians involved in this activity gave written consent. Total anonymity of participants was observed at all times.

Increasing Opportunities for Comprehensible Input and Pushed Output

It is possible for craft and project classes to involve mainly visual demonstration with very little

language acquisition. To avoid this, all craft project classes incorporated a variety of input, such as extensive listening, extensive viewing, teacher talk, and written instructions.

Instructional Videos

Various online videos were used to demonstrate craft projects with the teacher pausing and explaining the project and, in some cases, paraphrasing the language used. As most of the videos were made for native English-speaking children, this type of scaffolding was necessary to make the input comprehensible.

Teacher Explanation

When videos were not available, the teacher explained the activity to students at a level just above the learners' current language level (i+1: Krashen, 1981). For lower-level students, visual demonstration also acted as a form of scaffolding to understand the language. An effort was made to explain the steps of the craft before demonstrating, to encourage students to listen rather than just watch the demonstration.

Written Instructions

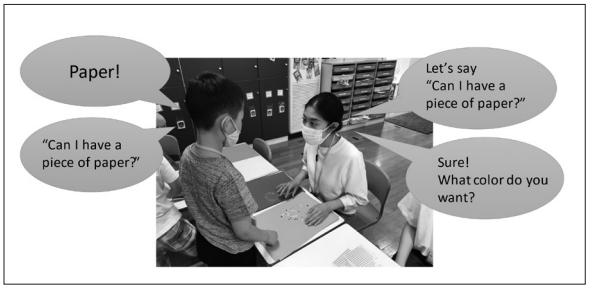
Some craft projects could be explained with written instructions in English. In these cases, the students received a worksheet, then the teacher read the instructions step by step with the students to ensure comprehension and demonstrated the activity for extra scaffolding. Students were shown the finished craft completed by the teacher and told that they must listen carefully to make it themselves.

Individual Support

The final way in which comprehensible input was provided was through one-on-one support for students by the teachers during the activity. This provided opportunities for repetition and recycling of language. Students often asked teachers to explain one step again or more commonly, "Can you help me please?" It was also observed that help was occasionally given by other students, which Pinter (2015) observed could increase both students' abilities to pay attention to the task.

Figure 1

Making Requests for Craft Materials



Pushed Output

As noted at the start of this article, for students to become fluent English speakers they need opportunities to use language spontaneously and creatively. Initially, students were taught a few formulaic phrases for making requests in English. As shown in Figure 1, if students wanted to get materials or help from the teacher, they were required to ask for them in English. By week 20, students were using these formulaic phases spontaneously for a variety of classroom requests. Students were also encouraged to tell teachers, parents, and peers about their craft and how they made it. The parents communicated with the teacher how much they enjoyed hearing about the activity through a communication notebook, and some parents even sent the teachers photographs of the crafts hanging in their house.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is an integral part of any language teaching (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2018). Many cultural activities, such as festivals, involve art and craft activities. Introducing young learners to culture through art and craft work should be meaningful and comprehensible. Savić (2013) states that young learners can understand culture better through hands-on concrete activities. There are many ways that this can be done, but in our activities the cultural aspect was always introduced initially through a video. After discussing the meaning of the video, students then created the craft to deepen their understanding.

Craft Projects

The following is a small selection of the tasks that were used in this research project.

Jellyfish

This activity started with the teacher eliciting from the students what they knew about jellyfish, for example: "Have you ever seen a jellyfish?"or "What color are jellyfish?", followed by the teacher telling students a story about when she was stung by a jellyfish. This created a great amount of interest. Even the students who did not have high levels of English fluency were helped by the assistant to ask questions. The teacher then showed a video about jellyfish, pausing at various points to explain important vocabulary. The students then completed a cloze activity about jellyfish as a class. All the missing words were vocabulary from the video. Finally, the students made jellyfish craft using a plastic cup, tissue paper, and glitter string (Figure 2). The teacher showed the students an example of a completed jellyfish craft and explained how to make it. Students then had to request materials from the teacher and assistant. The teacher and assistant asked students follow up questions such as, "What color paper do you want?" and "How many stickers do you want?" In this way, students were engaged in meaningful and authentic communication in English. Some students also asked for extra assistance in English. As an additional benefit, after the craft was taken home, a number of parents wrote to say how much they enjoyed learning about jellyfish from their child. Young learners are often unwilling to share what they learn at school with parents, but it is highly motivating for children to become the givers of knowledge to their parents.

Figure 2

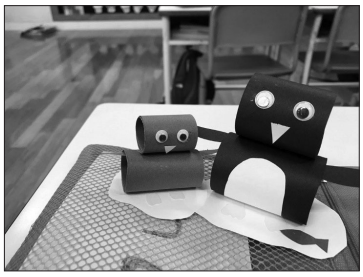
Jellyfish

Penguin

In this activity, the teacher initially asked the students what they knew about penguins, for example, "Where do penguins live?"and "How are their babies born?" After this, the students were shown a video of Emperor Penguins in Antarctica. The teacher paused the video to discuss why the penguins need to keep the egg on their feet and why the mother and father take turns looking after the egg and the chick. The students then completed a worksheet about the Emperor Penguin's life cycle as a class. This recycled all of the information from the video, such as the egg being laid and the chick hatching. Finally, the students watched a video on how to make a papercraft penguin. The teacher paused the video at various points to repeat and explain each step. Then the students requested materials from the teacher and the assistant. Some of the students who finished quickly requested extra materials to make a brown penguin chick, egg, or fish, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the life cycle of an Emperor Penguin (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Penguin Craft

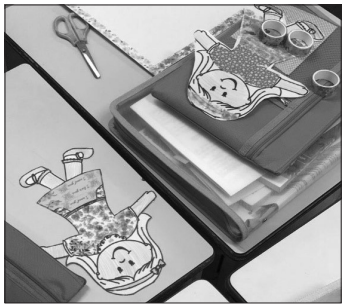


Flat Stanley

This activity used the popular story *Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown (1964) as a springboard to create craft projects. In addition, the figures were exchanged with university education students, which increased their motivation by providing a real audience. The teacher first read the story to the students, eliciting what they thought Flat Stanley could and could not do. They then created their own self-introduction and *Flat Me* craft (Figure 4). In the story, Stanley is posted to California, so the students decorated an envelope, and their Flat Me craft was sent to the university students. The university students each made Flat Me figures and sent them to the elementary school students. The students then took their *Flat Friend* into the playground. A photograph was taken of every Flat Friend playing in the playground. These were made into postcards, which the students wrote and sent to the university students, telling them what they had been doing. After the final stage of the project, the Flat Friends were returned. This activity incorporated reading, writing, listening, and collaboration.

Figure 4

Flat Me Craft



Butterfly Chromatography

In this activity, students started by looking at pictures of chromatography butterflies. They tried to guess what color pen was used to make the rainbow colors on filter paper. The answer of black and brown was surprising for them. After that, they read instructions on how to make a chromatography butterfly and requested materials from the teachers. Although the activity is relatively easy, doing each step correctly is essential. Students were encouraged to try many times with different pens and patterns. This led to simple discussions of the colors they made, for example, "Look at this! It's red, green, and blue!"

Figure 5

Chromatography Butterflies

Diwali

In another activity the students watched a video about Diwali. After understanding the meaning of the festival of light, they made a lantern out of construction paper (Figure 5). This was particularly meaningful because one of the students was from India. She was usually very quiet in class, but this time she kept on volunteering information about her mother's sari and the food they eat at Diwali. Through incorporating a variety of ethnic craft activities, students from various cultures can feel included.

Figure 6

Diwali Lantern

This sample of craft projects demonstrates how reading, writing, speaking, and listening can be encouraged through craft projects. Students were motivated by craftwork, but at the same time, they were able to acquire language through a variety of comprehensible input and pushed output in meaningful and authentic situations. Through focusing on the craft, recycling and scaffolding of language was possible.

Findings

Through these activities, three main improvements were observed: verbal skills, risk-taking, and motivation. First, the verbal skills improved directly through memorization of formulaic phrases and repetition in a variety of situations. Prior to this research project, students were instructed to choose paper or other items that they wanted to use for their craft. The teachers tried to engage students in dialog, but they were able to participate passively without speaking. In this research, all craft materials were controlled by the teacher or assistant. If students wanted something, they had to ask for it verbally. To help the lower language level students, some formulaic language was taught, such as "Can I have a piece of paper please?" The teacher would then engage with them asking what color they would like and what size. The variety of questions was gradually increased over the 34 weeks. By the end of the second term, students were naturally and freely making a variety of classroom requests not related to craft projects, for example, requesting a new notebook, having their pencil sharpened, and even going to the bathroom.

Second, risk-taking was observed with students using request phrases outside the craft class as well as trying to formulate sentences to share results or show their craft. As students were focused on doing the craftwork, their affective filters were lowered and many students who were usually quiet offered opinions and asked questions. Students were also motivated to ask for help when they had a problem because they wanted to complete the activity.

Finally, students were observed to be focused on the craft, asking questions in English, and requesting to watch videos again, indicating intrinsic motivation. When they became excited about the content, their English language output increased greatly. In addition, sharing the craft with parents at home showed their increased motivation, which was evidenced through parents' communication with the teachers.

Conclusion

The most important finding from this project was that students used far more English by requiring them to ask for materials rather than allowing them to help themselves. Both teachers noted that the amount of speaking by children in the craft class had increased greatly compared to previous years. In addition, students engaged with the language in a very natural way, focusing on meaning and communication. Students were motivated by having a wide variety of materials. Being forced to ask for materials greatly increased the speaking time, particularly for some students with lower English skills. With teachers providing correct models at the time of speaking, students were also able to develop accuracy in grammar and vocabulary.

It was found that students with limited English skills were able to experiment with language by using the formulaic language in other situations, such as asking for erasers or tissues and requesting permission to go to the bathroom. On the other hand, students who had a high-level of spoken English at the start of the research remained verbally confident. They were motivated to discuss what they had made and how they had made it with the teachers. Given the freedom to adapt the project in alternative ways, students felt they had created something original by choosing their own colors and having access to a variety of materials. As Pinter (2015) noted, motivation increases when learners have ownership and control over a task. It was observed that young learners were constantly pushing the boundaries, but they were also eager to share. Although students with lower language skills were not able to describe in detail what they had made, they were still eager to show the teachers and explain what they had tried to achieve.

In conclusion, craft activities are excellent, not only in introducing comprehensible input and vocabulary building, but also for encouraging verbal output. The craft projects fitted into the curriculum, reinforcing the vocabulary introduced in the classroom and allowing learners to experiment with the language. Students were also motivated to help each other, increasing collaboration and depth of learning. Using craft activities as tasks could be an ideal way to introduce intercultural communication and environmental issues to young learners.

References

Brown, J. (1964). *Flat Stanley.* Harper & Row.

DeCapua, A., & Wintergerst, A. C. (2018). *Crossing cultures in the language classroom* (2nd ed.). University of Michigan Press.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language learning and second language acquisition.* Pergamon.

Pinter, A. (2015). Task-based learning with children. In J. Bland (Ed.), *Teaching English to young learners* (pp. 113-128). Bloomsbury Academic.

Frances Shiobara is Director of the Foreign Language Education Committee at Kobe Shoin Women's University. She also set up and teaches in an International School English program for elementary school students. She has a Master of Education from Temple University Japan Campus and a Doctor of Education from The University of Liverpool, UK. Her main areas of interest are teaching English to young learners, gender equality in higher education, and attitudes to technology in education.

Ran Niboshi is a full-time adjunct English lecturer specialising in TOEIC at Kyoto Sangyo University. Additionally, she works as an assistant teacher at St. Michael International School, Kobe. She holds a Master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, a Junior and High School First Type Teaching Certificate, and a Junior and High School Specialized Teacher's Certificate (relevant to TESOL). Ran's research interests include young learners, language learning motivation, and task-based learning.