

Mini-Model United Nations Simulation on Climate Change: Discussion and Negotiation Skills through 4Ps Active Learning

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ABSTRACT

Maintaining student motivation in advanced academic English discussion classes can be challenging. There is some evidence that complex discussion tasks are effective in helping to motivate students, but they can also result in less use of discussion skills. This classroom activity uses a task-based approach with a role-based element and an attempt to mitigate the decrease in discussion skill use through scaffolding, the 4Ps (Presentation, Practice, Production, and Probe) university active learning approach, and language teaching principles associated with realistic meaning and problem-solving. The activity consists of a Mini-Model United Nations based on a case study of global climate change negotiations.

INTRODUCTION

This activity took place within the academic English Discussion Class course (EDC) at Rikkyo University. EDC is one of the four required English language courses for first-year students. Classes are typically seven to nine students. Classes run for 100 minutes, once a week, over two consecutive semesters, meaning students complete a total of 28 weeks of class. Each semester course is 14 weeks with a curriculum consisting of six discussion skills (for a total of 12 discussion skills over the two courses) and three communication skills common to both semesters. Regular lessons involve two small group discussions: Discussion 1, which is usually 10-12 minutes in duration, and Discussion 2, which is usually 16 minutes. Three Discussion Tests are held per semester (Hurling, 2012).

EDC classes are streamed according to bands based on students' combined TOEIC listening and reading score: Level I (the highest), Level II, Level III, and Level IV (the lowest). The current activity was carried out in the highest stream, in which students have combined TOEIC listening and reading scores of 680 and above. This activity was carried out over a single lesson in two classes each comprised of eight first-year students majoring in liberal arts subjects or business fields. The activity was taught in the final lesson of the Fall semester course so that students would have the opportunity to utilize the full EDC discussion skill curriculum within the activity.

Promoting motivation appears to be key for teaching these advanced discussion lessons. This challenge was first introduced to me in a department faculty development workshop on teaching advanced discussion classes. This motivation challenge was confirmed through my own experience teaching advanced discussion classes and consultations with colleagues also teaching these classes. What's more, in end-of-semester surveys Level I EDC students have at times expressed less satisfaction, than lower-level students, with how discussion skills are practiced and assessed in the course (Brereton, Schaefer, Bordilovskaya, & Reid, 2019).

One promising option to address this is the use of task-based language teaching (TBLT) such as that reported by Lesley and West (2019), who found evidence for enhanced student motivation in advanced discussion classes that use "more complex and more challenging types of discussion tasks" involving group-decision-making (pp. 310-311). Lesley's (2018) analysis of student survey data also finds evidence of the same tasks enhancing student motivation. However, Lesley and West (2019, p. 298) also found that students exhibited a significant drop in target discussion skill use when carrying out these more realistic, complex discussion tasks.

The current classroom activity sought to address this student motivation challenge using a complex discussion tasks while seeking to mitigate potential reductions in discussion skill use through increased scaffolding. The activity was based on five elements:

1. The 4Ps active learning methodology (Duffill, 2019a; McGaughey et al., 2019) that has been specifically designed for the university context and draws on insights from the Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) approach to communicate language teaching (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991; Ellis & Shintani, 2014, pp. 120-121), and triangulates these insights with a range of learning and teaching theory and research. 4Ps has also been applied to reflective practice for teaching discussion (Duffill, 2019a). 4Ps adds a fourth “P” to PPP important for university contexts: Probe. Probe activities are assessments, reflections, debriefs, or feedback. Students are encouraged to critically reflect on their learning, link their learning to broader issues, bridge theory to practice, and consolidate their learning. Probe can also help assess student interest, engagement, and difficulties in an activity. The activity integrates TBLT with 4Ps and thus follows a *task-supported language teaching* approach (TSLT) (Ellis, 2003; for an outline of TSLT in the context of discussion curriculum see: Lesley & West, 2019, p. 299).
2. Integrating a cluster of principles of language learning and teaching associated with realistic meaning and problem-solving variously termed: *autonomy* and *meaningful learning* (Brown, 2007), *personal significance* and *focused interaction* (Dörnyei, 2009), and *focus predominantly on meaning* and *learners collaborating in solving linguistic problems* (Ellis, 2014). These principles suggest that realistic, high-context, cognitively engaging activities can help motivate students in learning.
3. Employing a complex decision-making task activity similar to Lesley and West (2019; also see for example Ellis & Shintani, 2014, pp. 134-160), but with a deeper role-based element for students that integrates discussion skill use with negotiation and dialogue.
4. Mitigating potential reductions in discussion skill use through targeted scaffolding activities, completed prior to the discussion task, implemented through the 4Ps activity progression. Preparation activities are key for student performance in complex tasks. For example Ellis (2009) has shown that preparation activities can enhance performance in oral production tasks.
5. Developing an engaging, current, realistic, and challenging case study as an authentic basis for the activity. The case study used in this activity was global climate change negotiations.

DISCUSSION

The current activity aimed to leverage the 4Ps approach and above-noted language learning and teaching principles to design and implement an active learning roleplay activity titled *Mini-Model United Nations Climate Conference*. Building on the discussion task type framework outlined by Lesley and West (2019) the current activity would be defined as a divergent-to-convergent decision-making task (students were assigned different roles with different viewpoints but were also required to attempt to find agreement on a solution with the students of the different viewpoints). Roleplays have long been part of communicate language teaching (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991, p. 53) including discussion (Lesley & West, 2019), as well as social issues education (for outlines see: Lederach, 1995, pp. 101-107; Mitchell, 2000) and are a practical opportunity to leverage the 4Ps framework in the classroom. In fact, (Mitchell, 2000) argues that for education involving discussion of controversial issues, roleplays are an important tool that can reduce students’ unhelpful, reflexive defensive and win-at-all-costs debate mindset that inhibits learning. This activity was also an opportunity for students to extend their performance in particular discussion skills that support dialogue, both in terms of dialectic Platonic dialogue (where discussion is a cooperative activity that increases the knowledge of the questioner, the respondent, and people observing or taking part in only some part of the discussion; Walton, 2007,

p. 55) and international dialogue and negotiation (that promotes collaboration, and reduces conflict and misunderstandings, between different identity groups; Duffill, 2013). The specific EDC Level I discussion skills that support dialogue include asking for and giving: opinions, definitions, joining a discussion, choosing topics, checking for more ideas, summarizing a group's ideas, connecting ideas, different viewpoints, and reconsidering opinions (Fearn-Wannan, Kita, Sturges, & Young, 2019).

Experiential and active learning approaches are receiving growing support in Japanese education policy. The Japanese government's National Curriculum Standards and Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (2018-22) explicitly promotes "active learning" in Japanese education including at universities (Kimura, 2018; OECD, 2018; Suzuki, 2018). One form of active learning, called *simulations*, are increasingly being shown to be robust, flexible and engaging methods to teach about social and global issues at university. Simulations are advanced roleplays that usually serve as course capstones. Simulations incorporate principles from critical pedagogy, which in the ESL/EFL and Discussion context include "the simultaneous development of English communicative abilities and the ability to apply them to developing a critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to improve matters" of interest to students (Crookes & Lehner, 1998, p. 320; Finn, 2015). Simulations informed by communicative language teaching have covered a range of social and global issues (Banki, Valiente-Riedl, & Duffill, 2013; Duffill, 2019b; McGaughey et al., 2019). Model UN activities (MUN) are a type of simulation used at universities since the 1940s. Worldwide there are an estimated several hundred a year. In MUNs students take on the role of a diplomat involved in negotiations at a UN body (Hazen, 2019; Obendorf & Randerson, 2013). MUNs are an increasingly popular student-centered university education activity in Japan (Notre Dame Seishin University, 2019). One of the critical current issues heavily imbricated in international dialogue and negotiation challenges is climate change, and this is the topic my students would discuss as the Mini-Model United Nations Climate Conference.

PROCEDURE

The activity runs for 100 minutes and is a modification of the EDC lesson format (Hurling, 2012). There is no fluency activity or quiz. Readings chosen by the teacher to be appropriate for Level I students' English level (combined TOEIC Listening and Reading scores of 680 and above) are utilized as lexical and conceptual resources to help students prepare content input for discussion. In terms of 4Ps, scaffolding in Presentation and Practice (through readings and preparation discussions in pairs), and Probe (in *Discussion 1 Feedback*) are used to prepare students for Production in the discussions. *Discussion 2 Feedback* is utilized to generate formative feedback and assess how interesting and motivating the task was for students. Two handouts are used (see Appendices). The activities in Appendix A (*D1 Prep 1* to *D2 Prep 1*) are cut up into individual strips or shown as individual PowerPoint slides.

For four minutes in pairs students warm-up discussing their favorite topics in the textbook. This is an opportunity for students to review topics covered previously in the semester.

For ten minutes, in class students read a print-out of "What is Climate Change?" by National Geographic Kids. The article defines climate change, explains causes and effects, and outlines possible prevention methods. (The article is available here: <https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/geography/general-geography/what-is-climate-change/>).

For five minutes, in pairs, students discuss *D1 Prep 1* (Appendix A). The teacher supports students to ensure they can correctly answer the questions and understand the vocabulary in the reading.

For five minutes, in pairs, students discuss *D1: Prep 2* (Appendix A). The teacher monitors and supports students to ensure they understand the questions. Students then change partners to make discussion groups of four (or if not possible five or three) students. For 11 minutes students discuss *D1*. The teacher monitors but doesn't intervene.

Next, for four minutes, in pairs, students discuss *D1 Feedback*. Then for up to four minutes the teacher provides further feedback on any particularly challenging issues and/or provides additional vocabulary that students want to know to be able to express their ideas about the topic. The teacher divides the class into two equally-sized blocks. One block is the European Union, and the other block is the G77. For 12 minutes the European Union members read a print-out of: "How will we be affected?" (The article is available here: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/adaptation/how_en) and the G77 members read: "Climate change will hit poor countries hardest, study shows" (available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/sep/27/climate-change-poor-countries-ipcc>). For five minutes, in pairs of the same block (EU or G77), students then discuss *D2 Prep 1* (Appendix A).

The teacher gives students *HANDOUT 2* (Appendix B) and reads the *Participants*, *Scenario*, and *Topic* sections with students, checking they understand and answering key questions they have. For five minutes, in pairs of the same block (EU or G77) students discuss *D2 Prep 2* (Appendix B).

In preparation for the final discussion, students change partners to make discussion groups of four (or if not possible five or three) students where there are ideally equal members of each block (EU or G77) in each discussion group. For 17 minutes, students discuss *D2: Mini-Model United Nations Climate Conference* (Appendix B). The teacher monitors but doesn't intervene.

Finally, for five minutes, in the same discussion groups, students discuss *D2 Feedback* (Appendix B). For up to three minutes the teacher provides further feedback on any key emergent issues.

VARIATIONS

Potential variations, for lower-level students (Levels II-IV, combined TOEIC listening/reading scores of 680 or below) or when less time is available in class, include modifying the readings to replace demanding vocabulary or requiring students to do only the first reading with all students playing the same "role" in *D2*. Alternatively, the key points of the readings could be distilled and summarized in bullet points on a handout.

For a case study more connected to students' daily lives, the Model UN scenario could be replaced with one focused on youth climate action where students learn about, and then discuss and decide, what kind of things they might like to do to positively respond to climate change.

For courses that allow teachers to modify the curriculum to integrate further content (and related readings) with language, where students have sufficient language ability, basic negotiation skills (such as in: R. Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1999; Hollier, Murray, & Cornelius, 2008) could be added to Presentation and Practice activities to help prepare students with deeper negotiation skills for the Mini-Model UN Climate Conference (*D2*).

CONCLUSION

The 4Ps framework served as a helpful framework to design and refine the activity. Presentation, Practice, and *D1 Feedback* (which is a Probe activity) seemed particularly important to prepare students for the fairly demanding Production tasks of *D1* and *D2* (the Mini-Model UN Climate Conference). *D2 Feedback* generated helpful feedback for the activity and its motivating aspects. Students typically reported that using the discussion skills and thinking about the needs of the G77 and the EU were the most difficult parts of the activity. However, students also indicated that the

most interesting elements of the activity were being able to learn about, and think more deeply about these real issues and share different ideas and perspectives. The similarities between what students considered difficult and interesting are notable. They suggest that advanced discussion students' interest in tasks of this nature may be positively related to the actual difficulties, perhaps perceived as stimulating challenges of the task. Future research, as an expansion of the Probe stage, could assess motivational dimensions of the task more formally using student questionnaire methodology (for example adapting that used by Lesley, 2018), although this would require more class time devoted to the activity.

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APPENDIX A: MINI-MODEL UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE: HANDOUT 1

D1 Prep 1

1. What are the names of the three sections of the reading?
2. With your partner, discuss a summary of one or two sentences for each section of the reading (there are three sections).

D1 Prep 2

1. What do you think are the dangers of global warming in Japan? (You can use the reading to give you ideas.)
2. How do you think Japan makes global warming worse? (You can use the reading to give you ideas.)

D1

1. What do you think are the dangers of global warming in Japan?
2. How do you think Japan makes global warming worse?
3. What do you think Japan can do to reduce global warming?

D1 Feedback

1. What was easy and difficult to discuss about the topic?
2. For the difficult things in the topic, what questions do you have?
3. Which Discussion Skills were the easiest and most difficult to use?
4. How can you use more of the difficult Discussion Skills?
5. What Communication Skills did you use to help the discussion?

D2 Prep 1

What are the key points, or most interesting points, from the reading?

APPENDIX B: MINI-MODEL UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE: HANDOUT 2

Participants

Each participant is a member of either the G77 or EU. These are blocks of countries that have similar interests on many of the issues for climate change:

1. **G77:** This is a group of countries at the United Nations of 130 countries – mainly developing countries.
2. **EU:** This is the 27 countries in the European Union.

Scenario

Participants will take on the role of a diplomat for one of the country blocks (either the EU or the G77) involved in negotiations about a new international treaty on climate change.

Topic

The participants will discuss three potential solutions for how to help people and reduce and/or adapt to global warming:

- a. A global climate change fund (money)
- b. Technology transfer (transferring technology between countries)
- c. Countries set emission reduction targets (targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions)

D2 Prep 2

What do you think about the effectiveness of each of those three solutions to help your group (G77 or EU) reduce and/or adapt to global warming?

- a. A global climate change fund
- b. Technology transfer
- c. Countries set emission reduction targets

D2: Mini-Model United Nations Climate Conference

1. What do you think about the effectiveness of each of those three solutions to help your group (G77 or EU) reduce and/or adapt to global warming?
 - a. A global climate change fund
 - b. Technology transfer
 - c. Countries set emission reduction targets
2. Both groups (EU and G77) discuss together and try to agree on some effective solutions for global warming that meet both groups' (G77 and EU) needs.

D2 Feedback

1. In the last discussion what were the most difficult things?
2. In the last discussion what were the most interesting things?

(This activity draws on material from Danish Model United Nations' School Service and DanMUN (n.d.)