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Action Research final report 2024 - 2025

(1) A communicative approach to 4th grade public elementary school English instruction

(2) CONTEXT:

Level: Elementary school (4th grade students)

Class size: 30 (there are three classes in the same grade)

Time: 40,45 minutes, 1/week

Textbook: *Let's Try 2*

The current situation: This is the second year I have taught the students. Students vary in English ability (from complete beginners) but overall are energetic in class. Last year I taught three 3rd grade classes at the school with an English-speaking volunteer (in other classes I supported other Japanese English teachers as an Assistant Language Teacher, ALT). This year I teach three 3rd grade classes (and four more as T2) and five 4th grade classes at two elementary schools. Altogether I teach around 365 students. At my main elementary school, I was the main teacher, T1, with a 4th grade homeroom teacher supporting me for three 4th grade classes. During the school year I realized that lessons did not progress as I wanted. I worked with a different person who knew students, but language barriers and a lack of time prevented effective team teaching. An additional problem was that the length of lessons varied and often classes were shorter than scheduled resulting in less time for English communication. The final, and perhaps greatest problem I faced was that I had to do everything for the English lessons. The *Let's Try* series of books have been used in schools since 2018. When I started in 2023 there was no material for me to use. No lesson plans, flashcards, handouts, etc. I was provided a tablet, a student copy of the book (not the teachers copy), and access to teaching stationary. I would have to create everything from lesson plans to teaching materials, student handouts, etc. In essence, I was the English program for the 3rd and 4th grades. A benefit was that I could design a curriculum as I deemed fit, but a drawback was the incredible amount of time required to create materials.

(3) Goals and objectives

The goal of my research is that my students would be able to extend simple conversations in English by using conversation strategies. I introduced conversation strategies (openers, closers, and rejoinders) in lessons to promote student communication in class. I did communicative activities, especially information-exchange activities with handouts so that students could use the target English in various meaningful ways. My clear and measurable goals were:

    (1) 90% of students will be able to appropriately use openers and closers by the end of the school year.

    (2) 80% of students will be able to appropriately use several rejoinders by the end of the school year.

(3) 80% of students will be able to talk in pairs for 90 seconds by the end of the school year.

## (4)	Literature review

Communicative Language Teaching

There are several definitions of Communicative Language Teaching, (CLT). CLT is defined by Lightbown and Spada (2021) as:

> An approach to L2 teaching based on the premise that successful L2 learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings. This approach emphasizes the communication of meaning in interaction rather than the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms in isolation. (p. 235)

Grammar and communication, especially meaningful interaction are important to language acquisition. Another definition of CLT by Brown (2014) is, "an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task-based activities, and communication for real-world, meaningful purposes" (p. 369). This definition expands on uses of communication through instruction. In the classroom, learning should focus on student interaction, rather than the teacher. According to Savignon (1997), "Communication is the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning; and communicative competence is always context specific, requiring the simultaneous, integrated use of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence" (p. 225). These three definitions show that real, unrehearsed, meaningful, and interactive communication are important for language development.

Communicative Competence

Communicative Competence, as a part of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), consists of four related sections: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is understanding grammar. Discourse competence is understanding complete works in a language, such as books, conversations, etc. Sociolinguistic competence is understanding social rules in another language. Strategic competence is being able to continue communication without a complete understanding of a language. Sandra Savignon (1997) proposed an inverted pyramid to show the "…possible relationship between grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence as overall communicative competence increases" (P. 49). The inverted pyramid shows that while all four components of communicative competence are important, strategic and sociolinguistic competences are paramount at the beginning stages of learning. Sociolinguistic competence is necessary from the beginning and increases in importance as competence increases. Strategic competence is

shown to be the most important competence in early language learning and is present throughout the inverted pyramid, though its importance later is diminished.

Strategic Competence

One of the four Communicative competences, Strategic competence is present throughout communicative competence development and is especially important at the early stages of language learning. Savignon (1997) wrote that no one knows all of a language, is the ideal speaker, or can use language perfectly (P. 44). We are all deficient in some way and make use of language however we can to further communication. Strategic competence is used when a speaker does not know or cannot recall a word, when misunderstanding takes place, etc. and attempts are made to continue communication through a variety of methods. According to Savignon (1997), "Adult native speakers routinely cope with a variety of factors that, if not taken into account, can result in communication failure" (p. 45). Strategic competence is not only an important part of communicative competence and language learning, but also necessary for all language speakers. Joseph Wood (2009), discussing Communication Strategies (CSs) a part of strategic competence, wrote; "Native speakers of every language use CSs, but may not realize it nor take the time to notice the benefits CSs bring to overall communication" (p. 475). Strategic competence, the most important competence for beginning language learners, exists throughout communicative competence development and is used by first language speakers.

Information-Exchange Tasks

Lee and VanPatten (2003) introduce information-exchange task, or information-based task, to encourage "real communication" in language classrooms (p. 2). Information-exchange tasks are a means for instructors to organize language instruction for learners. Instructors first identify a goal for a unit or lesson, consider what must be done to complete the task, and then adjust or divide the goal into smaller sub-goals which allow tasks to be completed. Language that is considered in information-exchange tasks are the required vocabulary, grammar, other parts of language, and content learners will need to complete the task (p. 77). Information-exchange tasks allow learners to exchange information with each other using the necessary language through communication. The exchanging of information is one part of the task but is not the task itself. Language learners will then use the exchanged information in some way (p. 62). When the task is completed, the goal will have been attained. Information-exchange tasks are a blueprint for language instructors and students to identify language goals, exchange information, make use of the information, and attain subgoals and goals through communication.

(5)   Research questions

        (1) What effect, if any, do information exchange tasks have on elementary school students' L2 communicative competence in conversations for learning?

(2) What impact, if any, does the teaching of conversation strategies have on elementary school students' conversation talking time?

(6) What I did:

In the first semester I tried a variety of methods to promote student interest in English. First, portfolios were given to students to keep material in. In addition, portfolios were intended to show students what they did during the school year. I prepared material from MEXT's website, printed handouts from other student English books (e.g. New Horizon Elementary), and made handouts for the students. Second, I made information-exchange handouts to expand on book activities and reflection sheets to encourage students to use English and reflect on lessons respectively. I wanted information-exchange tasks to serve as a final unit activity where students used the unit language multiple times, especially to talk with classmates using vocabulary of their choice. Reflection sheets were intended to be "can do" statements of what students learned in a unit. Third, I had students use conversation strategies, openers and closers, when interacting in pairs and I introduced rejoinders. Students, I noticed in other classes, do not use conversation strategies during speaking activities. Fourth, I did a pre/post survey and pair video recordings. The pre/post survey was to gauge students' attitudes towards English. We did pair video recordings, using student tablets for the first time, which helped us get used to using technology in English lessons. Video recordings allowed me to review what students can, and were, doing in speaking tasks. Video recordings also allowed students to see what they could do and even show others, i.e. members of their family. Finally, I attempted to provide as much English input as I could in our limited context. I used simplified English along with gestures when speaking. I established an English blackboard presence, putting the date, day, weather, and time on the board so that students could receive input which are recommended by Shin and Crandall (2014). Putting English on the blackboard also allowed English vocabulary to be pre-taught and recycled.

From September I attempted different teaching approaches to improve lessons including input tasks, pre literacy activities, intercultural communication tasks, and incorporating aspects of sociocultural theory into lessons. Most of these were failures due to unforeseen time class time limitations and/or resulted in students spending a large portion of class time using Japanese. Attempting different teaching approaches also led to the exclusion of information-exchange tasks due to previously mentioned changes. I could not do everything I wanted to do, first term goals were forgotten, and a lack of class time prevented much of anything being accomplished. Despite the failures, I think that they were necessary to try. Through trial and error, I came to realize that I cannot incorporate everything into lessons.

At the task-based language teaching conference held in Nagoya 2024, Rod Ellis recommended input tasks for beginning language learners. Shin and Crandall (2014) and Shintani (2017) also promote input tasks with young learners and Japanese young learners respectively. Observation of the students doing input tasks, such as listen and move, revealed that students could negotiate meaning and follow the tasks.

Failed and/or abandoned teaching approaches were development of preliteracy activities, intercultural competence tasks, and incorporating aspects of sociocultural theory. Preliteracy activities were discouraged and abandoned due to incompatibility with action research and limited class time. Intercultural competence tasks were not used after one unit for similar reasons along with increased use of Japanese in the classroom. Finally attempts to include sociocultural theory stopped due to previously stated reasons. Although what I tried in the Fall was unsuccessful, I learned much from the attempt.

At the end of Fall, and in Winter, I conducted pair talk video recordings with assessments. The Fall recordings, for the first time, expanded assessment to include student self-assessment. The Winter, final recordings, expanded assessment to include observers. The final lesson of the year I did a year end survey with students, in digital form for the first time.

(7) Results:

I have included the results of my focus class, and sometimes included other 4th grade classes. Number of students varied. Surveys used a five-point Likert scale. Written Japanese is translated into English by myself or bilingual family members and appears in *italics*. Names of students are pseudonyms, changed for student privacy. Survey results for other classes and school are available upon request as well as assessment spreadsheets for the focus school.
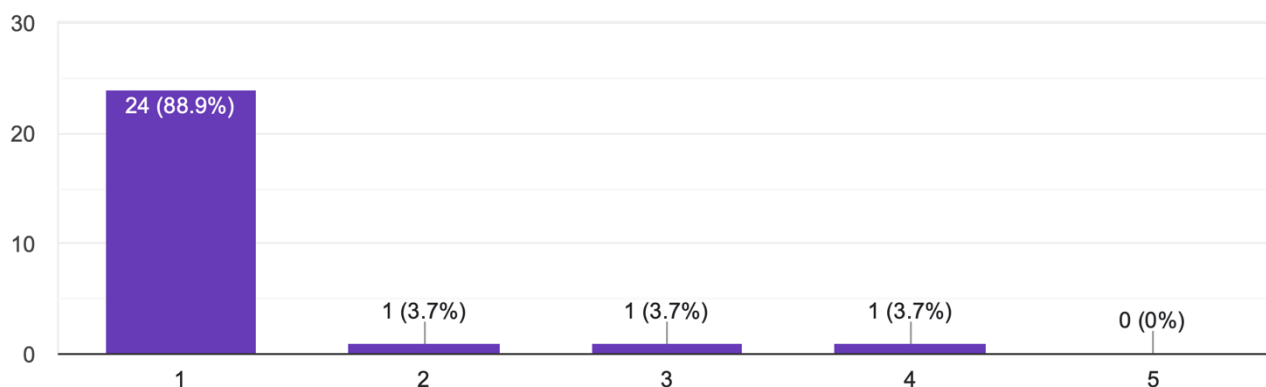
First goal and objective, **90% of students will be able to appropriately use openers and closers by the end of the school year**. Figure 1, 2 - Nearly all students of focus class 4-3 reported that they could start a conversation in English, an increase from April. This is confirmed in figures 6, 7 (conversation strategy use by all 4th grade classes) and excerpts 1,2, and 3 (transcripts of select 4-3 student video conversations). During video recorded pair talk and transcriptions of focus students, all students used conversation openers.

Figure 1

4-3 year end survey – conversation strategy (opener)

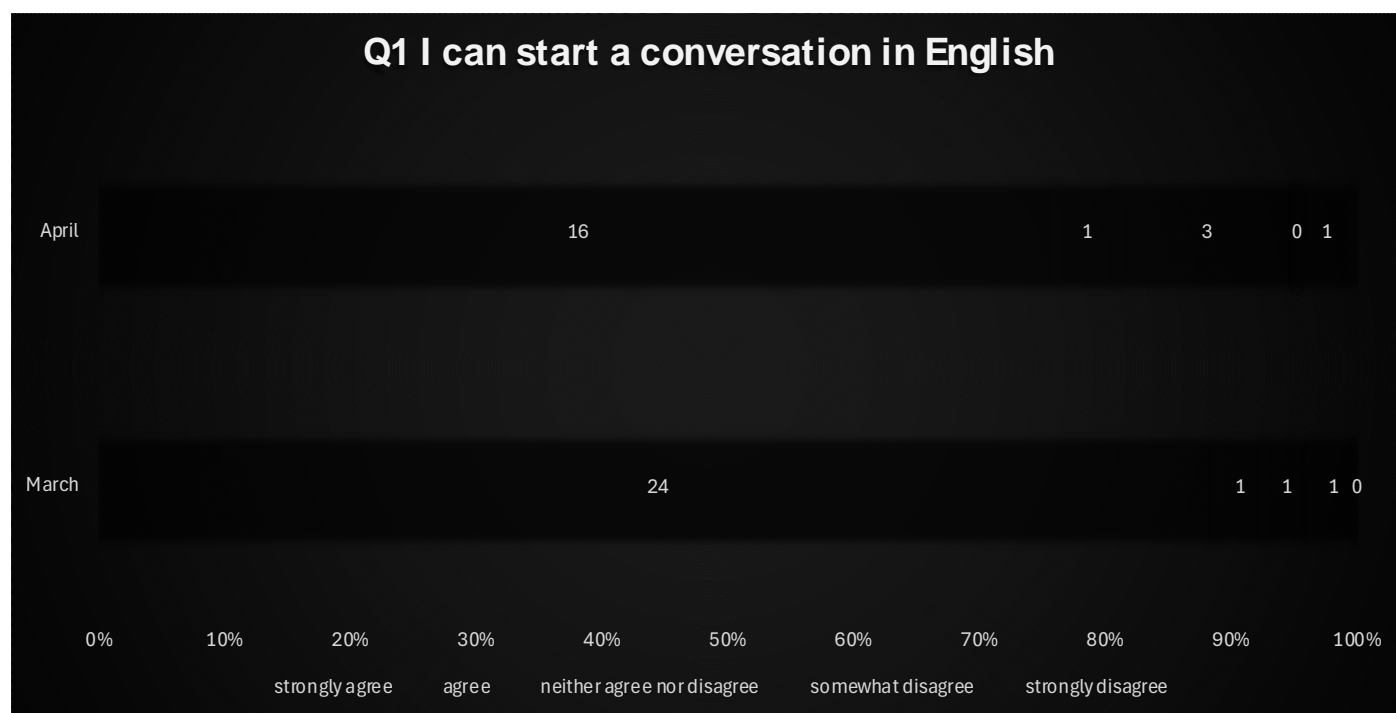1) I can start a conversation in English. 英語の初めに、挨拶をする事ができます。
27 responses

Figure 2

4-3 initial/year end survey – conversation strategy (opener)

In the initial survey (Figure 4) just over 80% of class 4-3 students strongly agreed that they could use closers. By March use of closers had increased to 88% (Figure 3). This is supported by analysis by the author of pair talk video recordings (Figure 7). Class 4 – 3 used closers 64%, less than in the self-reported survey, in July. However, this had increased to 97% and 96% in November and February respectively. Focus students use of closers was observed in July and November (Excerpts 1,2). Closers were not observed in February (Excerpt 3) although the pair had a separate, longer, video which included closers, which was not transcribed.

My analysis of the first goal and objective is that students can appropriately use openers and closers in English conversation. As students are beginning, young learners, with few opportunities to use English in Japan, this is an important step in developing the students strategic and communicative competence. My belief is that students were able to achieve this by being given opportunities to use English through pair talk and information-exchange activities. Students were encouraged to use openers and closers every time, recursive practice, they used English in pairs.

Figure 3

4-3 year end survey conversation strategy (closer)

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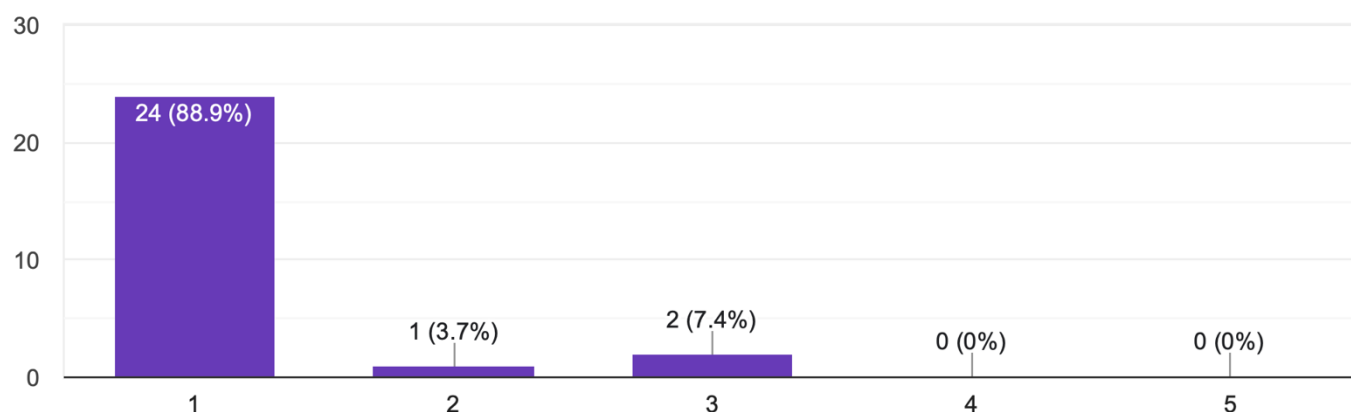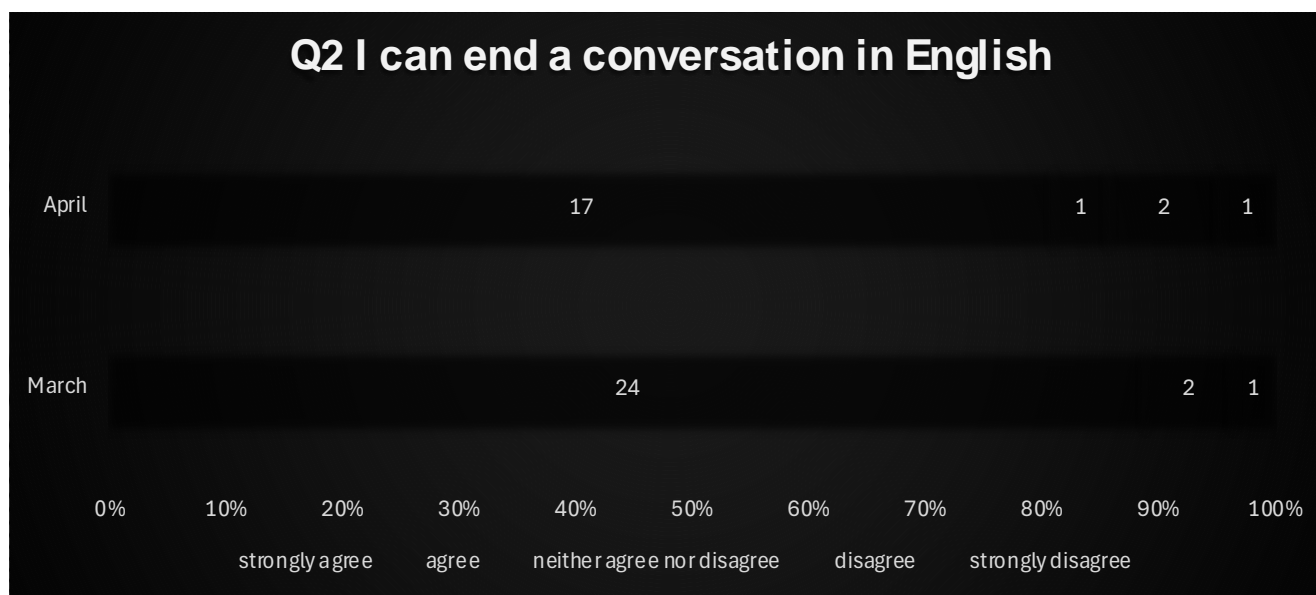## 2) I can end a conversation in English. 英語の終わりに、挨拶をする事ができる。
27 responses

Figure 3, 4 - Nearly all students reported that they could end conversations in English, an increase from April.

Figure 4

4-3 initial/year end survey – conversation strategy (opener)

Q2 I can end a conversation in English

Second goal and objective, **80% of students will be able to appropriately use several rejoinders by the end of the school year.** Students began the school year without using rejoinders. Students were not asked if they could use rejoinders in the initial survey and only three students, in class 4-3, were observed using a rejoinder in July pair talk (Figure 6, 7, 8). Teachers consistently demonstrated and encouraged students to use rejoinders before pair talk (warm up, teacher demonstrative conversations, information- exchange tasks). The number of students who used rejoinders in class 4-3 increased in November to 13 (Figure 6) and again in

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February to 15. The percentage of students using rejoinders increased from 12% in July to 63% in February (Figure 7). The number of students who used more than one rejoinder in pair talk increased from zero students in July to seven students in November, and finally to ten students in February (Figure 8). Increased usage of rejoinders is also supported in the three transcripts of focus students (Extract 1, 2, 3). The observed usage of rejoinders increased from one in Extract 1 to four in November and finally seven rejoinders in February. In the year-end survey 16 students strongly agreed and 4 students agreed, total 74% of class 4-3, that they could use rejoinders (Figure 5). By the end of the school year students of 4-3 went from using no rejoinders to an average of one rejoinder per student. Contrasted with other classes, these numbers are low for the fourth grade. Students of class 4-1 and class 4-2 used an average of 3.17 and 3.1 rejoinders respectively. **These numbers do not meet the goal and objective of 80% of students using several rejoinders**. However, students made incredible progress from not using rejoinders at the beginning of the school year to students using at least one rejoinder in class 4-3, during pair talk, and more rejoinders in other classes. Given time, this author suggests that students would use more rejoinders as students were just starting to implement them into pair talk. Unfortunately, some students were never observed using rejoinders which affected overall percentages and should be considered. The goal and objective was not met but students did improve in using rejoinders and their strategic communication.

Figure 5

4-3 year end survey conversation strategy (rejoinder)

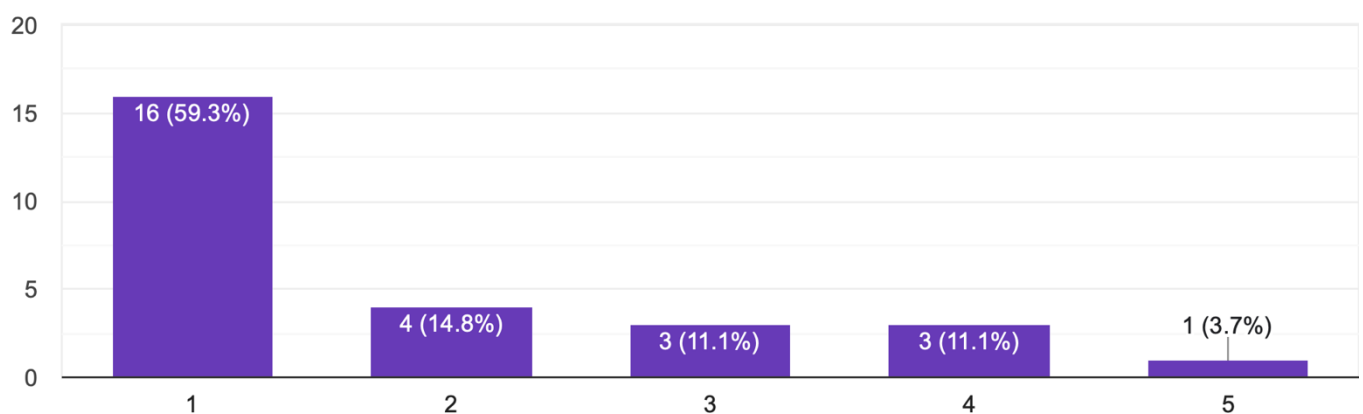3) I can react or comment in English. 英会話にリアクションかコメントができる。
27 responses

Figure 6

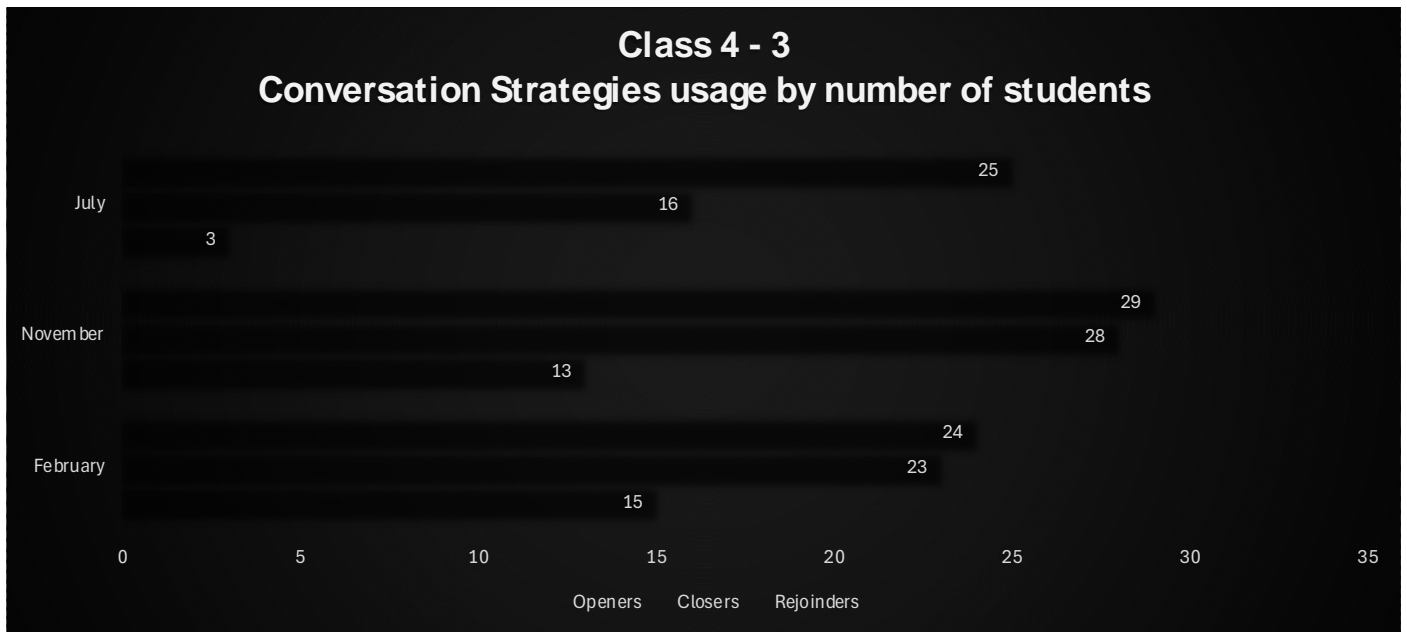*4-3 assessment of student use of conversation strategies during school year*

Class 4 - 3
Conversation Strategies usage by number of students

July — 25, 16, 3
November — 29, 28, 13
February — 24, 23, 15

Openers   Closers   Rejoinders

Figure 7

4-3 assessment of student use of conversation strategies, by class percentage, during school year

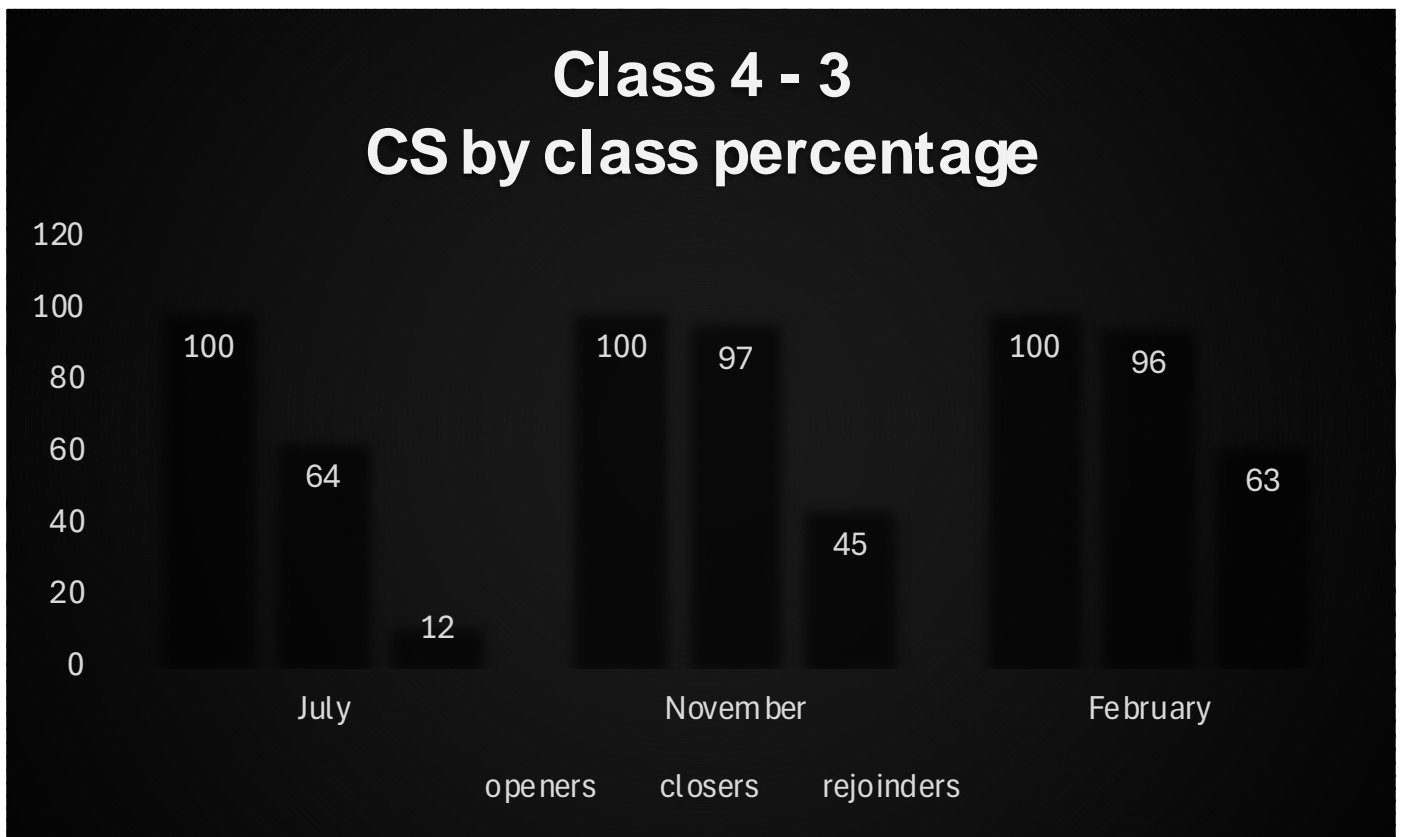**Class 4 - 3**
CS by class percentage

July — 100, 64, 12
November — 100, 97, 45
February — 100, 96, 63

openers   closers   rejoinders

Figure 8

4-3 number of rejoinders used by students during recorded pair talk

Class 4 - 3
number of rejoinders
by individual students

Figure 9

4th grade – average number of rejoinders used in pair talk
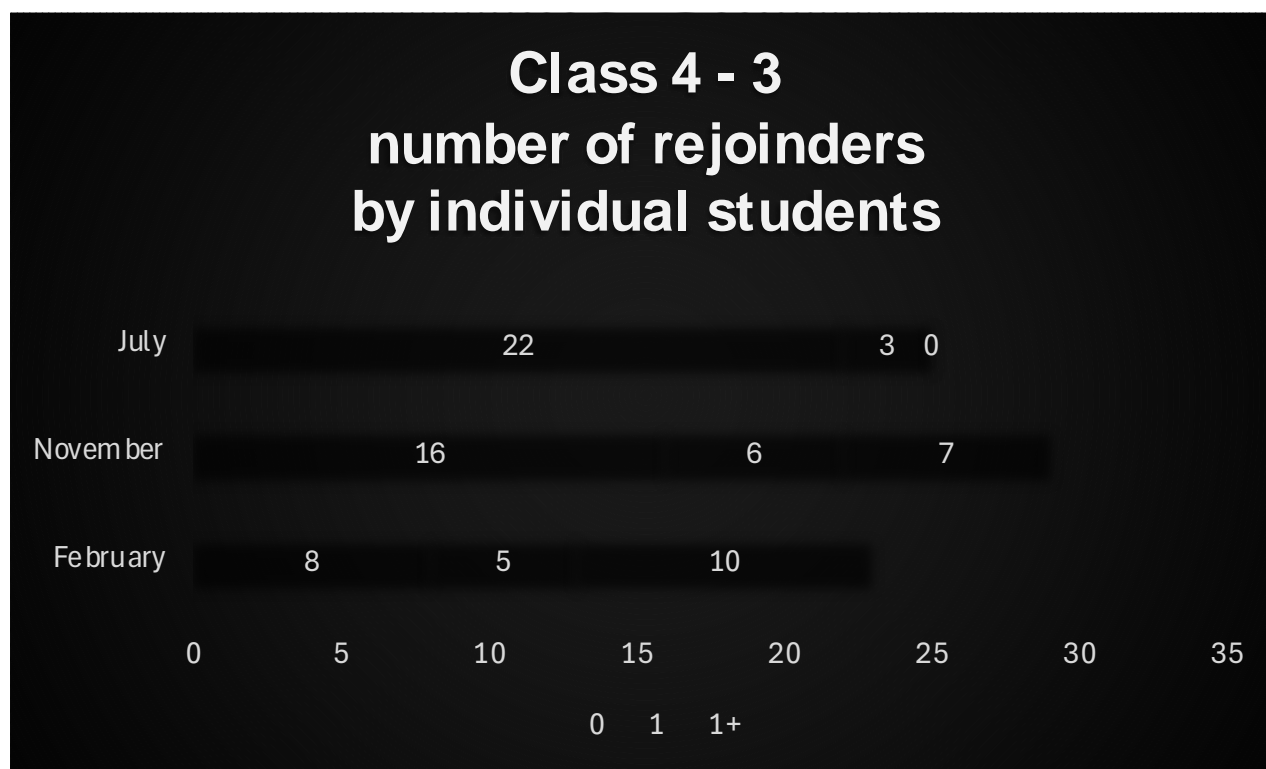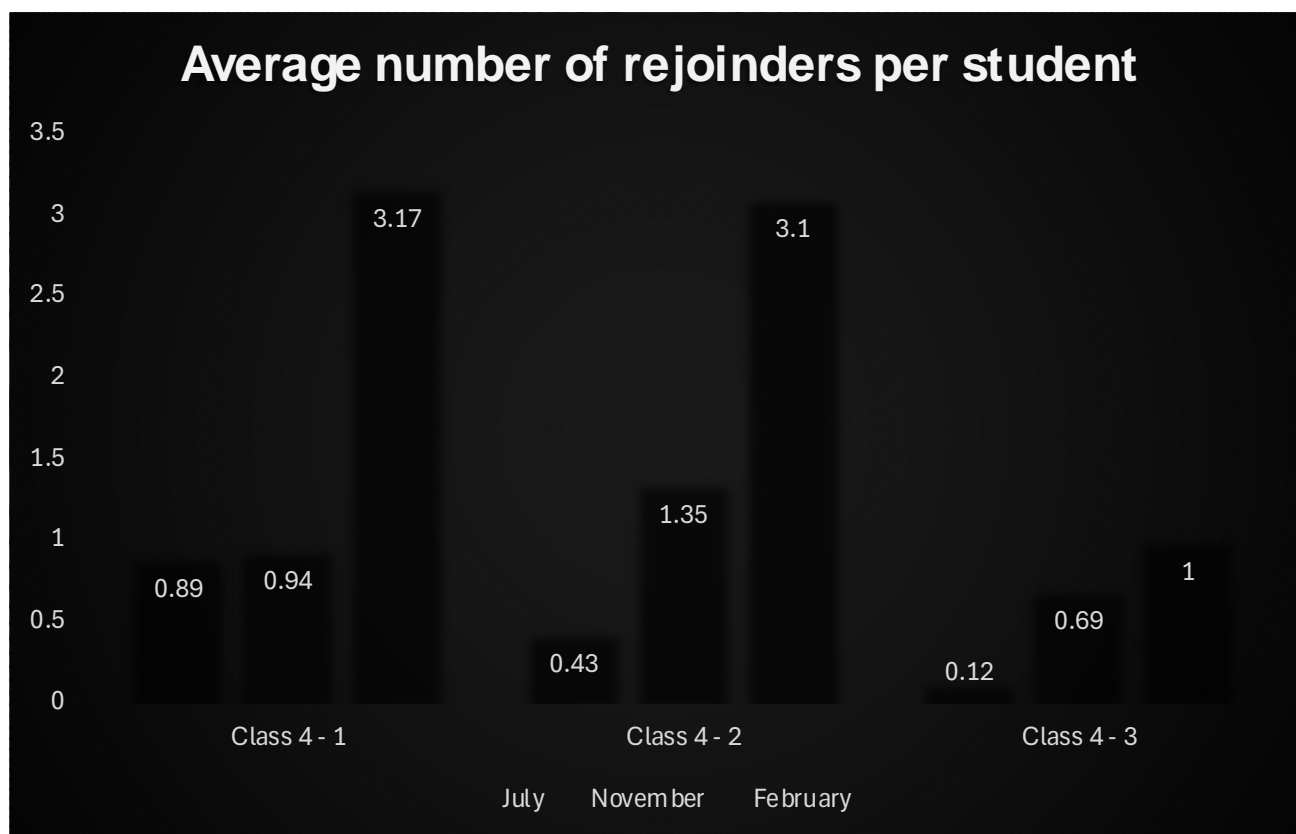

Average number of rejoinders per student

Third goal and objective, **80% of students will be able to talk in pairs for 90 seconds by the end of the school year**. Students were asked if they liked talking in English with classmates in the initial survey (Figure 6). 14 students in class 4-3 reported that they strongly agreed (13) or agreed (1) that they like talking in English, more than 50% of all students. This is important as it shows that not all students like talking in English with classmates in April.

Figure 10

4-3 intial/year end survey – students attitude towards speaking English
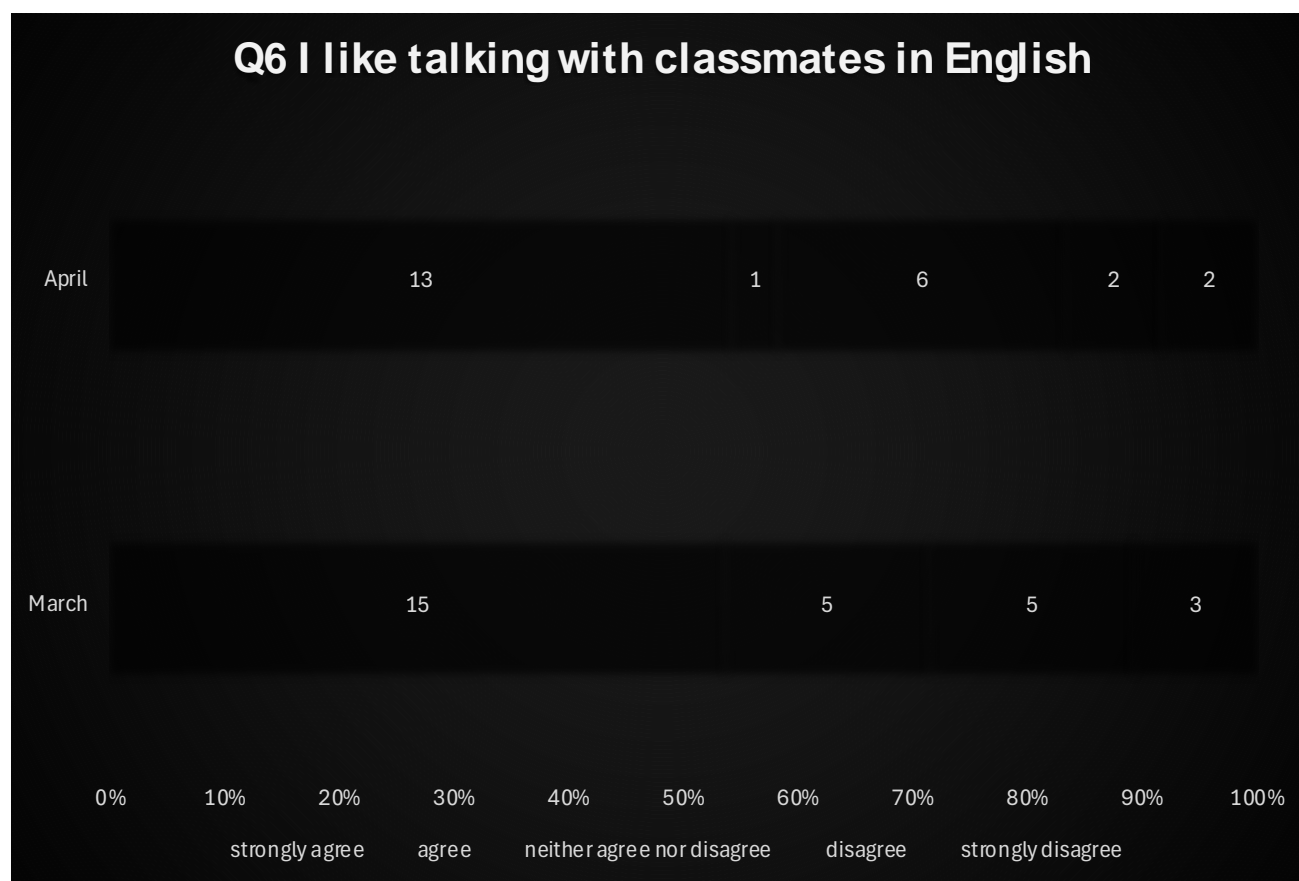
Over the course of the school year, through unit information-exchange tasks and pair talk assessments with rubrics, students talked more in English with their classmates. In the initial assessment of pair talk in July (figure 11) using student tablets to video record pair talk, videos were an average of 43 seconds in length. Talking time was counted from when students used openers to when they used closers, both students stopped talking, or when recording was stopped. There were time periods in videos when students used Japanese, were silent, required scaffolding from teachers and/or classmates, etc. Average pair talking (figure 11) increased to 57 seconds in November to 130 seconds in February as information-exchange tasks increased in complexity and students used more rejoinders and closers. Figure 12 shows that the increase in talking time between 4th grade classes to be similar through the school year.

Figure 11

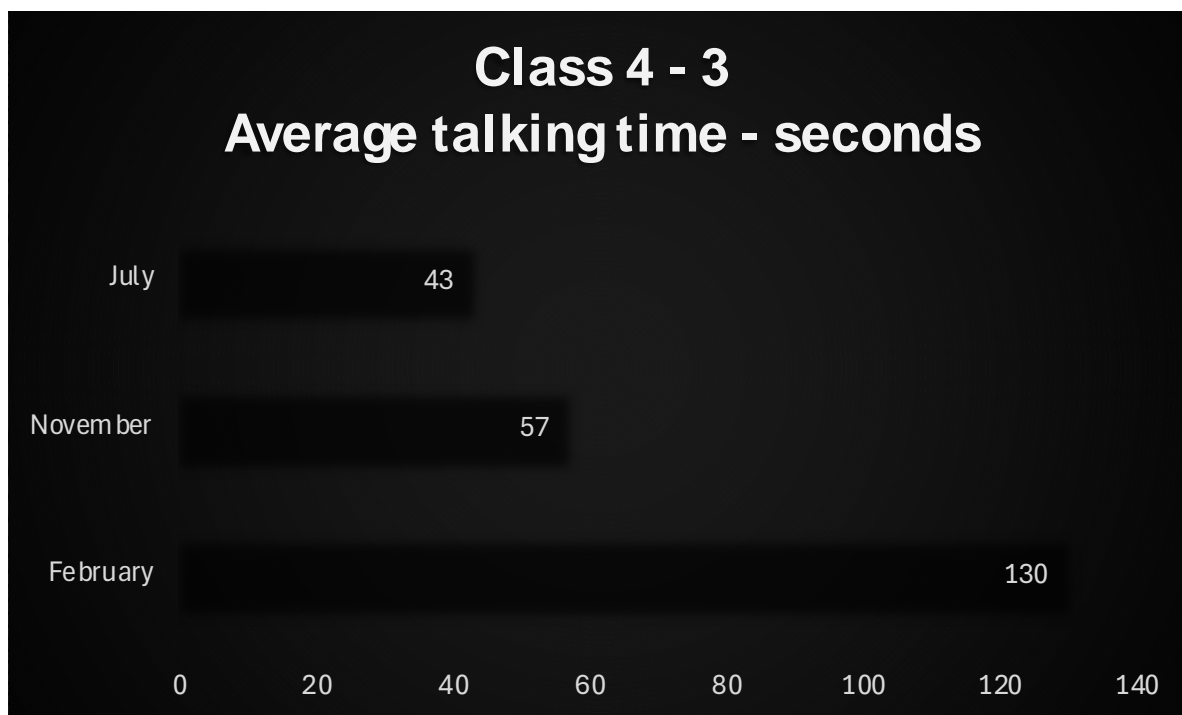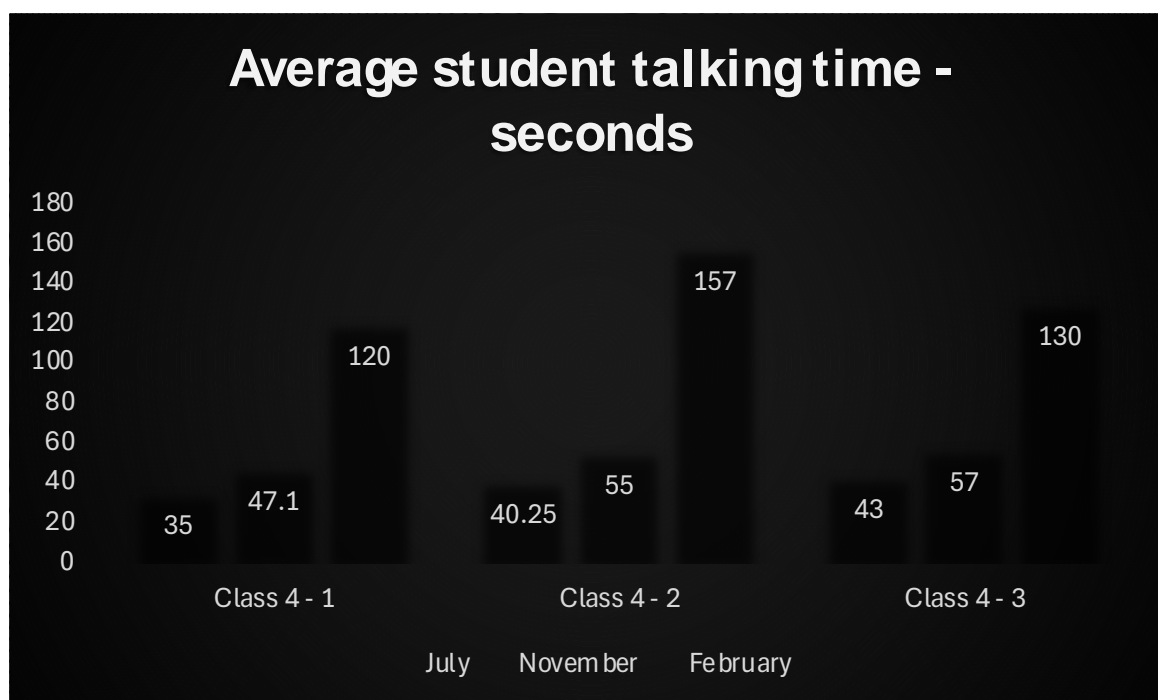*4-3 assessment of class average student talking time in pair conversation during school year*

Figure 12

4ᵗʰ grade – average talking time, in seconds, in pair talk

Focus student transcripts (Extracts 1,2, 3) talking time did not increase as other observed students. The first transcription, between Hana and Ichiro, was longer than the initial class 4-3 average of 43 seconds. The second transcription, between Mika and Hana, was shorter in length (43 seconds) as the two students were both of a high level. The third transcription, between Kei and Sachi, (66 seconds) was not longer than the first

transcription but had a greater number of turns, 29 versus 14, in the same amount of recording time. The students were talking more than in earlier extracts.

Extract 1

Sample dialog – July pair talk

```
        [0:10:00]
01  Hana  how are you (00:10)
02 Ichiro  I'm sleepy (…)how are you  (00:15).
03 Hana  I (…) I'm hungry (…) (00:16)
04 Ichiro  oh (…) (00:21)
05 Both  what day do you like  Ha (…) (00:23)
06 Hana  what day do you like  (00:27)
07 Ichiro  I like tursday (Sic) (00:32)
08 Hana why (…) (00:35)
09 Ichiro  授業が五時間しかないから {jyugyogagojikanshikanaikara, there are only
five periods} (…) (00:41)
10 Hana  what day do you like (00:47)
11 Ichiro  what day do you like(00:48)
12 Hana I like thursday (…) (00:51)
13 Ichiro  Why? (00:55)
14 Hana  Why (…) Because I like yakisoba and pine jelly. Ha (…) Hana Bye
(Waving) (01:06)
```

High/medium mix: Hana used openers and closers. Ichiro used a rejoinder.

Extract 2

Sample dialog – November pair talk

```
[0:00.00]
01  Mika:  hello [0:00]
02  Hana:  hello [0:01]
03  Mika:  how are you [0:02]
04  Hana:  i'm hungry [0:04]
05  Mika:  o:h [0:05]
06  Hana:  how are you? [0:07]
07  Mika:  ha-i'm happy [0:09]
08  Hana:  oh nice[0:10]
09  Mika:  What time do you like [0:13]
10  Hana:  I like seven pm   [0:16]
11  Mika:  wow[0:17]
12  Hana:  because i like dinner [0:20] [[Hana responded as if being asked
"why" I assume]]
13  Hana:  hh what time do you like [0:27]
14  Mika:  i like seven pm [0:31]
15  Hana:  why [0:32]
16  Mika:  (cheer) dance time [0:36]
17  Hana:  oh so great [0:38]
18  Mika:  see you [0:41]
19  Hana:  see you [0:42]
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13

```
20  Mika:  °goodbye° [0:43]
```

High/High mix: Hana used openers, rejoinders, and closers. Mika used openers, rejoinders, and closers.

Extract 3

Sample dialog – February pair talk

```
[00:00]
01  Kei   hello:: [02:09]
02  Sachi  how are you [02:22]
03  Kei   I'm sleepy=uh fine [05:15]
04  Kei   HOW are you [08:14]
05  Sachi  I'm fine [11:00]
06  Kei   NICE [12:04]
07  Sachi  えと {e:to:::, well} [13:26]
08  Kei   what (…) what do you want [15:08]
09  Sachi  eh (…) s::strawberry (…) please [19:27]
10  Kei   how many? [20:28]
11  Sachi  ONE please [22:02]
12  Kei   okay:: [22:27]
13  Sachi  WHAT DO YOU LIKE? what ha ha (…) what do you want [29:10]
14  Kei   salmon please [31:07]
15  Sachi  how many [33:00]
16  Kei   si::x please [35:06]
17  Sachi  si::x? (…) okay=okay [38:01]
18  Kei   WHAT DO YOU WANT [40:15]
19  Sachi  生クリーム {nama c:ream} please ha ha [44:10]
20  Kei   how many [45:17]
21  Sachi  ha ha two:: [46:12]
22  Kei   OH:: (…) nice [48:26]
23  Sachi  ha ha how are you ha ha (…) なんと言うの {nantoiuno, I don't know how to say}
what do you like ha (…) [55:26]
24  Kei   (kokukaranoshoyudakara) しょうゆ {shouyu, soy sauce} please [1:00:05]
25  Sachi  えっとしょうゆじゃなく{ehto shoyu jyanaku, not soy sauce} =how many [1:02:16]
26  Kei   one please [1:03:22]
27  Sachi  (marugoto ippon) ha ha [1:05:08]
28  Kei   okay:: [1:06:03]
29  Sachi  ha ha okay=okay [1:06:03]
```

Medium/medium mix: Kei used openers, rejoinders, and closers (in another, longer, video). Sachi used openers, rejoinders, and closers (in another, longer, video).

Video recordings of student talking time did exceed 90 seconds if only recording time is considered. In the final survey, 23 students reported, strongly agree and agree, that they could talk longer in English than in April (Figure 13). Students video recording length increased and students self-reported that they could talk longer. In Figure 10, 14 students, more than 70% of respondents, chose strongly to agree or agree to indicate that that like talking in English with their classmates. This was an increase in class percentage over the initial survey. Students talked more, thought they could talk more, and had a more positive view of speaking English with classmates.

Figure 13

4-3 year end survey – student talking time

4) I can talk longer in English now more than in April,
2024. 2024年4月よりも今のほうがたくさん英語で話せるようになりました。
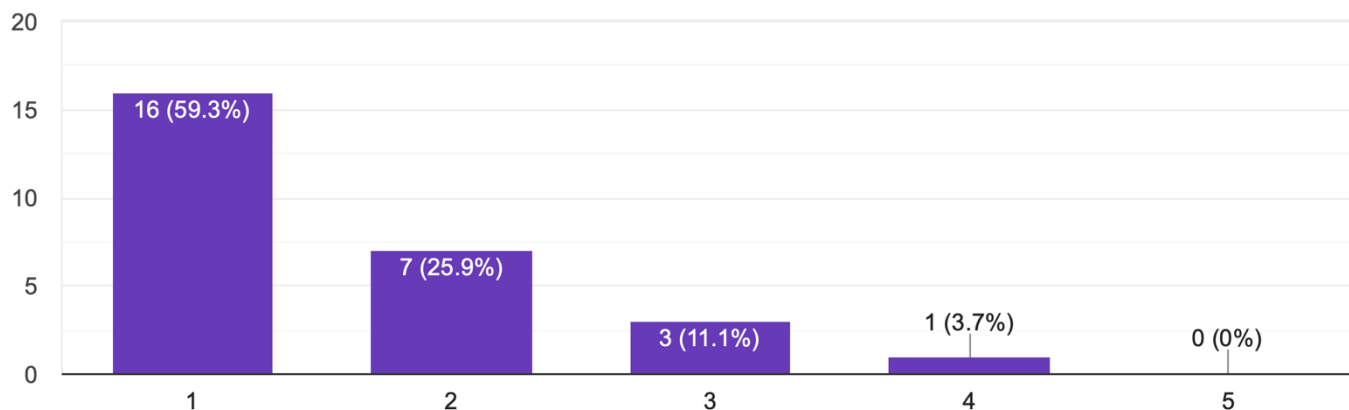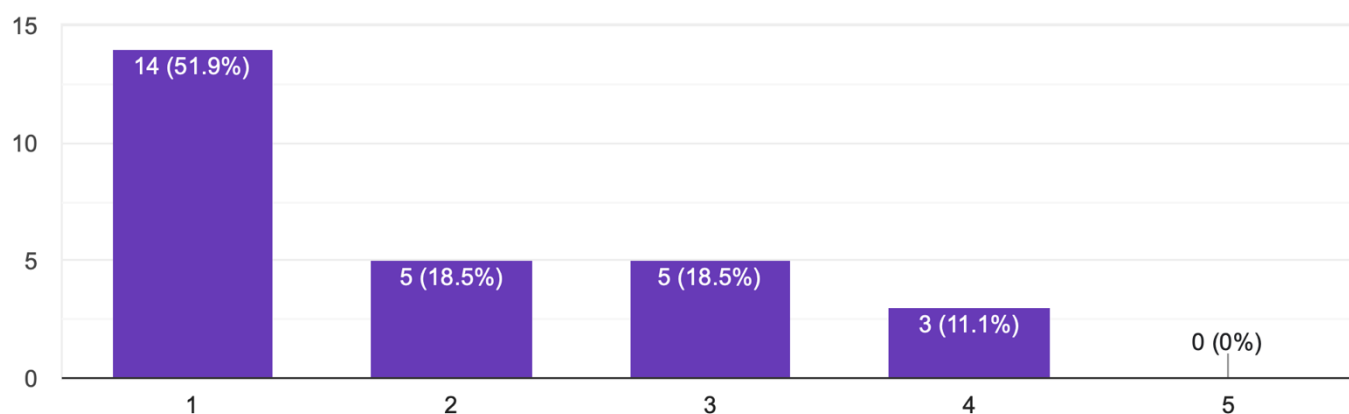27 responses

Figure 14

4-3 year end survey – students attitude towards speaking English

6) I like talking with classmates in English. クラスメートと英語で話すのが好きです。
27 responses

Finally, the author found it challenging to measure students' communicative competence through information-exchange tasks. To show some manner of development, usage of unit English in pair talk during three assessments in July, November, and February, were examined. In the first assessment in July, most students used Japanese to exchange information in pairs. According to Table 1, usage of unit English by 4-3

class, as a class percentage, increased from 40% in July to 96% in February. In July only 10 of 25 students used English to exchange information (others used their L1, Japanese), this increased to 27 of 29 students in November, and in February this had increased again to nearly all students, 23 of 24. The writer suggests that students we able to increase utterances in unit English through opportunities to speak English in class and through information-exchange tasks. Student interaction was paramount in the increase of student usage of English in pair talk. Observation of other English classes as a teaching assistant, or T2, are that students rarely speak English in class or do it chorally as part of a teacher-centered class. In observed English lesson, students are not given enough opportunities to negotiate meaning through unrehearsed student interaction. Further research, such as student interviews, is needed to discover precisely why students used more unit English throughout the year.

Table 1

Class 4 – 3 Usage of unit English during recorded pair talk during information – exchange tasks

Class 4 - 3 Usage of unit English	July	November	February
utterances by number of students	10	27	23
total number of students	25	29	24
class percentage	40%	93%	96%

(8) What I learned:

(1) From action research

From action research I learned about collecting data through surveys, video recorded pair talk, and how to better observing lessons. Through surveying students, more than once, they reported their opinions and how they changed, or not. Through video recorded pair talk I could see what students could or could not do in our English lessons. By recording three times in a year, I could see how students developed their communicative competence. Transcribing student pair talk was difficult and time-consuming but rewarding as I could better focus on what individual students did and said in their English conversations. I also learned to observe lessons better through keeping a log and using technology. Being T1 in a class of 30 or more beginner, young learners, it was difficult to reflect in action during lessons, but I took notes when possible. Using a tablet to video record parts of lessons was invaluable for reviewing lessons, especially for what I failed to notice in class.

Conducting action research requires constant learning and adapting. I learned much through trial and error. My surveys continued to change and did not always match each other. This was useful for learning more about students but also difficult to connect initial and end of year surveys. I also changed my lessons as I learned more about students and realized what was important, what was not, and what could be implemented in limited class time. I spent much more of class time conducting surveys and pair talk video recordings than

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I wanted to, possibly leading to student disinterest. I also attempted to adapt what I learned in classes with varying degrees of success. For example, reflection sheets could be done for every unit. In the end I was unable to apply much of what I learned in summer intensive courses and fall semester due to a lack of class time.

Aspects of action research which were difficult for me were objectives, research questions and literature review. Only now, at the end of the year, do I feel that I am starting to understand their importance and connection. For much of the year I did not understand how they were related or could be achieved until recently. My objectives were helpful to see what students could reasonably achieve. I am unsure if focusing on student talking time was an appropriate measure of students' communicative competence. Research questions were difficult to formulate at the beginning of the year but helped to guide my research. The literature review I see requires revision and expansion to accurately describe the work I am presenting.

(2) What I learned from students

From students I learned much about what they could do or not do in English lessons. Students were able to use openers, closers, and more rejoinders during the year. As students are young, beginning learners who vary in speaking ability and have one English class a week, it is very important to manage expectations. Giving students opportunities to talk did not lead to more speaking in English by all students. Students varied in their improvements. Surveys, pair talk video recordings, and transcripts reveal that students, as a class, made improvements in using conversation strategies, talking time, and exchanging information. However, there were still students who did not use rejoinders, could exchange information in English, or had other difficulties. The "tipping point" of classroom size is difficult to overcome (Yoneyama & Murphy, 2007). I could not help all students. Students often scaffolded each other when teachers were unavailable, as evident in the survey (figure 15, 16 and table 2) and observed during pair talk recordings. Students did choose teachers as most helpful to helping them learn English, but classmates were also important. Without classmates scaffolding, many students would have had difficulty negotiating meaning.

Figure 15

4-3 year end survey- students opinions of what helped them to learn English

7.1) _____ helped me to learn English. (Check all that apply.) _____
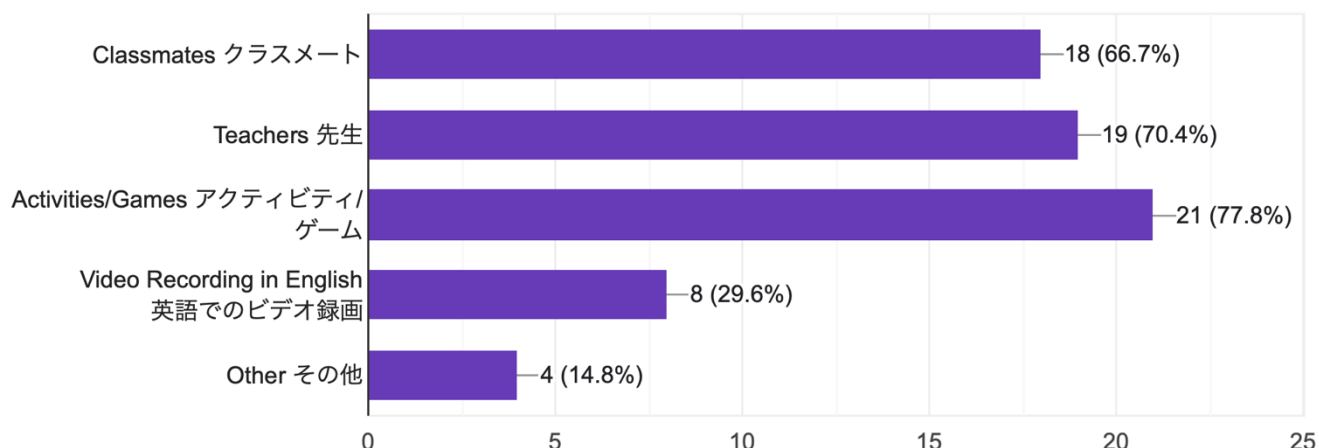は私が英語を学ぶのに役立ちました。 （該当するものをすべてチェックしてください。）

27 responses

Figure 16

4-3 year end survey- students opinion of what best helped them to learn English

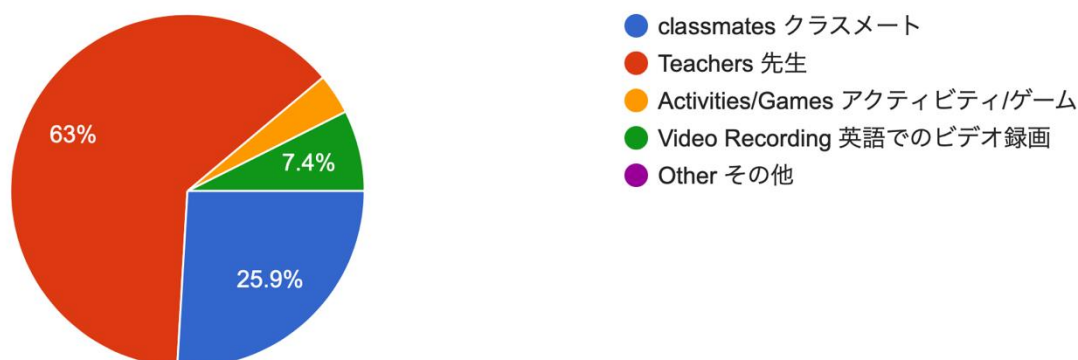7.2) What helped you to learn English the most? (Check one) 一番役に立ったのはどれですか？

27 responses

Table 2: selected comments of what students reported helped them to learn English the most

Teachers (17)
Because the teacher's lessons are easy to understand. (not translated from Japanese)
Because the teacher teaches me. (7)
Because the teacher speaks English smoothly.
Because the teacher helps me when I don't understand. (4)

Classmates (7)

Somehow. (2)
I could get ideas that I didn't think of.
When I talk to my friends I can get to know their opinions.
When I talk to my friends, I can talk about things I don't understand. (2)
If there's anything you don't understand, they'll come to your aid right away.

(3) English language teaching

English language teaching with beginning young learners in public schools in Japan is challenging with CLT. Much of what I learned about CLT applies to older learners and must be altered for young learners. For example, lessons were more teacher-centered for input tasks. Information-exchange tasks required that students use Japanese for communication (writing and discussing during pre/post tasks). I was unable to implement task-based language teaching at this time in the manner I wanted. How English language teaching and CLT can be done requires fine-tuning. I must balance what can be done in my teaching context.

(9) Future issues

I will not be continuing my action research due to changing teaching positions but as I am unsure of future changes I will write as if my action research is continuing. I found action research beneficial for my teaching context, especially to improve my lessons, learn more about students, and get a better idea of what they could do and what they could not. By conducting surveys and video recorded pair talk, students showed me what they thought and what they were doing. This data was important but incomplete. In the future it will be necessary to learn more from students, especially through interviewing. Often, I wanted to know why students did something or what they were thinking, but I did not have the data which I believe interviewing would provide. Next, I think that I should improve team-teaching.

Public elementary school English activities should be co-developed rather than by a single teacher. Being T1 I was able to develop lessons and curriculum as I thought would best serve students. Overall, I am satisfied with my lessons as I tried to give students opportunities to communicate, to do tasks individually, in pairs, in groups, and as a class. I tried to give students meaningful input through input tasks and develop their communicative competence through conversation strategies. However, I do believe that lessons would have been greatly improved through working with the Japanese homeroom teachers. Japanese homeroom teachers know the students and have much to offer. It is also important for students to see their teachers being involved in English lessons. Therefore, English lessons should include all teachers involved in the class.

Through action research I learned to first conduct a survey to learn more about students, then to improve the survey through trial and error, and adapting a digital format. For the first time I did assessments of pair talk in conjunction with using student tablets. I found this method, adopted from fellow Nagoya University of Foreign Studies MA TESOL student Daisuke Hashiguchi, to be invaluable to see how students

communicated in English with each other. An additional benefit is that students also have a record of what they did in our classes, something which they could share with others, such as family members. I am a parent of a nine-year-old who also has English class in a public elementary school, but I have no access to see what my daughter does in her lessons. They do not have portfolios of their collected works or any accessible material on their tablets. By using technology that students now have access to, we can extend English language learning beyond mere speaking and listening. I believe this is a powerful tool that should be used in English class. I also think that integrating reflection sheets into digital form could save class time while allowing students to share their opinions and view other students thinking as well.

There are many opportunities to improve English instruction in public elementary school to make lessons more communicative but there are limits. 1. Students are young learners and learn differently from older students. 2. Lessons are limited in number and class length. 3. Not all aspects of CLT are applicable to teaching young learners, especially in a large classroom. Instead, aspects that apply to the teaching context, such as input tasks, information-exchange tasks and conversation strategies, should be incorporated. Lessons are more teacher centered. Students learn little of what is presented in their books but that is acceptable as basic conversation strategies can be used throughout the year, giving students speaking opportunities and developing their strategic competence. Further research is needed for improving public elementary school fourth grade English lessons using CLT, as a I believe that it is an important but neglected part of English teaching in Japan. In the end, English lessons require constant fine-tuning but by focusing on the students, their communicative competence can be developed.

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Appendix 1- A

Unit 7 MEXT goals:

- **Become familiar with how to say ingredients and expressions that ask or request what you want.**

(Knowledge and skills)

- **Ask and request the ingredients you want and introduce the menus you have thought of.**

(Thinking ability, judgment ability, expressive ability, etc.)

- **Try to introduce your own original menu while considering the people you are communicating with.**

(Motivation toward learning, humanity, etc.)

Week	subgoals
(01/09) Unit 7 Lesson 1 "What do you want?"	(1) Students write Unit 6 reflections and share what they wrote with classmates. (2) Students become familiar with unit 7 ingredients (fruits and vegetables).
(1/23) Unit 7 Lesson 2 "What do you want?"	(1) Input tasks: Listen and do bingo. *20 minute class
(1/30) Unit 7 Lesson 3 "What do you want?"	(1) Output task: Make a parfait (fixed pairs)
(2/6) Unit 7 Lesson 4 "What do you want?"	(1) Output task: Make a pizza (rotating pairs)
(2/13) Unit 7 Assessment 1 **(Today's lesson)**	(1) Introduce output task for pair talk recording for final assessment (2) prepare for assessment (fixed pairs) (3) practice for assessment (rotating pairs)
(02/20) Unit 7 Assessment 2	(1) Students practice assessing others. (2) Students do assessment in pairs, assess one other student, watch their recordings and assess themselves

1. Today's lesson Plan

Goals

(1) Students recycle unit 7 expressions to communicate what they want.

(2) Students prepare for pair talk video assessment (next lesson).

(3) Students use a handout to choose the food they want with additional ingredients.

Time	Interaction T-Ss, S-S, S	Activity and Procedure
2 3	T-Ss S-S	Class greeting and teacher goes over the date, day, time, weather, etc. Students greet their partner, ask each other, "what (food) do you want?" (recycling from the previous year) and react (rejoinder) to what their partner says.
35 (3) (7) (10) (15)	 T-Ss S T-Ss S-S	Information-exchange task (noticing) (output) 1. (Pre-task) Teacher elicits some foods students want. 2. (Pre-task) Students decide on a food they want to eat and ingredients. 3. (Pre-task) Teachers demonstrate the task, check for comprehension, then practice once as a class. 4. (Task) Students exchange handouts with their partners, ask each other what they want, write the ingredients, draw pictures, and finally return the handouts. Then students change partners.
1 (1)	 T-Ss	Greeting 1. Students greet the teacher, and class ends.

Total time: 41 minutes

S-S: 18 minutes

S: 7 minutes

T-Ss: 16 minutes

Figure 17, 18

Unit 7 handout,, front and back

Let's make a pizza!! オリジナルピザを作りましょう!

Step 1: Write what you want on your pizza and how many pieces.
ピザに何が必要か、何個か書いてください。

Step2: Talk with your friends about what you want. They will draw the ingredients on your pizza.
あなたが何を望んでいるかについて友達と話し合ってください。彼らはあなたのピザに材料を描きます。

Step 3: Ask your friends what they want. Draw the ingredients on their pizza.
友達に何を望んでいるか聞いてみましょう。彼らのピザに材料を描きます。

Ingredient 材料	Number of pieces 数	Ingredient 材料	Number of pieces 数

Figure 19

Unit 7 supplemental handout,, front

Class:	Number:	Name:	Let's Try 2 Unit 7 "What do you want?"
年組	番		
_____	_____	名前 _____	

Date: 日付	
Day: 曜日	
Weather: 天気	

Unit 7: Introduce your food with friends!

Name：名前	Favorite food 好きなたべもの
(1)	
(2)	
(3)	
(4)	
(5)	
(6)	
(7)	
(8)	
(9)	
(10)	

Talk in groups about what you learned.

Figure 20, 21

Student handout, front and back, in portfolio
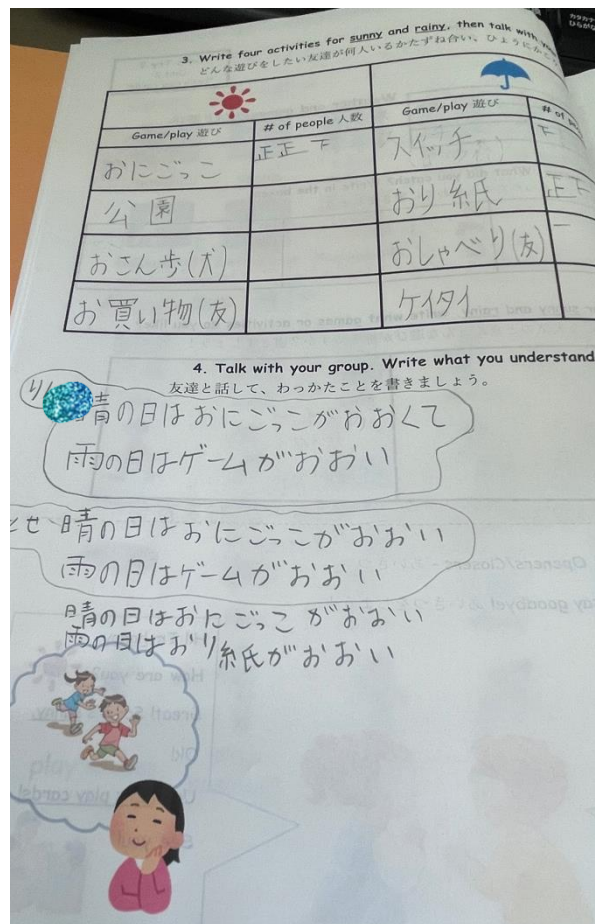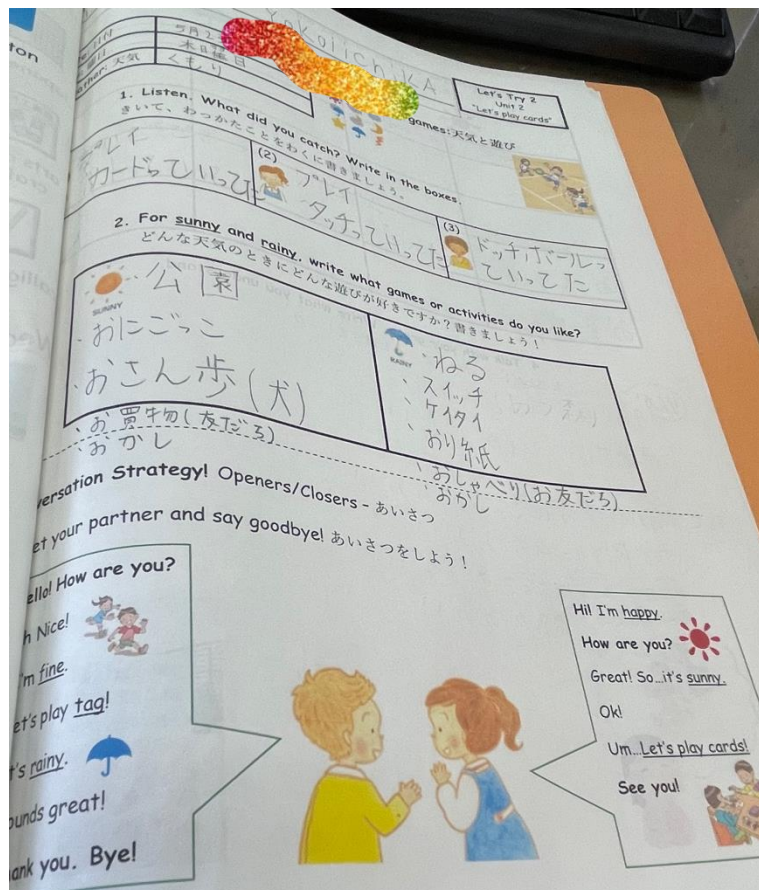
Figure 22
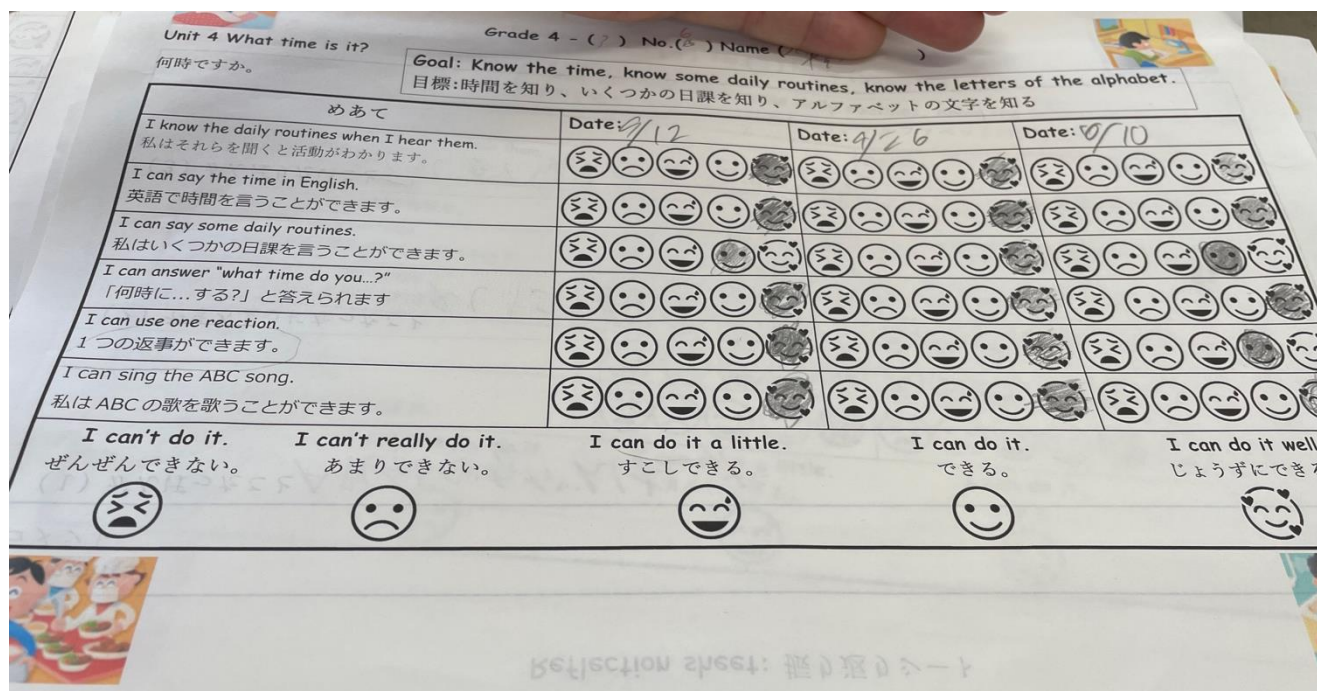
Example reflection handout (front)

Figure 23

Example reflection handout (back)