A Report On Trials For the Improvement Of Output Activities In SEED Program At Kyoto Seibo Gakuin Elementary School

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O. Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition, the importance of output has been widely recognized since Swain (1985) proposed “Output Hypothesis.” Swain (1985) also mentions that “it is the action of producing language, speaking and writing, which develop part of process of second language learning,” and also suggests three functions of output: (1) “the noticing/triggering function”; (2) “the hypothesis-testing function”; (3) “the metalinguistic function.” Moreover, Swain (1985) argues that in order to develop learner’s communicative competence, it is necessary for learners to depend on comprehensive output as well as comprehensive input that Krashen (1985) recommends. In terms of age and language acquisition, Lenneberg (1967) proposes a “Critical Period” for language acquisition, extending from the age of three to early teens, and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) argue that “younger is better in the most crucial area, ultimate attainment, with only quite young (child) starters being able to achieve accent-free, native-like performance in SL.” In addition to these arguments, Harley (1986) points out that an early start can be helpful for learners to gain greater oral proficiency. Taking these arguments into consideration, it seems effective for Japanese EFL learners not only to start earlier but to gain both a large amount of English exposure and occasions for comprehensible output. With these ideas as its background concepts, in 2012, Kyoto Seibo Gakuin Elementary School started the Seibo Enriched Education Discoveries Program (henceforth, SEED Program) which is carefully arranged to provide a great deal of input using various kinds of topics as well as a number of occasions for output.

The SEED Program at Kyoto Seibo Gakuin Elementary School is conducted 30 times a year on Saturdays. The program consists of two classes for kindergarteners (named Kinder Morning and Kinder Afternoon) and four elementary-level classes: two for 1st and 2nd graders (named Lily and Lotus), and two for 3rd and 4th graders (named Iris and Violet). As is shown in the Figure (1) and (2), the two Kinder Classes’ timetable is comprised of one input-centered lesson (English Development) and two output-centered lessons (AMS [Art, Music and Sports] and Communication English); Elementary-level classes’ schedule is made up of two input-centered lessons (English Development and Story Telling) and two output-centered lessons (AMS and Communication English):

**Figure (1):** Time Table for Kinder Morning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:30–9:40</td>
<td>Pray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40–10:10</td>
<td>English Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15–10:45</td>
<td>Communication English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:50–11:20</td>
<td>AMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:20–11:30</td>
<td>Homeroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure (2): Time Table for Lotus Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:45</td>
<td>Morning Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:50-10:35</td>
<td>English Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40-11:25</td>
<td>Communication English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-12:15</td>
<td>AMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15-13:15</td>
<td>Lunch Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:20-14:05</td>
<td>Story Telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:10-14:40</td>
<td>Homeroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each of the four different kinds of lessons above, a native English instructor conducts his/her lesson with support from a Teaching Assistant (henceforth, TA) and a Teaching Helper (henceforth, TH). Since these four different kinds of lessons provide young learners with various kinds of occasions for English exposure through input-centered and output-centered activities which are intended to cultivate children's communicative competence, it is worthwhile examining the problem that the program faces and considering the trials that the program makes, especially in output activities. This paper aims to examine problems in AMS, output-centered lesson, as well as to give consideration to trials aimed at improving the output activities used in the lesson.

1. Problem in Output Activities Themed on “Summer”

In one AMS lesson, children seem to have enjoyed and participated in the activities themed on “summer,” and to have given utterances in a usual positive manner, showing an apparently brisk development of the classroom activities. However, when we examine the children's utterances throughout the whole lesson, the quality of their utterances seems to be lower than initially expected, because the children used a limited extent of words concerning the theme “summer,” which reveals the variety of the words uttered by the children not to be so much abundant but restricted. The following three factors are regarded as the main causes of the problem:

1. Uncertainty of target sentence structures and target words/phrases under the theme
2. Uncertainty of target linguistic components intended to use in each activity
3. Poor arrangement of the activities

With regard to cause (1), it is reasonable to think that this cause derives from the failure to make a definite plan for target words/phrases and sentence structures under the theme of “Summer”: e.g., sea, water-melon, ice cream, swimming and so on; “What is your favorite summer food?” → “I like...” / “My favorite summer food is...” As for cause (2), there should be a clear idea about activities for each target linguistic component, in other words, it is necessary to think what activity is required for uttering particular target words/phrases or for practicing particular target sentence structures. In terms of cause (3), there are two different sub-factors: first is the problem of the activity containing more difficult linguistic components being dealt with at the opening stage of the lesson while easier linguistic components are used in the following activity; second is the problem that it takes nearly half of the lesson time for the children to draw or paint a picture about summer,
during which time the children concentrate on the picture without English communication among the children being encouraged effectively. After examining the problem and its causes, it is obvious that we should make the following trials to improve the output activities for the next AMS lesson:

1. To think about and decide clear target words, phrases and sentence structures
2. To think about and decide the main activities where children can learn and use the target linguistic components
3. To think of an arrangement of appropriate order of difficulty from activities with easier linguistic components to ones with more difficult components; in other words, the development of the activities should be arranged from “i” level (learner’s current linguistic level), or even from “i − 1” level, to “i + 1” level that Krashen (1985) posits3)

Having observed the problem of the output activities in AMS and its factors, we must examine and consider trials to improve the output activities in the next section.

2. Trials for Improving Output Activities

As the analysis shown in the previous section highlights the need for the improvement of the output activities, the following items are set for an AMS lesson themed on “Body Parts and Body Movements”:

Theme: “Body Parts and Body Movements”
Aim of the Lesson: Uttering words and expressions relevant to body parts and body movements
Target Words and Phrases: “mouth,” “eyes,” “knees,” “ears,” “move,” “touch your X,” “turn around,” “dance,” “run,” and so on
Target Sentence Structures: “What can you do with your X (a body part noun)?”
→ “I can V...”
Main Activities: (1) Opening Activity: Exercising and chorusing body movement words
(2) Word Level Activity: Competing to name as many body parts as possible
(3) Sentence Level Activity: Answering the question of “What can you do with your X (a body part noun)” by using the form “I can V...”
(4) Closing Activity: Touching body part game

In the opening activity of this lesson, the children can practice some of the target words and phrases through moving their body and chorusing. The children can notice the theme of the lesson and get the first input of the target words and phrases in the natural flow of the activity. In the word level activity, the instructor divides the children into two groups, and has them compete as to how many body parts the learners can name. In the sentence level activity, by asking questions of “What can you do with X (body part noun)?” the instructor aims to elicit answers from the children using the form of “I can V... .” In the closing activity, the children can practice body parts nouns by giving an immediate response to the instruction to touch their body parts.
2.1 Opening Activity: Exercising and Chorusing Body Movement Words

At the beginning of the opening activity, the instructor had the children try to move their body while chorusing the words, as Figure (3) below shows:

**Figure (3)**

At this opening stage of the activity, the instructor explained how to move their body, and had the children move and chorus together after the instructor’s priming calls, “Step, step. Move to the right. Move to the left.” At the following stage, the instructor added additional actions, “Kick, turn around,” to the previous movement, so they practiced a little longer movement, as is shown in the Figure (4):

**Figure (4)**
After the second stage of the activity, the instructor speeded up the tempo of the action, and at the fourth stage, the instructor introduced another additional action, “Shoulder, move to the right. Move to the left,” and had the children try the final version of this body movement activity:

**Figure (5)**

The instructor got the children to repeat this movement five more times: after repeating the action twice, the instructor had the children perform this movement three times with musical accompaniment. In the first two repetitions, the children enjoy chorusing while moving their bodies at a quite rapid tempo, but in the following three repetitions with musical accompaniment, they ceased chorusing but moved their bodies to a more accelerated tempo following the instructor’s priming calls.5)

This opening activity gave the children opportunities to practice some of the body movement words (e.g., step, move to the right / left, turn around) without an explicit feeling of learning and practicing those words. Generally speaking, it is thought to be beneficial and effective to develop the activities from “i” (learners’ current) level to “i + 1” (a bit beyond the learners’ current) level. Therefore in this opening activity, the instructor aimed to use words that are not so difficult, or are at least well known to the children, and in the following word level activity, the instructor provided the children with opportunities to deal with slightly more difficult task.

2.2 Word Level Activity: Competing to Name Body Parts Nouns

In the word level activity, the instructor divided the children into two groups, and had them compete as to how many body parts the learners could name, while the instructor and TA wrote down the words on the black board. In the first half of this activity, the instructor, TA and TH
refrained from giving explicit hints, but let the children utter body parts as many as they could. As a result, after naming easier words such as head, mouth and so on, the children had to recollecting some other body parts. One child was enthusiastic about bringing one body part noun to his mind, moving his hand and singing the first line of the famous song “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,” as is shown in Figure (6):

![Figure (6)](image)

Touching his knees, the child uttered “Knees” several times, rushing to TA. However in the second half of this activity, as the instructor, TA and TH gave explicit hints and let the children use dictionaries, the children continued naming the body parts nouns which included far more difficult words than those that average Japanese 1st and 2nd graders knew. In this word level activity, the children named 35 different body parts:

arm, back, belly-button, blood, bone, bottom, cheek, chest, ears, elbow, eye, eyebrow, eyelash, finger, foot, hair, hand, head, knee, leg, mouth, nail, neck, nose, shoulder, sole, teeth, temple, thigh, thumb, toe, tongue, tummy, wrinkle, wrist

In order to carry out this activity, the children had to not only use their previous knowledge but also search for new words with a dictionary, from which we may deduce that they dealt with “i + 1” level activity at this stage, but the children themselves enjoyed the activity as if it were a game.

2.3 Sentence Level Activity: Answering the Question of “What Can You Do With Your X (a body part noun)?”

After the word level activity, the lesson advanced to the next stage in which the children practice a reply in the form of “I can V...” to the instructor’s question of “What can you do with X (a body part noun)?” As for a body part used in the interrogative sentence, the instructor chose one from the parts named by the children in the previous activity. Before starting this question-answer activity, the instructor and TA had to give a little longer and more detailed explanation about the activity, because it was difficult for the children to understand exactly what to do and the meaning of the sentence structures used in the task.

At the beginning of the explanation, the instructor wrote down the interrogative sentence on the black board, and made the children chorus the question three times. In addition, the instructor asked the children about the Japanese meaning of the interrogative sentence. After checking the Japanese translation, the instructor and TA tried to have the children infer a word following the word “with” in “What can you do with...?” However, it was not so easy to infer the next word,
leading one child to ask the TA whether some words about sports followed the “with.” To this question, the TA answered the child, “No, no, no, with these words,” pointing to the words on the black board, “What can you do with your eyes? What can you do with your nose? What can you do with your mouth?” Moreover, the TA asked a demonstration question, “What can you do with your hand,” and the instructor answered, “I can tie,” at which the TA gave the children additional Japanese explanation, 「結ぶでしょう (Musuberu Deshō)」 (You can tie with your hands), in order to enhance the children’s understanding.

Through the explanation above, some children seemed to start understanding what to do in this activity, and the instructor decided to practice this question-answer activity by providing a question, “What can you do with your foot,” while showing a gesture of pointing to his foot, as is shown in Figure (7):

**Figure (7)**

To this question, one child raised her hand, and said energetically, “I know it. I can walk.” The instructor praised the child and asked her to say the sentence again, and he repeated it in a loud voice in order for the rest of the children to hear the appropriate answer uttered from their classmate. The instructor gave the children another question, “What can you do with your arms?” As this question seemed a little difficult, TA gave a sample answer, “I can hug,” while putting her arms around a child. Then the instructor set the children a little easier question, “What can you do with your nose,” to which a young learner answered, “I can smell.” Hearing the reply from a child, the instructor had the other children chorus the sentence to give them a better understanding of how to answer the questions. Thanks to the previous three warming-up questions, to the fourth question, “What can you do with your knees,” the children uttered three different answers: “I can walk,” “I can run,” and “I can sit down.” After hearing these three answers, the instructor told the children to stand up, and made them chorus the sentences while moving their body: “I can walk,” “I can run,” “I can bend,” and “I can kick.” The explanation and the warming-up practice about the activity enabled the children to prepare for taking part in this question-answer activity, and to energetically provide various answers to the following five questions:

1) “What can you do with your mouth?”
   → Children’s answers: “I can speak.” / “I can sing.”
2) “What can you do with your bottoms?”
   → Children’s answers: “I can shake the bottoms.” / “I can sit down.”
3) “What can you do with your ears?”
   → Child’s answers: “I can listen to music.”
(4) “What can you do with your head?”
   → Child’s answers: “I can think.”
(5) “What can you do with your foot?”
   → Children’s answers: “I can walk.” / “I can tap” / “I can dance.” / “I can run.”

The difficulty level of this sentence-level activity is a little beyond the children’s current linguistic ability, and must be much more difficult than the previous word-level activity, which reveals that the sentence-level activity can be correspond to the over “i + 1” level. However, detailed additional explanation as well as warming-up practice allowed the young learners to perform this rather difficult activity in a positive manner.

2.4 Closing Activity: Touching Body Part Game

After the sentence-level activity, the instructor conducted a touching body part game as the closing activity of the lesson. In this game, first the instructor took the caller’s role and gave instruction, “Touch your knees,” while pointing another body part. The children correctly touched the body part that the instructor had called, as Figure (8) below shows:

**Figure (8)**

![Touch your knees!](image)

After the instructor called instructions for touching 8 different body parts several times: “Touch your knees,” “head,” “nose,” “eyes,” “shoulders,” “foot,” “toes,” and “bottoms”; the instructor gave over the caller’s role to one child. Then the child called another 4 instructions: “Touch your eyes,” “head,” “ears,” and “shoulders.” Through this low difficult level activity, the children could review the body parts.

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has discussed trials for improving output activities conducted in the SEED Program. As we have observed in Section 1, the program faced a problem containing three different factors: (1) Uncertainty of target words, phrases and sentence structures; (2) Uncertainty of target linguistic components in each activity; (3) Poor arrangement of the activities. In order to deal with these issues, the SEED Program conducted the following trials: (1) Setting for clear target words, phrases and sentence structures according to theme; (2) Providing appropriate activities for particular target linguistic components; (3) Setting out an arrangement of appropriate order of difficulty from activities with easier linguistic components to ones with more difficult components. In the AMS lesson themed on “Body Parts and Body Movements,” the young learners enjoyed and participated
in the activities in a more positive manner, and the instructor, TA and TH succeeded in encouraging the learners’ utterances and English communication. The most important trial for the improvement of the activities used in “Body Part and Body Movement” lesson was that the development of the activities was arranged from “i-1” or “i” level, to “i+1” level, and to over “i+1” level. With such an appropriate order of difficulty, the lesson provided the children with adequate opportunities for output activities. However, the AMS lesson needs the further improvement in the quality of its output activities: e.g., improved arrangement of appropriate order of difficulty from easy sentence structures containing easy words to ones with more difficult structures and words. The SEED Program needs to continue taking action to improve output-centered lessons in order to help young learners to cultivate their communicative minds which encourage them to convey their feelings and ideas.

Notes
1) This is a revised version of a paper presented at the symposium of the 42nd Annual Conference of Japan Society of English Usage and Style, at Kyoto Seibo College, on 16th June 2013.
2) Lenneberg (1967) mentions that “between the age of three and the early teens the possibility for primary language acquisition constitutes to be good; the individual appears to be most sensitive to stimuli at this time and to preserve some innate flexibility for the organization of brain functions to carry out the complex integration of sub-processes necessary for the smooth elaboration of speech and language.”
3) With regard to “comprehensible input,” Krashen (1985) argues that L2 learners should move from “i” (learners’ current level) to “i+1” level (next level) “by understanding input containing i+1.” He also points out that “we are able to understand language containing unacquired grammar with the help of context, which includes extra-linguistic information, our knowledge of the world, and precisely acquired linguistic competence.”
4) I would like to thank my students for their assistance in drawing pictures for this article.
5) Considering the children stopped their chorusing, the latter three repetitions with musical accompaniment seemed to be less effective practice compared with the preceding ones with the children chorusing.

Reference Books
(Eds.), *Principles and practice in applied linguistics* (pp. 125-44). Oxford: Oxford University Press.


