

The importance of child affective development and class dynamics in English activities in Japanese elementary school

著者	Arao Hiroko
journal or publication title	Philologia
volume	40
page range	127-138
year	2009-02-01
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10076/10607

The Importance of Child Affective Development and Class Dynamics in English Activities in Japanese Elementary School

Hiroko Arao

This paper discusses the importance of class dynamics in English activities in Japanese elementary school (EAJES) and ways of class dynamics production, relating to the developmental stage and their affective states of elementary school students. School children build their self-concept through their peers in school life, especially a class to which they belong. Each student with a different self-concept constructs a class group and makes a contribution to class dynamics development essential for positive class climate. Class dynamics offer a gateway to positive communicative attitudes and motivational morale in the language classroom. For the effective function of class dynamics, class member relations are crucial and the ones connected by acceptance, rather than just friendship, constitute a tightly bonding class group. The four factors required for this bonding--proximity, contact, interaction and cooperation--are especially focused in its effects.

Introduction

With the introduction of EAJES in 2010, the relation between a class formation and EAJES has been subject to a surge in interest in recent years. Many teaching practitioners report that class dynamics generated in English activities help students learn with a positive mindset and also facilitate harmonious human relationships in class. Affective factors of school children are actually one of the main concerns for teachers as a practitioner; however, this used to be a relatively low-priority research topic in the academic study. This is because the method of teaching is the most urgent and crucial item to develop, responding

to the new attempt of teaching English in Japanese elementary school. In a way, collaboration between researchers in English as a foreign language (EFL) and teachers with a good insight into children's affect is less developed, and it is also undeniable that EAJES is still too new in academic research to sufficiently accumulate insight provided by practitioners in order to give theoretical feedback for its improvement. It is important to explain the practical insights based on theoretical background by reference to EFL study and educational psychology. This allows teachers to take every advantage of approach, methods and techniques suggested by EFL research.

The developmental stage of a child needs to be researched. The new course of study, coming into effect in 2010, makes English activities compulsory in elementary school, aiming at 5th- and 6th- year students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008). This period falls into the stage of children aged of 10 to 12, when children cognitively develop high-level logical thinking. Hence, EAJES is expected to contribute to students' awareness to the features of languages including Japanese, their native language that is unconsciously acquired.

Children in this age build identity with peers in the same age through school life, so studying is one of the most important factors to build identity. It also influences their self-efficacy, depending on the degree of academic success. Children in this age are also sensitive to their peers, with awareness of commonality and differences. They develop communication skills through communal life in school, since they learn to control emotions for harmonious human relationships, with individual differences in mind.

In the middle of this rapid growth, the influence of EAJES, involving communication with their peers in English, cannot go ignored in terms of affective state: their peers and the relationship are one of the most influential and significant items for their mental growth. The ultimate goal of English education in schools originally stems from ongoing globalization; however, in the case of EAJES, the effects are not limited to English skills and knowledge practical in global society, but further far-reaching to the development and

growth of a whole person.

The development of self-concept of children in a group

Before focusing on a class group, it is important to pay close attention to the individual member in a rapid developmental stage. Children of school age show outstanding development and, when it is discussed, it is necessary to divide the stage into two: the early stage (the 1st-4th grades) and the latter stage (the 5th and 6th grades). It is a frequently reported fact that children in 4th grade and under most likely become engaged in English activities in all innocence, while children in 5th and 6th grades don't; they commonly show much hesitation in activities where they are encouraged to be physically active in English use. This phenomenon causes confusion for teachers trying various teaching methods, primarily physically active ones such as songs, chants, skits and games, which have proved to be effective in EFL research and shared among practitioners.

Children in this age become excessively consciousness of themselves and the other person's evaluation in the middle of building self-concepts. Children's self-concepts inevitably influence their class behavior and attitudes; therefore, it is of great importance to get a clear grasp on the development of self-concept and the age difference in designing class activities. Damon and Hart (1998) argue, in their self-understanding model, that children, after middle childhood, increasingly compare themselves to others and understand their abilities based on others and act with the consideration of the other person's response. Through social comparison, as children age, their self-concepts are modified and newly constructed based on one's position in a group. For most school children, the main social arena in life is their school and their most important reference group is their peers (Dörnyei, 2001). This means that a school, more specifically a class, is one of the most significant groups to which they belong and recognize oneself as a social existence. Therefore, regarding learning in a classroom, when there is a threat to a learner's self-concept, resistance to learning is possibly kept to a maximum.

Classroom dynamics influencing communicative attitudes in English activities

Classroom dynamics discussed in this paper basically highlight an entire class. The importance of class as a group for effective teaching of a foreign language is emphasized by Stevick (1980, p.4), saying that "...success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom". Interestingly, the success of English activities conducted by a homeroom teacher is said to be closely related to the teacher's skill not in English, but his/her class management: the key to success in EAJES is how successful the homeroom is created as a coherent group. According to the new course of study effective in 2010, in EAJES, homeroom teachers are encouraged to play the role of main instructors instead of ALTs (assistant language teachers skillful in English). The harmonious relation between the teacher and students and between students themselves create a higher comfort level in class, where all members experience no undue tension and feel relaxed enough to be outspoken. English activities, in such a class, are most likely perceived to be going well.

Moon (2000) raises three factors--a sense of security, a sense of self-esteem, and confidence--in order to develop a positive classroom atmosphere. She suggests:

In our lives, we are affected by the atmosphere in which we work and the way people behave towards us..... . If the atmosphere is warm and relaxed, people around us are friendly and supportive and we sense that they value us, we feel more confident and secure. This can affect our desire to participate in events. It is the same with the classroom. If there is a friendly atmosphere in the classroom and the teacher and pupils get on well together, then they will both feel more secure and learning is more likely to be encouraged. (p.44)

Group dynamics elaborate on how a group influences the extent to which each individual

student engages in learning and also how the teacher can promote group development for efficient learning. Researchers (e.g., Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Eharman & Dörnyei, 1998; Dörnyei, 1997) suggest, from the perspective of group dynamics, that what is happening in the language classroom makes a significant difference in language class properties. Summarizing their points, there are mainly five properties influenced by class dynamics: 1. the level of confidence and satisfaction for both students and teachers, 2. the level of co-operation between students, 3. the relationships with their classmates and teacher, 4. the order and discipline in class, and 5. the level of motivation. These are impersonal and interpersonal conditional levels and they all have a crucial impact on communication among students in the classroom. Since one of the most important goals of EAJES, prescribed in a course of study effective in 2010, is to nurture one's basis of communication ability, these five are essential to achieve this goal. The basis of communication abilities aimed in EAJES is composed of three elements: 1. positive attitudes toward communication by using foreign language, 2. being familiar with sounds of a foreign language, and 3. awareness toward language and different cultures (Kan, 2008). It is also argued that students in class are influential to each other in terms of willingness to communicate (Kang, 2005). Hence, close attention to classroom events help improve students' attitudes toward communication with other students, and it possibly creates smoother paths to goal-achievement in EAJES.

Classroom dynamics influencing motivation in English activities

Motivation is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important key success factors. For Japanese children engaged in EAJES, there is no immediate need to succeed in learning English, but the long-term results from EAJES is that children have a quality start by enjoying English and they will pursue a lifelong learning of English, which definitely requires perpetuating motivation. Enjoyable, fun and interesting learning experiences are essential prerequisites for elementary school students who first encounter English. Without

such a learning experience, it sometimes could be just a traumatic experience detrimental to the subsequent learning. While providing enjoyable and fun activities for children seems a powerful yet simple process to motivate them to engage in the activities. and, in fact, many teachers are intent on designing enjoyable classes, it does not encompass everything as a major incentive for learning English. In the two-dimensional classification of motivational model by Hayamizu (1998), this type of motivation is called quasi intrinsic motivation, assumed to be caused by superficial fun. It is, for example, a case when a teacher gives entertaining activities in class and, as a result, children are absorbed in them and feel motivated to learn English, but once the teacher's arrangement disappears, so does their motivation. Hence, considering the continuous learning of English from elementary school through junior and senior high school, and possibly even college, motivation should be deeply internalized in one's personal affective state.

Class dynamics contribute to intrinsic motivation, which possibly inspires students to learn English in the long-run. Dörnyei (1994) conceptualizes motivation in three levels: language level, learner level, and learning situation level. The learning situation level is further categorized into three: course-specific motivational components, teacher-specific motivational components, and group-specific motivational components. The previously mentioned motivation, caused by a class designed to be attractive to students, can be one of the course-specific motivational components, while group-specific motivational component is directly grounded in class dynamics. Group-specific motivational components are discussed in relation to the influence of educational milieu, such as goal-orientedness, norm and reward system, group cohesiveness and classroom goal structure. Among these, group cohesiveness is most closely related to EAJES, as evident in many teachers' reports and acknowledgement from empirical facts. In the definition by Eharman and Dörnyei (1998), cohesiveness is the "magnetism" or "glue" that holds the group together and maintains the group as a system; cohesiveness corresponds to the extent to which individuals feel a strong identification with their group (p.136). They also mention that cohesiveness is caused by a

sense of liking among group members based on the perception of similarity and mutual acceptance. Eharman and Dörnyei (1998) clearly argue as follows:

a positive and accepting group atmosphere have a beneficial effect on the morale, motivation, and self-image of its members, resulting in positive attitudes toward the second language and the language learning process.

(p.140)

In Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994), group cohesiveness is significant in motivational development in second language learning. It is no wonder that the close linkage between class management and the success of EAJES is often emphasized and worth noticing.

Cooperation among learners results from class cohesiveness and vice versa. The importance of cooperation on positive attitudes toward the learning situation, including a class group, has been widely proposed as seen in the approach, such as cooperative learning, and generates many kinds of techniques available in class. What are the positive influences of cooperation on group-specific motivation in learning a foreign language? Dörnyei (1998) suggests several helpful functions of cooperation for motivational learning: (1) fostering class group cohesiveness by depending on each other and sharing common goals, (2) raising students' expectancy of success by knowing the possibility of counting on their peers, (3) achieving both academic and social goals effective in learning and responding to students' need for belonging, (4) pulling students along by a sense of obligation and morale, (5) increasing one's effort by knowing the necessity of one's unique contribution for the group to succeed, (6) giving a positive emotional tone by generating less anxiety and stress, (7) providing autonomy by having students work without immediate supervision of the teacher, (8) giving an experience of satisfaction by the shared experience and the joint celebration, and (9) increasing the significance of effort relative to ability by

promoting effort-based attributions. As for EAJES, autonomy mentioned in (7) may not apply to the case because a homeroom teacher basically supervises the class and there are not enough opportunities for children to engage in an activity completely free of the teacher's supervision. However, a small group work is a common practice, and the implication here is the importance of abstaining from directly supervising cooperative work in a small group.

Group formation for class dynamics based on intermember relations and group norms.

Intermember relations discussed in class dynamics can be just as valid for a classmate's relationship in EAJES. In Japanese elementary school, class formation is officially completed as a homeroom class in which children spend most of school life studying almost all the subjects, including English activities, and participating in their homeroom activities. In a study of class dynamics, however, differentiating between attraction and acceptance in the class linkage is a requisite issue. Acceptance refers to a feeling toward another individual that is non-evaluative in nature and has nothing to do with likes and dislikes, but rather involves an unconditional positive regard with all his or her values and imperfection (Ehman & Dörnyei, 1998, p.115). Being an intermember requires other members to accept the whole person, including any unattractive aspect of the person. In many classroom settings it may be that students find good points of other students and are attracted toward them, and, as a result, good human relationships among students are favorably formed in class; however, this type of relationship based on attraction level, rather than acceptance, is not powerful enough to generate class dynamics to effectively function for better learning.

How could a teacher have a classroom made up of members related based on acceptance for the best use of class dynamics? Some factors included in EAJES are considered to be effective to enhance acceptance in class and available as a conscious strategy to make the

class acceptance-relations. Acceptance is basically attributed to sufficient information about others, and several other factors are also suggested for membership affiliation (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Hadfield, 1992). Among those, the most available and applicable to EAJES are the four factors: proximity, contact, interaction and cooperation.

The first one, proximity in a classroom, is physical distance created by seat formation or a communicative task requiring a face-to-face contact. This makes a difference in building relations between students. In many English activities, unlike other subjects, it is common to have a spacious room by moving the desks and chairs to the back of the room, or out of the room, so that students can move around to communicate with others, free from fixed seat positions. This allows a student to have a physically flexible communication beyond the boundaries of limited neighbor classmates in proximity. It also enhances their physical closeness to others, as well as their affective one. Dörnyei and Murphey suggest that not having desks separating people from one another can sometimes create a feeling of closeness and enhance interpersonal communication (2003, p.81).

Relating to proximity, contact is an integral part of EAJES, since one of the goals clarified in a course study is, as previously mentioned, to nurture a base of communicative ability. In accordance with the goal, EAJES revolves around students' contact indispensable for communicative tasks. Without contact, it is not too much to say that EAJES can hardly achieve the goal to a satisfactory level.

Interaction is also essential in EAJES, as the subpart of communication, which is a more developed form of one-way communication, and, at the same time, a natural and authentic way of communication in daily life. One of the most typical and common activities practiced in many classes is a show-and-tell in which students make a speech about themselves using English and then show an object or a picture in front of the class. Self-expression in English and speech attitudes are emphasized first and foremost in this presentation; however, it should not end in just giving a speech without the establishment

of interaction between a speaker and audience. For example, students engaged in EAJES commonly make a two-sentence patterned speech such as, "This is my cat. I like her very much." One thing to be noted in this case is that a teacher always needs to encourage the whole class to respond to the speech, asking even a very simple question, like "What is her name?" or "How old is she?" This encouragement ensures success in interaction of at least *three-time exchanges between a speaker and the audience.*

Cooperation is of importance in EAJES, as was previously discussed in relation to motivation. Focusing on the benefit in terms of acceptance in class, affective bonds between students are realized through cooperation. Therefore, game or group work requiring cooperation is effective not only in improving motivation, but also in promoting bonding.

In forming an effective class, there should be a rule to which class members agree and follow to strive for the same goal, which is learning. In addition, the rule ought to be accepted and regarded as appropriate by students instead of just being imposed by the teacher (Levine & Moreland, 1990). Regarding EAJES, the stereotyped rules employed in many classes, sometime called "four promises," are "Eye contact," "Big smile," "Clear voice," and "Listen carefully," although the expressions may vary slightly from class to class. A repeated reminder of these rules is a must-do for teachers, since these rules are important, but simple enough that students could pay less attention to them. The rules are also directly related to students' behavior in class and the communicative tasks in which they engage; therefore, even though teachers in EAJES should create a care-free climate that accepts any mistakes and errors in English use, it is important for them to alert every individual who fails to follow them in order for norms to be long-lasting and effective.

Conclusion

This paper discussed class dynamics generated in EAJES in relation to the developmental stage of children in 5th and 6th grades and also the mutual effects between

EAJES and class dynamics. As children in this age group build their self-concept through peers in a class group, which determines their behavior in class and attitudes toward learning, class dynamics promote positive communicative and motivational attitudes in EAJES. At the same time, EAJES provides an excellent opportunity through various activities to a class as to generate effective class dynamics.

It is suggested that EAJES could create multiplier effects on the development of both individuals and a class group and also possibly promote other school activities including other subjects by class dynamics. The effect of EAJES actually went beyond what teachers and researchers originally expected in the way that it has a marked effect on class dynamics assumed to be effective on communication and motivational development and potentially bears the good ripple effects in all education. Without attention to a class where EAJES actually takes place, the base of communicative ability is never cultivated enough to meet the goal of EAJES.

References

- Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K.A. (1994). Motivation, self-confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. *Language Learning*, 44(3), 417-448.
- Damon, W., & Hart, D. S. (1988). *Self-understanding in childhood and adolescence*. New York: Cambridge University.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 78. (3), 273-284.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1997). Psychological processes in cooperative language learning: Group dynamics and motivation. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, 482-493.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

- Dörnyei, Z. and A. Malderez. (1997). Group dynamics and foreign language teaching. *System*, 25, 65-81.
- Dörnyei, Z. and T. Murphey. (2003). *Group dynamics in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Ehrman, M. and Z. Dörnyei. (1998). *Interpersonal dynamics in second language education: the visible and invisible classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hadfield, J. (1992). *Classroom Dynamics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hayamizu, T. *Jiko keisei no shinri (Psychology of building self)*. Tokyo: Kanekoshobou
- Johnson, D.W. and R.T. Johnson. (1995). Cooperative learning and nonacademic outcomes of schooling. In J.E. Pedersena and A.D. Digby (Eds.) *Secondary school and cooperative learning*. New York: Garland.
- Kan, M. (2008). *Shogakou gaikokugo katsudou (eigo katsudo) no shido (Teaching in foreign language activities 《English activities》 in elementary school)*. *Shido to hyouka*, 2009, February, 31-35.
- Kang, S-J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System*, 33, 277-292.
- Levine, J.M. and Moreland, R.L. (1990). Progress in small group research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 41, 584-634.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008). *Shogakou shido youryou gaikokugokatsudou eigohan (A course of study in elementary school: Foreign language activities. English version)*. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/gai.pdf
- Moon, J. (2000). *Children Learning English*. Oxford: Macmillan
- Stevic, E.W. (1976). *Teaching Languages: A way and ways*. Rowley: Newbury House.