

“What we have here is a problem of communication”

The Sheriff in Cool Hand Luke

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This paper is dedicated to Ajarn Dr. Kanda Sitachitta

1. The Lockstep Waltz¹

If we pop our head into any classroom, we may well hear the steady beat of the Lockstep Waltz. Lockstep, because although the students may vary widely in ability, they are all required to learn at the same rate. Waltz, because the interaction between the teachers and students can be broken down into units which consist of three parts :

- 1) a stimulus by the teacher
- 2) a response by a student or students
- 3) a confirmation or correction by the teacher

This particular example is taken from Iran² and the first two units have been marked ; the reader may like to mark the other units.

I am indebted to Paul Nation, English Language Institute, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand and Andy Dunlop, King Mongkut Institute of Technology, Dhonburi, Thailand for many of the ideas on communication games.

Teacher	Students
right look at the picture at the top right hand side whats this	
its a spade yes/whats it made of	thats a spade
yes	made of
thats right so a spade is made of metal and wood/ what about your desk whats the desk made of	its made of metal and wood
made of desk the desk the desk is made of metal and wood look at the picture underneath the two top pictures whats that picture of	metal and wood
its a tractor yes and we said that the tractor is supported by its	its a tractor
its wheels yes and I am supported by my	wheels
my feet my legs yes	foot

The one-two-three rhythm appears to be very satisfying to both teacher and student and has been well-documented in the classroom³. However, certain problems arise:

1) The students vary in ability but are all required to learn at the same rate, hence the lockstep.

2) The teacher does about two-thirds of the talking. This means that even for choral drills, each student would speak for only 15 minutes in a 45 minute class. For individual work with a class of 30, each student would have 30 seconds for his part of the waltz.

3) The language is not being used for communication but for exemplification and practice. "What's this?" is not a real question because it is being used for repetition work and the teachers and students already know the answer. This type of drill is a necessary and useful part of language teaching but it holds two dangers: first, that the teacher loses the correct stress and intonation in the practice; secondly, that the teacher does not move towards a more communicative type of language practice.

4) The practice reinforces the traditional pattern of teacher-student roles and does not place the responsibility for learning where it belongs - with the student.

5) Any interest aroused by the lockstep waltz is likely to be based on the class being able to fall asleep while they continue the dance.

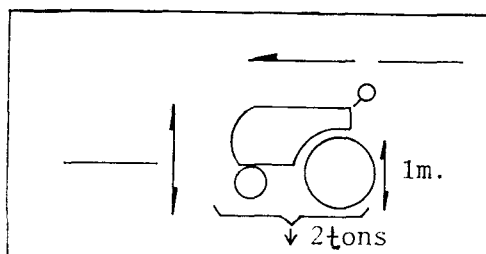
it
two
to

takes
tango

If you have performed the above communication game correctly, you will no doubt agree not only that it takes two to tango but that if information is divided between two people, the only way to share it is by communicating. However, we do not want to tell the student what to communicate but rather to cue him: diagrams and tables provide an easy way of doing this.

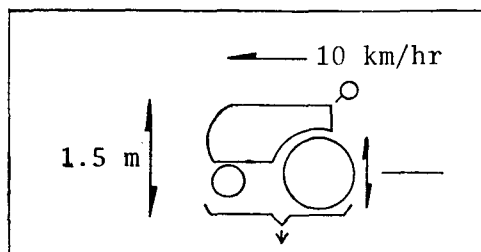
Student A

Chiangmai	
population	_____
_____	400 m.



Student B











Data on	_____
_____	200,000
altitude	_____



The students work in pairs and have to communicate the information in English without showing each other their sheets until they are completed. This technique mitigates the above problems respectively in the following manner :

- 1) Students work at their own pace
- 2) The amount of talking by students is increased
- 3) The task is essentially communicative
- 4) The teacher becomes a learning manager and adviser
- 5) The technique encourages relevant and enjoyable language use

Many variations and extensions of the technique are possible. For example, students decide whether their sheets contain the same or different information :

Student A			Student B		
1. 	2. 	3.	1. 	2. 	3.
 	 T	etc.	 	 S	etc.

Students share information and then perform a ranking exercise :

Student A	Student B
1. wooden bed (15 kg) 2. electric lamps (5 kg each) 3. colour TV (20 kg) etc.	1. warm coat (1 kg) 2. bottles of beer (1 kg each) 3. bags of charcoal (2 kgs each) etc.

The students are told they are shipwrecked and can only take 20 kg of supplies onto a desert island. Each pair decides on their list of supplies by sharing the information, compares with the lists of other students, explains their choices and so on.

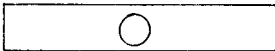
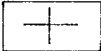
The Syllabus Samba – a dance for three

The results of a piece of research on communication games for the teaching of reading⁴ indicated that compared with more traditional methods :

- 1) they encourage better general reading comprehension and more positive attitudes to learning
- 2) they were no better than traditional methods in respect of oral communication
- 3) they were not as good as traditional methods for speed reading and mastery of the course syllabus

It would seem wise, therefore, to maintain what is best of traditional methods and to integrate communication games into the syllabus. In this way, the student would learn language points in the familiar way and then move on to a game to ensure communicative practice of what has been learned. This involves more careful selection of diagrams and tables and design of the game in order to cue

appropriate language patterns. A simple technique is to provide one student with the diagram or table and the other with a description including the language which the teacher wishes to practice. The students must decide if the description is correct or not :

Student A	Student B
1. 	1. a circle is inside a rectangle
2. 	2. a division sign is outside a circle

In the final game illustrated in the appendix, the same technique is applied. The section in the box has been added under the table in order to allow greater control of the language patterns cued by the game. The game fits into the syllabus in the following manner⁵ (representing a week with 3 teaching and¹ lab hour):

Oral Introduction	Writing	Reading	Listening Lab	Communication Game
{much slightly} {greater larger smaller} than.. compared with ...	comparison paragraphs Similarly In the same way	passage including comparatives	drills and listening passage on comparatives	

Students works in groups of three and after sharing the information, check their answers with the key which also includes a short reading exercise (see appendix). They then write the paragraph and pass it on to another student to check before either handing it to the teacher or comparing it with an example paragraph.

The above examples are taken from a notional syllabus for agriculture students but the techniques can easily be applied to a structural syllabus and even to such an esoteric subject as English for Ballroom Dancing – hopefully the lockstep waltz will not be the last.

Notes

1. See, for example, "Group Work and Communicative Competence in the ESOL Classroom", Long, M.H., in (Eds) Burt, M. and Dulay, H. "On TESOL" 1975.
2. Recorded at University of Tabriz, Iran. Class of 31 students.
3. "Towards an Analysis of Discourse", Sinclair, J. and Coulthard, R.M., O.U.P. 1975.
4. "The Use of Communication Games in the Teaching of Reading", Palmer, A.S., RELC Seminar on Reading Development, 23-27 July 1974.
5. Taken from the second semester English course at Mae Jo College of Agricultural Technology.

Appendix

Section 5 : Speaking Communication Game
Sheet A

	1971	1972	1973
Rice	378.2		
Tobacco			
Maize + Sorghum			

Rice : 517.9, 379.5
 Tobacco : '72 - much smaller than '71
 '73 - slightly smaller than '71

Instructions :

1. Share the information.
2. Do not show your sheet.

Unit : million baht

Source : _____

Title : _____

Now write a paragraph. Compare the increase in rice production 1971-3 with the increase in maize and sorghum production 1971-3.

Sheet B

	1971	1972	1973
Rice			
Tobacco	28.9		
Maize + Sorghum			

Tobacco : 21.6, 24.3
 Maize + Sorghum : '72 - small compared with '71
 '73 - large compared with '71

Instructions :

1. Share the information.
2. Do not show your sheet.

Unit : _____

Source : National Statistics Office

Title : _____

Now write a paragraph. Compare the increase in rice production 1971-3 with the increase in maize and sorghum production 1971-3.

Sheet C

	1971	1972	1973
Rice			
Tobacco			
Maize + Sorghum	238.4		

Maize + Sorghum : 298.2, 152.2
 Rice : '72 - slightly larger than '71
 '73 - much greater than '71

Instructions :

1. Share the information.
2. Do not show your sheet.

Unit : _____

Source : _____

Title : Major Agricultural Products of Nakhon Sawan by value

Now write a paragraph. Compare the increase in rice production 1971-3 with the increase in maize and sorghum production 1971-3.

Section 5 : Speaking Answer Key

Now check your answer with this table and then use the information to correct the mistakes in the passage below :

	1971	1972	1973
Rice	378.2	379.5	517.9
Tobacco	28.9	21.6	24.3
Maize + Sorghum	238.4	152.2	298.2

Table 1

Unit : million baht

Source : National Statistics Office

Title : Major Agricultural Products
of Nakhon Sawan by value.

Table 1 shows the major agricultural products of Nakhon Srithammarat by value based on data from the National Statistics Office. Both rice and tobacco show an increase in production whereas maize and sorghum show a decrease in production. Rice production increased slightly in 1972 and much more in the following year. Tobacco production decreased in 1972 and decreased again in 1973. The production of maize and sorghum was relatively large in 1972 and relatively small in 1973.