

A Preliminary Study of the Effectiveness of Applying Board Games for Language Acquisition

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Introduction

Second language communication classes, by definition, are intended to develop and improve communication skills in a second language. Students need to acquire knowledge in the language they are studying and to acquire facility in using the language as a communication tool. It is common to provide lexical items and models of how communication transpires, in the form of dialogues and listening exercises to practice, in the hope that learners will eventually be able to use the second language in a natural unrehearsed manner. For communication classes, it is akin to a spectrum with studying lexical items, and memorised phrases and dialogues at one end and producing spontaneous improvised speech at the other.

Task-based language learning (TBL), using tasks “an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (Bygate et al.), attempts to bring these needs into alignment. A logical step in learning how to use a language to achieve specific results, tasks can become limited within the confines of their models (Ellis: 606). This result is understandable in the context of classroom language study due to a classroom at best imitating the natural environment of the target language. Providing tasks that have meaning for learners is imperative. According to Willis & Willis (p.13) “without engagement, without genuine interest, there can be no focus on meaning or outcome.” They continue, “Learners have to want to achieve an outcome, they have to want to engage in meaning”. Recognizing these circumstances, there was an interest to develop a task-based English communication program that engaged learners interest and engendered a natural communication environment. Additionally, minimizing the confines attached to tasks and encouraging as wide an application of communicative acts as possible was part of that goal. In effect creating a classroom as far to the improvisation end of the spectrum as realisable.

Acknowledging the above issues, it was decided to create a year-long intermediate level general communication program, Boardtalk, that encouraged a language use environment as native-like as achievable. Competitive board games were employed as the medium of study

while applying a task based methodology hoping to encourage unrehearsed exchanges with as few confines as possible. Choosing competitive board games necessitates a multiple layering of tasks; the participants have the task of learning the rules for each game, the task of mastering the tasks required by each game in order to play, (always working in pairs or teams) the task of working with a partner to make all decisions during play, and the overarching task of each team competing to win the game. In short, preparation and partnership with the goal of prevailing in shared objectives utilizing English.

Boardtalk

Program Overview

The program, “Boardtalk”, was designed as a year-long, two fifteen week semester intermediate level course of study. The first semester consists of three modules. The first and second modules of playing the board games, UPWORDS and SCRABBLE, and the third of producing an original board game utilizing English or the English alphabet in some manner. The second semester consists of four modules each one based on a different board game; Pictionary Jr., Around The World, Clue, and Monopoly.

All modules consist of learning each game’s rules from the actual rules included with the game. Mastering of the rules, which in some cases is challenging even for native speakers, is reinforced by providing a list of study questions for each game from which a test of each board game’s rules is later constructed. Passing the test (70% or higher) from the provided study questions on each games rules is required in order to participate. The tests operate as a gatekeeper to participation rather than a goal in themselves.

During all modules the students make a continually expanding list of phrases used and learned while playing all games and are encouraged to internalize them. Some of these phrases will be applicable to all or most of the games, some will be specific to a few or only one of the games. When participants have utterances they wish to make, but find that they cannot express them in English during play, they are expected to write them down in Japanese, translate them into English after class, and include them on the list of phrases for play for next class.

In each module students are required to answer questions that encourage metacognitive understanding of language skills being applied and developed while playing each of the games. The questions require having students produce self-analysis of the skills needed and enhanced by mastering each game. In each game module the students are required to explain in their own English; what the particular game is, how it is played, what skills are needed to be successful,

what they learned from playing the game, what language skills improved by playing the game, and what is their advice for winning the game. This engenders deeper understanding and appreciation of the skills they are employing and developing while engaged in play.

There are additional assignments where the students are requested to do comparison/contrast reports on the games at the end of both semesters. This works as a method to tie together and further appreciate all the skills and knowledge realised over the course of study.

In addition to making individual reports answering the above questions, students are also required to work in pairs to produce "pair reports". One such example taken from the UPWORDS module,

"For this report you are required to work together with a partner (in English) to produce a report on UPWORDS by synthesizing your individual papers into a new one. Work together to decide how to combine your papers into a new report that integrates both. The goal should be a paper that uses the best of each individual report to produce a new report that is superior to the originals. The focus should be on mixing together ideas to produce a new synthesized paper that is written again rather than pasting together different sections of the original reports." (Levy. p.16)

These assignments encourage the students to discuss metacognitive features of the program in a personal manner. Working with a partner to produce a report is a beneficial activity not commonly assigned but has application to future possible work environments.

There are also different game-specific assignments that will be detailed in the descriptions of each module. These are supportive study assignments to help acquire skills that broaden knowledge to apply in the games.

Program Module Descriptions

UPWORDS

UPWORDS, a simplified version of SCRABBLE created for children, is a board game in which the participants construct crosswords from randomly selected letters. In UPWORDS competitors create a growing crossword by attaching a new word to a previously made word in the crossword that incorporates one letter from a word on the board, by extending a previously made word that attaches letters to the front and or back of the word, or by stacking different letters on top of the letters of a previously played word as long as at least one letter remains

from before modifying the word (ie: “mail” into “tail” or “garlic”).

This last quality, “stacking”, is unique to UPWORDS and provides an opportunity to consider vocabulary from playfully child-like and extremely flexible awareness perspectives that are never encountered in standard language study. In the above example of a “turn” changing “mail” into “tail”, by stacking a “t” on top of a “m”, the player discerned and produced the minimum morpheme shift that resulted in a completely new word from the existing word. This is a sophisticated cognitive process that a young native speaker learning or “playing” with a language might do but would not normally take place in typical study and learning of a language. In the example of changing “mail” into “garlic” the participant recognized points of intersection of letters between two completely different words and by “stacking” a “g” over the “m”, a “r” over the “i”, and the adding “i” and “c” to the end of the previous word made a completely different word. This action necessitates sophisticated vocabulary knowledge, perception, and cognitive flexibility.

Successfully playing requires focus on cultivating excellent spelling skills in UPWORDS and SCARBLE. UPWORDS allows players to remove incorrectly spelled words without losing your “turn” which encourages risk-taking, self correction and discussion of words and spelling between partners.

In the UPWORDS module there are prefix study assignments to encourage expanded understanding of word transformations. This is often the first time that prefixes are specifically studied.

SCRABBLE

SCRABBLE, the original board game that UPWORDS is derived from, is a crossword forming game. There is no stacking of pieces but letters are assigned different values based on their difficulty of usage and the board also has four kinds of special bonus scoring spaces. There are locations that double or triple the value of the letter placed on them and there are locations that double or triple the value of the entire word containing a letter on the location.

Playing to most effectively integrate the maximum scoring opportunities of placing high value letters on the spaces that increase individual letter scores and playing for words that additionally incorporate spaces that multiply the value of an entire word involve the application of multiple cognitive aptitudes. These attributes encourage participants to deeply consider the global placement of words and letters and the words they can make within such constraints, in order to maximise scoring opportunities.

There is a high level of strategic planning both offensive and defensive through letter and word selection and placement that comes to bear on successfully playing. This quality requires and encourages great flexibility and creativity in conceiving of additions to the crossword.

There are assignments on suffixes during this module that again expand understanding of word structure and grammatical transformations of vocabulary.

Board Game Project

The final module of the first semester is devoted to the creation of an original board game that incorporates the English alphabet in some manner. In groups the students are encouraged to be as creative as possible with the only condition being that the English alphabet is used somehow in the game. Some class time is devoted to discussing what constitutes a board game, and the need to have some novel aspect that can be successfully repeated while delivering similar yet unique results each time the game is played. Three class periods are devoted to groups working, in English, to think up and make a game. The groups may require outside class time to work during which the groups of students are encouraged to work in English, but by its nature cannot be directly enforced. Of course the model of crossword games from the first two modules are in the front of their minds, but participants are prevailed on to not repeat a similar model.

The groups are required to produce a complete board game with all of the pieces and equipment required to play it, a full explanation of the game's objectives, and instruction sheet for play and determining the winner. Each group is required to prepare a presentation to present the game to the teacher and class in full "sales team role play" as if they are attempting to promote the game to a company for production and sale in a store. As part of the presentation they must explain the objective and rules of the game and play it for the class as well.

Instructions for each game are distributed to all class members to learn in order to play and critique each team's original game in the following, final class meeting of the semester.

PICTIONARY Junior

PICTIONARY Junior, the first module of the second semester of the program, is derived from the original board game PICTONARY. The only difference from the original version is the level of difficulty of the vocabulary used. In this game teams compete to sketch vocabulary items in order to compel participants to correctly guess the item within a one minute time limit. The individual drawing, the "picturist", can sketch a picture of the actual item or representations of the sound or sounds necessary to produce an utterance of the item. For items that are easily rendered

directly, simply sketching the item is effective. For items that are more abstract, sketches aimed at reproducing sounds may be more effective. If the item is “elephant” drawing an elephant would suffice. If the item is somewhat abstract for example, “handsome”, rather than trying to depict “handsome” itself, it may be easier to prompt the players to say the word by drawing the sketch of a hand “+” the sketch of the sun together to produce the sounds (hand + sun). Some items may require a combination of techniques, for example; a pig “+” an upward pointing arrow “+” a truck to form “pick-up truck”.

Competing in this game encourages constructing very creative homophone combinations, intuitive leaps of thought that align with or are English derived and novel combinations of sounds and images. The picturist can not speak, gesture or use letters or numbers - only draw. The pressure of watching the one-minute timer run-down also creates an opportunity to learn to adapt to an environment necessitating creative thinking and generating language output while highly stressed.

The vocabulary used in the game is very broad and falls into many categories taken from all aspects of everyday life that a typical young person in a native English speaking environment would encounter. Many of the vocabulary items proffered are very commonly known colloquialisms to native speakers but would never appear in a typical English as a Second Language or Foreign Language study program.

Any items encountered for the first time and items that competitors could not answer successfully are assigned as homework to study. In the following class the words are reviewed with the students giving definitions, sentences using the word and pronunciation in English along with a drawing, preferably a “sounds” representation of the item.

Around the World

Around the world is a general trivia board game based on world culture. The participants move around a board, landing on one of the four topic categories; Culture and Customs, People and Places, Geography, and Language and answer questions, or land on one of two less frequently encountered categories; World Bank Spaces that provide information about social causes and actions taken to assist them, and World Wonder Spaces that introduce players to some of the world’s recognised wonders and the continents they are on.

When a team lands on a topic, a member of an opposing team is given the question card and must read it to the challenging team. After a team understands the question, which can require negotiation and repeating the question multiple times, the members discuss it together and

provide a group answer.

All missed and/or incorrectly answered questions and answers are recorded and researched, in English, and short explanations are written as homework. In the following class the answers are reviewed.

Clue

Clue is a board game that compels the participants to use deductive logic and reasoning to solve a crime. The board comprises nine rooms of a mansion in which a murder has taken place. Each of the rooms is the potential murder scene with six potential murderers that serve simultaneously as the participant's character playing pieces and six possible murder weapons. There is one playing card representing each character piece, room, and weapon. To start the game one card from each category is removed facedown and placed into an envelope (the case file) and placed in the center of the board. This envelope contains the murderer, weapon, and room where the murder took place. The remaining cards are shuffled together and randomly distributed to the participating teams.

The game progresses by the teams moving the character pieces on the board and entering the different rooms as they choose. Once in a room the team can ask a question proposing a weapon and murderer with the entered room as the crime scene. The other teams are required to answer in turn until one team can respond to the question by secretly displaying one card to the questioning team that disproves one of the three suggested aspects of the crime, or all teams confirm that they have none of the suggested elements. Through this process the teams attempt to identify the three cards in the envelope.

While the teams are required to provide honest information they can also control the information they reveal and by their questions misdirect the other competing teams. Logical deduction, analysis of information, controlled release of information and intentional deception all play an integral part in the negotiation processes of successfully playing.

Monopoly

Monopoly is the final module and board game of the program. By far the most complex and rules intensive board game of the program, Monopoly requires the participating teams to engage in many communicative and economic tasks. The fundamental premise is the purchase of, negotiation of, exchange of, and development of property in order to accumulate the most wealth while driving the other competitors into bankruptcy. There are also a wide range of common social, lifetime, and financial dealings encountered. The mastering of the content is

highly applicable to everyday life and is highly beneficial to improving communicative and social competence in English. The practices of buying, selling, negotiating agreements, and using numbers are of particular utility. The need to plan and execute strategy requires a great deal of communicative activity between team members and competing teams.

The original version of Monopoly could easily take a number of hours to finish, however there has been the addition of the “speed die” which makes it possible to complete a game much more quickly, often within the limits of class time. In a way Monopoly represents the culmination of the series of modules as it is the closest to real life happenings in content. The events encountered parallel everyday situations and social interrelations encouraging very lively and spontaneous exchanges.

Program Observations

Atmosphere and Assessment

This program is very different from what would be considered a typical communication class. The majority of class time, with the exception of the module making a board game, is spent engaged in playing each module’s board game.

The atmosphere is very light and high-spirited. There is usually a good amount of laughter and casual chatting while playing. The games are exciting and fun and it becomes easy for the students to forget that they are in a class at all. This situation is an objective and intended positive consequence of the program. This atmosphere strongly contributes to a low stress environment that results in natural communicative exchanges. During class time English is used as a tool to win the games. Students do require being reminded that English is the only language to be used and there is no tolerance of speaking Japanese during class time.

The class room openness is quickly adjusted to but requires reminding the students that such an atmosphere is not to be equated with lax standards. It is made clear that satisfactory standards are expected and the schedule for assignments is adhered to. The students quickly understand this when they encounter the first game rules test in the second class and later with the first written assignment.

The tests are made from ten questions taken directly from the list of rules study questions provided with each module. There can be no excuse for not being prepared and poor results are not tolerated. Scoring lower than 70% results in being “sidelined” and made to study the rules during class time rather than play. One such experience is usually all it takes for the students to

prepare properly for the tests.

The written assignments are also regarded quite seriously. Work is expected to be submitted on time and done properly. Like the first tests episode often students hand in somewhat slipshod work at first and find that it is severely marked. Students are reminded that the course while “play-based” is to be approached seriously and good performance expected. Re-writing of all assignments is allowed and encouraged. The goal is to raise their skills through repeated practice. This approach works particularly well when the students are exploring metacognitive issues and practising on how to express their thoughts while reporting on them.

In balance to a rigorous test and assignment marking approach, final grades are awarded benevolently. For tests only the highest score from retakes are factored in and only the final rewrite scores for assignments used. The students are encouraged to understand that the journey of the classes is very important but that the final achievement they display is most recognised for grading.

Another result of the friendly atmosphere is that often during playing time conversation can drift away from the game being played. This is allowed as long as the students remain in English and play not interrupted. Although it is straying from the task of playing the games, the greater goal of spontaneous communicative exchanges is taking place. The students enjoy getting to know each other more intimately than a typical class would allow.

New Playing Field

Determination is a prized and encouraged quality during class playing time. There are always random factors that play out in board games. The desire and excitement to win is always an excellent motivator. Until the very end of a game there are often reversals of position and who will win cannot be known. “Never give up” becomes a rallying cry of class time. The value of fighting to the end is understood and appreciated.

Success in board games requires skills that are not usually part of traditional academic study. Sometimes the academically weaker students are the best in this new arena allowing for a new sense of ability and confidence. Employing English purely as a communicative tool rather than a studied academic subject allows students who are not the most academically skilled an opportunity to creatively flourish and display skills that may not have been appreciated or encouraged previously. These students can see themselves in a new more positive and successful light. There is often an observable growth in their self-confidence and enthusiasm.

The academically best students sometimes display surprise and frustration at not being able to apply traditional study skills to succeed at board games. It may be the first time that they are not the best in the class due to their better academic skills. These learners are encouraged to embrace flexibility and creativity and in some cases to recognise that they may not be at an advantage in class. This change in recognition of competencies often has a noticeable positive effect on interpersonal relations between the students.

On days when students were absent and extra players were needed, and some times when students requested, I would join the games as a team partner or play alone against other teams. The opportunity to play with the instructor as a teammate or “equal” competitor is an enjoyable and useful experience. The shifting of roles in the class room allows for new communication opportunities and experience. It also allows the instructor to join in the friendly chatting that takes place during play further enhancing the friendly, natural atmosphere of the lesson.

During the progression of the semester the “Phrases for Play” list takes on increased importance as the players come to recognise the utility of using the phrases without needing to think. The language slowly becomes internalised and automatic.

UPWORDS

As noted in the module description many of the skills called upon and enhanced during game play do not fall within the domain of standard English communication programs. Creating or extending words in a crossword is easily understood by participants. Getting the players to transform words by “stacking” often requires demonstration. This is accomplished by playing example “turns” or giving advice while being an active observer. At first many students struggle with word transformations made possible by stacking but it also becomes clear that the scoring opportunities by “stacking” far exceed simple crossword building. The team that most effectively “stacks” has a much better chance of winning. Often there is a sudden moment when the students really understand the concept of “stacking” and there is a comparable sudden explosion of complexity in play.

The set of skills needed for “stacking” is sometimes more quickly demonstrated by the less academically adept players. From the beginning of the program the participants become aware that they are in a new kind of environment for learning with a new kind of playing field. Early on an atmosphere of friendly rivalry is established and there is more recognition of the ability of the academically lower performing students.

During this module there are prefix study homework assignments. During play there is a

noticeable push to recognise and attach prefixes to words.

One noted problem is the reluctance of opposing teams to check if the playing team's spelling is correct. This was rectified by requiring all teams to confirm the spelling of their play after making it. This rule is applied to SCRABBLE as well.

SCRABBLE

SCRABBLE does not allow "stacking" but because the letters have different values and the board multiple special scoring locations, the participants over time come to realize the depth of far-reaching strategies they have available to apply for success.

The players come to recognise and appreciate the opportunities at hand in relation to the potential placement of letters and words on the special scoring squares on the board. There is truly concerted effort and discussion between team members to comb their collective memories for words that can be used to best advantage from the letters at their disposal to produce the best integration of these factors for the highest possible score.

There is value in making moves that limit the possible scoring opportunities of competing teams as well. This calls on very sophisticated planning and strategy skills, and global positioning awareness of words on the whole board. Playing engenders a broad range of communicative exchanges between partners as they deliberate tactical decisions while attempting to use the letters at hand to achieve their goals.

There are homework assignments on suffixes during this module. The awareness of these transformations becomes focused on making the best additions that assist in exploiting special scoring squares as well.

Board Game Project

Making an original board game is a challenging group project. At first groups are often so intimidated that they think the task is impossible. There is class time devoted to discussing what a board game is and the importance of conceiving of a novel action of some sort that can become the basis of a game. Students often start by attempting to create a derivative of SCRABBLE but are encouraged to extend their creativity by brainstorming ideas together. Soon they realise that the possibilities for their games are limited only by their collective imaginations and almost always by the second class session devoted to the project every group has a viable idea they are pursuing.

Many of the games developed are very sophisticated and highly entertaining. Fabricating the physical games and the rules sheets are given serious effort. The quality of the created articles and the rules is reflected in assessment.

The “sales presentation role play” often becomes very entertaining as the groups have become personally invested in their creations. The class devoted to playing the respective games of all the groups is quite enjoyable.

It is quite gratifying to witness this enthusiasm and accomplishment of the students and a pleasure to be part of it.

PICTIONARY Junior

PICTIONARY Junior Is highly entertaining and exciting to play. The level of energy exhibited by the participants is always intense and, particularly as the timer runs down, can become frantic.

Most of the topics and lexical items used are familiar objects but are very often in colloquial form. The students encounter vocabulary that would most likely be encountered during a home stay. An example would be the topic clue “creepy crawlies” which means small animals that crawl or slither and an item from the topic, “daddy long legs” the colloquial name of a very common spider. This would be very easy for a young native English speaking child but very challenging for someone studying English. The participants always enjoy encountering this vocabulary and find the homework assignments on them enlightening.

Similar to the challenges in developing “stacking” skills outlined above, it often takes multiple attempts and demonstrations for the students to develop the aptitudes to make and process sound representations of items. It is also a source of genuine hilarity during competition. By the end of the module the students have learned many new lexical items and have developed and enhanced many communicative skills that cannot be directly taught from a textbook.

Around The World

Around The World requires participants to consider and discuss a broad range of topics. The requirement of having a competing team read the question, and often a hint for the answer, is helpful to promote communicative competence. When the questions are of unfamiliar topics or information it necessitates repetition and multiple clarifications while negotiating meaning to understand the questions. Often the topics are unfamiliar so these exchanges provide excellent practice for students that is similar to the experience of using English with other speakers

outside of the classroom.

Often the students must engage in deliberation and pool together any knowledge they do have on a topic to arrive at an answer. Educated guessing based on discussion is common.

The homework assignments on missed answers encourage the students to expand their knowledge of the world. Having encountered the topics in the game there is more intrinsic value to the information than if it was just encountered in a textbook.

Clue

Clue relies on deductive reasoning, logic and when possible deceitful cunning. Participants engage in a slow continuous process of elimination of potential answers but at appropriate opportunities can mislead other teams. After one or two playing sessions the participants come to realise the value of intentionally hiding information in their possession. It can also be beneficial to propose questions that are delusive. Teammates decide what information to enquire into and what information to conceal. Logic and formulating deception become themes for discussion.

Clue relies the least on luck and rewards strong analytical thinking. The participants who stay focused tend to perform best.

Monopoly

The rules for Monopoly are the most long and complicated of all the games. Having a full list of study questions from which the test is constructed gives the students a very fair opportunity to pass the rules test. By the time this module is encountered the participants are adept at studying for and passing the rules test. This represents achieving an impressive level of competence in understanding written rules and instructions.

Game play is embraced with enthusiasm as teams learn the objectives of buying and negotiating for property. The occasion of constantly negotiating costs and expenses encourages the facility of saying and using numbers while engaged in negotiations which is a very valuable facility not regularly encountered in a traditional study course. In short time the players move from difficulty using numbers and "monopoly money" to handling it as easily and quickly as they do actual currency.

The opportunities to chance upon all manner of real life circumstances associated with money exposes participants to the vocabulary of economic activity. Economic planning plays a very strong role in the game and teams engage in many discussions weighing the relative

benefits of different team members' ideas for advancing their positions.

Survey Questionnaire

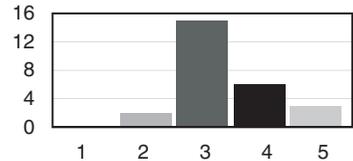
The data used in this study was collected by means of a questionnaire upon completion of the second semester of the course. The questionnaire consisted of questions scored on a five point Likert scale (1 = low, 5 = high). On the back there were also three open ended written response questions for students to expand on their thoughts about the program. (appendix) There was also one additional question given asking the students to list the skills they felt improved the most. For the purposes of this paper, only the responses to nine questions are reported upon.

There were a total of twenty-six questionnaires accumulated from two cohorts over two years. The results are given below (1 = poor, 2 = weak, 3 = good, 4 = excellent, 5 = outstanding):

1) Do you feel that this course improved your English ability?

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 2 (8%), 3 = 15 (58%), 4 = 6 (23%), 5 = 3 (12%)

average = 3.4 (good to excellent)

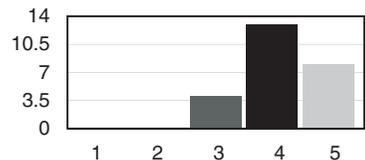


Eight percent rated their improvement at weak, fifty-eight percent of the respondents rated it as good, twenty-three percent felt it was excellent, and twelve percent rated it as outstanding. There was generally very good regard for the program with a small percent finding it nominally effective.

2) Did you enjoy using board games during class time?

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 0 (0%), 3 = 4 (16%), 4 = 13 (52%), 5 = 8 (32%)

average = 4.2 (excellent) NA = 1

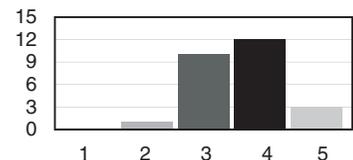


Sixteen percent rated enjoyment of class as good, fifty-two percent of the respondents rated it excellent, and thirty-two percent rated it as outstanding. The results display a very high regard for the use of board games in class. Clearly the respondents enjoyed this experience very much.

3) Would you recommend this class to a classmate?

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 1 (4%), 3 = 10 (38%), 4 = 12 (46%), 5 = 3 (12%)

average = 3.7 (good - excellent)

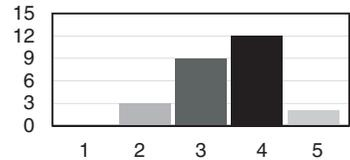


Four percent rated this as a weak class to recommend to a classmate, thirty-eight percent

rated it as good to recommend, forty-six percent rated it as excellent to recommend, and twelve percent rated it as outstanding to recommend to a classmate. Considering the almost constant “treadmill” of work expected in this program it is a very positive result. Many students commented on the value they appreciated in doing the assignments.

4) Did you learn new communication skills?

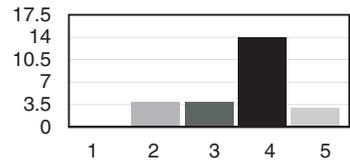
1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 3 (12%), 3 = 9 (35%), 4 = 12 (46%), 5 = 2 (8%),
 average = 3.5 (good - excellent)



Twelve percent considered this class weak for learning new communication skills, thirty-five percent rated it good for learning them, forty-six percent rated it as excellent for it, and eight percent rated it as outstanding for it. The overall result for learning new communication skills was very good, but it is somewhat surprising that twelve percent of respondents considered the program weak for this.

5) Was making combined reports a good learning exercise?

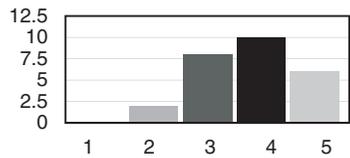
1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 4 (16%), 3 = 4 (16%), 4 = 14 (56%), 5 = 3 (12%),
 average = 3.6 (good - excellent) NA = 1



Sixteen percent of respondents considered making combined reports a weak learning exercise, sixteen percent considered it a good exercise, fifty-six percent rated it excellent, and twelve percent rated it as outstanding. The overall rating of this exercise was very good but again a significant number rated it low. In the case of this exercise it may be due to the higher skilled participants not liking to work with the lowest skilled members of the class or that it was too difficult for the weakest members. It should be noted that sixty-eight percent rated it very highly.

6) Did playing board games improve your English stamina?

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 2 (8%), 3 = 8 (31%), 4 = 10 (38%), 5 = 6 (23%)
 average = 3.8 (good - excellent)

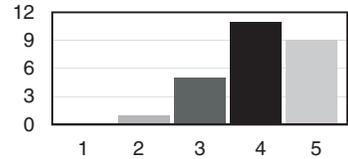


Eight percent rated playing board games as weak for improving English stamina, thirty-one percent ranked it as good for it, thirty-eight percent ranked it as excellent for it, and twenty-three percent ranked it as outstanding for it. The overall rating for improving stamina was very high but a small group rated it as weak.

7) Was making a board game a useful exercise?

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 1 (4%), 3 = 5 (19%), 4 = 11 (42%), 5 = 9 (35%)

average = 3.9 (excellent)

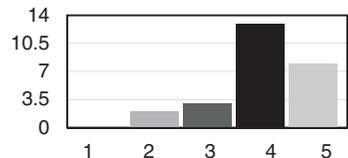


Four percent rated making a board game weak as a useful exercise, nineteen percent ranked it as good, forty-two percent ranked it as excellent, and thirty-five percent ranked it as an outstanding exercise. Clearly this was a highly valued exercise. Participants as a group, seventy-seven percent, considered making their own board game an excellent to outstanding exercise.

8) Ability to communicate ideas to others

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 2 (8%), 3 = 3 (12%), 4 = 13 (50%), 5 = 8 (32%)

average = 4.0 (excellent)

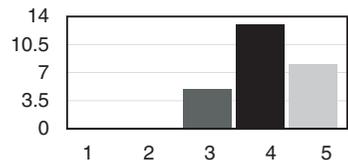


Eight percent ranked playing board games and the program of study as weak at developing the ability to communicate ideas to others, twelve percent rated it as good for it, fifty percent rated it excellent for it and, thirty-two percent rated it as outstanding for it. Clearly a large group, eighty-two percent, considered this program as an excellent to outstanding way to improve their ability to communicate their ideas to others.

9) Does studying game instructions improve English ability?

1 = 0 (0%), 2 = 0 (0%), 3 = 5 (19%), 4 = 13 (50%), 5 = 8 (32%)

average = 4.1 (excellent)



Nineteen percent of respondents ranked studying game instructions as good at developing English ability, fifty percent ranked it as excellent, and thirty-two percent rated it as outstanding for it. The incentive of needing to master rules in order to participate in class had a powerful positive effect. All participants ranked the exercise as good or better and eighty-two percent considered it excellent or outstanding which is a powerful indication of perceived value. The reading material being very topic focused and only a tool for further activity, rather than a comprehension goal in itself, and providing a list of study questions needed to be mastered for the rules quiz were probably positive factors.

Summary

From the responses it is clear that the majority of feedback to the questionnaire and the opinions regarding the course on the back of the survey were very favorable. A large majority of respondents verified having enjoyed playing board games and the atmosphere promoted by them.

Class was seen as fun and exciting. The opportunity to develop genuine friendships between members of the class was often cited. There were many expressions of gratitude for having an opportunity to be in the class. The variety of vocabulary encountered was also appreciated.

Although this program was focused on the application of English as a communicative tool and many participants reported gains in communication, there were gains reported in reading, composition, vocabulary, and listening. There was a general feeling of the work required for the program while constant was valuable and worthwhile. Reflecting on the development of skills and metacognitive perspective seemed to engage deeper appreciation of what they were doing. Some commented they found the assignments enjoyable.

In the two cohorts there were three or four students who really did not have the necessary level of competence for the class. This may explain the consistency of two or three low scoring responses and some comments relating to difficulty in negotiation of meaning focused games, specific competencies, and complaints that some of the class participants were too low to communicate with.

Accepting the above stated issues the questionnaire did receive very strong positive responses. The average score of the first question, if the course improved English ability, 3.4, is lower than the average scores for almost every other question. This is a promising score in itself but a bit surprising considering that almost all questions referring to improved competencies and skills received higher ratings. This question is also asking the broadest evaluation of the whole program which may result in a dampening of score in comparison to evaluating more narrow individual criteria.

The first tier highest ranked set of responses, 4.0 average score or higher (excellent), are as follows; enjoyed using board games during class (4.2), studying rules improves ability (4.1), and Ability to communicate ideas to others (4.0).

The enjoyment response speaks for itself - participants joyfully embraced the class room structure and regarded it as highly accommodating for learning English. The games UPWORDS, SCRABBLE, and Around the World were exceptionally popular. UPWORDS and SCRABBLE, particularly in connection with prefix and suffix study, encouraged learners to encounter deep structure of vocabulary in a very engaging low anxiety manner.

It is reassuring that the ability to communicate ideas to others received an excellent rating as well. This is the ultimate goal of the program of study. That studying game rules received an

even higher rating is also gratifying and admittedly a pleasant surprise. It bears reminding that the study of the rules for a game like Monopoly is challenging even for adult native speakers. The study of game rules became appreciated as an agent of assistance to further larger goals rather than a goal in itself. The appreciation of English as a tool to allow advancement of other goals is as well the ultimate intention of this program.

The second tier in terms of score, (3.7 - 3.9, very good - excellent) was as follows; was making a board game a useful exercise (3.9), did playing board games improve your English stamina (3.8), and would you recommend this class to a classmate (3.7).

Making a board game was rated very highly. The creative challenge in this exercise, once the initial intimidation is overcome, is enthusiastically pursued. Many of the module's results were very engaging. The role playing for demonstrating the games is often highly entertaining and there is usually a clear sense of accomplishment displayed by the groups upon submission of their games. It clearly stimulates confidence in newly discovered creative capacity by going from considering something as impossible to then respond by successfully accomplishing it. The high evaluation bares out this impression.

The high rating for improving English stamina, 3.8, also speaks for itself. The need to keep attending to the activity on the board and to keep constant strategy and planning dialogues with teammates required continuous use of English. Increased stamina in utilizing English is a noteworthy result of this course.

Ranking recommending this course to a classmate at 3.7 again attests to the positive opinion toward this program and the willingness to make a concerted effort to work outside of class by the participants. Fully aware that this course requires a constant workload it was still highly recommended.

The third tier of scores, (3.4 - 3.6, very good) were as follows; making combined reports was a good experience (3.6), new communication skills (3.5), and do you feel this course improved your English ability (3.4).

Making combined reports was rated highly. This exercise was positively approached by most students. There were instances of one partner being dominant in the exercise, usually due to superior skills, but this was usually easily realized when looking at the result and would be returned with a request to make the product more representative of both originals. Again it is clear that multiple faculties; attention span, communication skills, and comprehension all

improved significantly. Slightly lower yet still very good was, do you feel this course improved your English ability. While a very positive score in itself, as mentioned above, it is somewhat intriguing that in light of all the items with higher ratings this result was not somewhat higher. Ninety-two percent did rate it as good or better but the score was strongly weighed to the rating of three (58% chose 3 - the most among all questions) which pulled the result down compared to other scores.

Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

From the collected data it is fair to say that the application of board games as the structure for classroom activities is an idea worth promoting. The excitement and spirited embrace of playing board games by the participants was gratifying to observe. The positive regard by the participants for the contents of the program is evident. This is an unconventional program that relies on the willingness of all participants, instructors and learners, to approach learning from a new perspective.

The program requires some persistence from the instructor to make sure that only the target language is allowed in the classroom. This restriction is fundamental to fostering the cultivation of the multiple competencies enhanced. It is imperative that the participants understand that the desired gains appear most when only the target language is used.

The instructor also must make sure that class time is understood to be more than just play. This is best accomplished by maintaining high standards for rules tests and written assignments. Once the students understand that assignments must be submitted on time and that the instructor has high expectations they respond positively.

As this report represents only a broad survey of basic features and competencies regarding this study program, there are many potential avenues for further research. Each game and the competencies fostered by it could easily be the subject of more detailed study. The communicative and cognitive skills enhancement engendered from playing each game would provide extremely rich veins of language development to delve into. These are intended directions for further research.

With a large enough cohort to include for study and the resources to support it, entrance and exit competency evaluations would certainly provide very interesting results and data for potential investigations as well.

For students that tend to struggle academically, programs like this one may be a valuable addition to basic language study programs of all types. The potential and value of developing full multiple year language programs utilizing a board games based format may be a valuable addition to the language instruction profession. For learners and instructors alike, attending a class with a high level of excitement and enjoyment while effectively producing language skills improvement is worth embracing.

References

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Appendix

Intermediate Communication Questionnaire

	(low)				(high)
Do you feel that this course improved your English ability?	1	2	3	4	5
Did you enjoy using board games during class time?	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate the games for their value in learning English:					
Upwords	1	2	3	4	5
Scrabble	1	2	3	4	5
Around the World	1	2	3	4	5
Clue	1	2	3	4	5
Pictionary	1	2	3	4	5
Monopoly	1	2	3	4	5
Would you recommend this class to a classmate?	1	2	3	4	5
Did you learn new communication skills?	1	2	3	4	5
Was making combined reports a good learning exercise?	1	2	3	4	5
Did playing board games improve your English stamina?	1	2	3	4	5
Was making a board game a useful exercise?	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate your improvement in the following language skills:					
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5
Logical analysis	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to work independently	1	2	3	4	5
Comprehension	1	2	3	4	5
Attention Span	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to communicate ideas to others	1	2	3	4	5
Does studying game instructions improve English ability?	1	2	3	4	5

和文要旨

ボードゲームを活用した言語習得の有効性に関する 予備的研究

Lawrence S. LEVY

本稿では、英語によるボードゲームを授業の教材として活用し、1年間2学期制の英語中級コミュニケーションコースにおいて評価を行った予備調査の結果を提示する。本授業で使用したボードゲームは『UPWORDS』、『SCRABBLE』、『Pictionary』、『Around the World』、『Clue』、『Monopoly』であり、伝統的な英語教科の課程では生まれにくい、幅広いコミュニケーションスキルや外国語運用能力を扱うものである。受講生の自己評価によりこれらの教材は熱心に活用された。多くの受講生は積極的な社交性の向上に伴い、複数言語および認知能力の向上を示した。さらなる研究のために有力な方向性が多く確認された。

キーワード：タスクベースの学習、タスクベースのシラバス、ボードゲーム、『UPWORDS』、『SCRABBLE』、『Pictionary』、『Around the World』、『Clue』、『Monopoly』、認知技能開発