Ideas for Developing Your Own Activities

Theme:インフォメーションギャップ Information Gap

What is "Information Gap"?

You probably know the expression "information gap", which in its narrow definition usually refers to pair work activities using two different worksheets, in which students complete the missing information by asking and answering questions. But in its wider definition, it means literally "the gap in information" among people, that is, somebody has information about something that another doesn't have.

Consider an actual communication situation. An Australian student Erin is homestaying with a Japanese family, and talking with the host mother Mrs Tanaka.

田中：「エリンさんは、きょうだいは　いるの？」

エリン：「はい。兄が一人います。」

田中：「お兄さんは、何さい？」

エリン：「私より　二さい　年上で、大学一年生です。」

Before this conversation, Mrs Tanaka didn't know about Erin's brother, so there was a gap in information between Mrs Tanaka and Erin. By means of questioning and answering, the gap in information was filled.

One of the main purposes of verbal communication is to fill an information gap. By using information gap effectively in language activities, the activity will be more meaningful, motivating and closer to actual communication. You have probably found numerous activities using information gap in textbooks and other teaching materials. By analysing such activities and understanding the theory, you will be able to apply this freely in developing your own activities.

Using information gap in classroom activities

<Activity A>

1) All students are provided with Worksheet A 「木村くんの一日」.

2) Teacher asks and students answer questions referring to Worksheet A

   T:「木村くんは　何時に　起きますか？」

   S:「7時に　おきます」

Worksheet A

木村くんの一日
```
 7:00 おきます
 7:30 あさごはんを　たべます
 8:30 がっこうに　いきます
 5:00 がっこうを　でます
 5:30 ともだちと　かいものします
 6:30 うちに　かえります
 7:00 ゆうごはんを　たべます
 7:30 テレビを　みます
 9:00 べんきょうします
10:30 おふろに　はいります
11:00 インターネットを　します
12:30 ねます
```

<Activity B>

1) Students form pairs. Student 1 has Worksheet B (1), and Student 2 has B (2).

2) Students exchange information and fill in the blanks.

Worksheet B (1)

木村くんの一日 (1)
```
 7:00 おきます
 7:30 あさごはんを　たべます
_____ がっこうに　いきます
 5:00 がっこうを　でます
_____ ともだちと　かいものします
 6:30 うちに　かえります
 7:00 ゆうごはんを　たべます
_____ テレビを　みます
 9:00 べんきょうします
_____ おふろに　はいります
11:00 インターネットを　します
_____ ねます
```

Worksheet B (2)

木村くんの一日 (2)
```
_____ おきます
_____ あさごはんを　たべます
 8:30 がっこうに　いきます
 5:00 がっこうを　でます
 5:30 ともだちと　かいものします
 6:30 うちに　かえります
_____ ゆうごはんを　たべます
 7:30 テレビを　みます
_____ べんきょうします
10:30 おふろに　はいります
_____ インターネットを　します
12:30 ねます
```

Compare the above activities. In the case of the Activity A, the teacher and students are all looking at the same sheets, so there is no information gap. The reason for using Japanese here is just to practise the language, not to exchange information.

On the other hand, in Activity B there is an information gap between S1 and S2. So it can be said that Activity B is closer to actual communication, as focus is placed not only on practising the language but also on using the language to exchange meaning.

Note that activities that are closer to real communication require higher language skills of students. If language isn't used appropriately, communication will fail. They also require more strict class control skills of the teacher.

Types of information gap

There are various types of information gap you can use for language activities in your classroom:

I) Information gap between two students

  This is used in pair work activities. Activity B belongs to this type.

II) Information gap between two or more groups

  The teacher divides the class into two or more groups and gives different

  information to each group. Examples of such activities are given in Activity E.
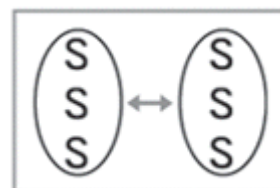
III) Information gap between one student (or the teacher) and all the other students

  This is when only one person has some information, and others have to

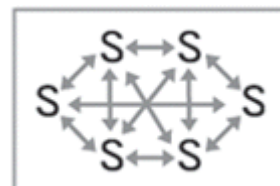 communicate to gain the information.

  Quiz activities such as 20 Questions are most typical of this form.
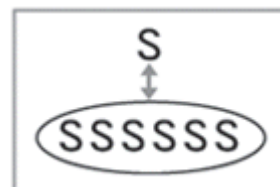
IV) Information gap among all students

  Here, each student has different information, and information is exchanged among

  the whole class.

  Interview activities are an example of these types of activities.

Compare Activity C to B. You can change the type of activity by rearranging the information.

<Activity C>

  1) Each student is given a card from Worksheet C

  2) Students complete Kimura-kun's schedule by asking each other questions

      S1 「木村くんは　何時に　何をしますか？」

      S2 「あさ 8時半に　学校に　いきます。木村くんは　何 時に　何を　しますか？」

      S1 「よる 11時に　インターネットを　します」

Worksheet C

あさ 7:00 おきます	ゆうがた 5:30 ともだちと　かいものします	よる 9:00 べんきょうします
あさ 7:30 あさごはんを　たべます	ゆうがた 6:30 うちに　かえります	よる 10:30 おふろに　はいります
あさ 8:30 がっこうに　いきます	よる 7:00 ゆうごはんを　たべます	よる 11:00 インターネットを　します
ゆうがた 5:00 がっこうを　でます	よる 7:30 テレビを　みます	よる 12:30 ねます

Sources of the information gap

In classroom language activities, the teacher usually inputs different information in order to set up a situation where communicative language practice will take place, so these information gaps are artificially created.

You can also use information gap which already exists naturally among the students, eg. private information about each student such as what they like, what they did on the weekend, their cultural background and so on.

Activities using this are even closer to real communication because the information is real, and not made up by the teacher or from a textbook. Compare Activity D to C.

<Activity D>

Students use the information to work out who went to bed the earliest/latest, who woke up the earliest/latest, and who slept the longest/shortest in the class.

1) All students are given Worksheet D.

2) They interview their classmates to find out what time they went
to bed last night and woke this morning.

3) Students use the information to work out who went to bed the earliest/latest, who woke up the earliest/latest, and who slept the longest/shortest in the class.

Worksheet D

なまえ	ねた じかん	おきた じかん	なんじかん？

Types of input for information gap activities

Information (with gaps) can be inputted in different ways. In the examples below, Activity E1 uses visual means, while Activity E2 uses audiotape.

<Activity E1>

1) Students form four groups.

2) Each group is shown one of the four pictures on Worksheet E (a). Students make notes about the picture.

3) Students form new groups of four, one from each of the former groups. In their new groups, students report on the family they saw in the picture. Group members take notes, and the group disperses.

S 「はるなさんの　かぞくは4人です。　お父さんと　お母さんと　おばあさんが　います」

4) The teacher plays the tape of Text E (b). Students listen and match what they hear to their information.

<Activity E2>

1) Students form four groups.

2) Each group listens to a different tape containing one segment of Text E (b). Students take notes about what they hear. This task is done in 4 different places in the classroom simultaneously.

3) Students form new groups of 4, one from each of the former groups. In their new group, students report on the family they heard about on the tape. Group members take notes, and the group disperses

4) The teacher gives out Worksheet E (a), and students match the information to the pictures.

Worksheet E (a)

はるなさんの　かぞく　　　みさきさんの　かぞく

ななこさんの　かぞく　　　あやかさんの　かぞく

Text E (b)

（一）私の　かぞくは　四人です。父と、母と、祖母が　います。きょうだいは　いません。

（二）私の　かぞくは　四人です。りょうしんと、弟と、私です。二人きょうだいです。

（三）私は　二人きょうだいです。姉がいます。それから、祖父と　祖母と　母がいます。

（四）私は　三人きょうだいです。兄と　妹が　います。それから　父が　います。

Application for skills focused activities

You can use information gap in activities that focus on particular language skills.

READING

<Activity F>

1) Students form pairs, and are given reading texts such as
   Worksheet F (1), and F (2) respectively.

2) They ask questions about the missing information, and fill in the blanks.

Worksheet F (1)

はじめまして！私 はあけみです。＿＿年生です。東京 にすんでいます。
毎日、＿＿で学校にかよっています。私 のかぞくは４人です。父と、母と、

Worksheet F (2)

はじめまして！私 はあけみです。高校２年生です。＿＿にすんでいます。
毎日、電車で学校にかよっています。私 のかぞくは＿人です。父と、母と、

WRITING

<Activity G>

1) Students write an essay on the theme of "Me and my family", and put their name on it.

2) The teacher collects the sheets, reads out the essays in turn, and students guess whose essay it is.

DISCUSSION/PROBLEM SOLVING

<Activity H>

1) Students form two groups. One group is given Sheet H (1), and the other H (2).

2) They read the text and memorize the content, or take notes. The content can also be given aurally using two different tapes.

3) Students form pairs, one from each group. They exchange their information and discuss the issue to find a solution.
   By creating information gap in the input the discussion will be more complicated, requiring higher language skills, and hence the task will be more meaningful.

The above activities are just examples. You can use the theory to create activities suitable to your classes.

Worksheet H (1)
さくらさんのなやみ

私は、しょうたくんと小学校のときから友だちでした。私は彼のことが、ずっと好きだったので、告白したら、彼もOKしてくれました。それからつきあいはじめました。でも、さいきん彼の好きな人が変わったみたいで、二人でいても、あまり話してくれないようになりました。また私のことを好きになってとは言いません。せめて、むかしのような友だちにもどりたいのですが、どうしたらいいでしょうか。

Worksheet H (2)
しょうたくんのなやみ

ぼくは、さくらさんのことがずっと好きでした。でもゆうきがなくて、告白できなかったんですが、彼女のほうから「好きだ」って言ってくれました。すごくうれしかったです。それからさくらさんとつきあっているのですが、さいきん彼女がほんとうにかわいくて、二人でいると、きんちょうして、じょうずに話せなくなってしまいます。彼女は、それがつまらないと思っているようです。どうしたらいいでしょうか。

This section written by Kazuhiro Isomura