The Minute Paper in EDC
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ABSTRACT
This paper discusses the development of a classroom activity, The Minute Paper (Angelo & Cross, 1993), in an English discussion class. The activity involves collecting reflection papers which include comments on the lesson and/or questions hindering them from understanding the new knowledge introduced in class. The activity is considered to be effective particularly with a group of reticent and unresponsive students when an instructor requires an additional assessment tool besides classroom observation and discussion tests. The Minute Paper activity was implemented following an instructional principle, Meaningful Learning, to improve learners' long term discussion knowledge retention.

INTRODUCTION
One of the roles that a teacher carries is to check if students received the information they learned accurately in various ways, such as by observing students' performance in group/ pair work, checking their reactions or facial expression, creating a quiz to assess students' comprehension, simply asking them if they have any questions, or a combination of everything. The importance of comprehension checking in the language classroom is widely accepted. As long as an instructor has understood what was clear and what was not for students, the instructor can reorganise and develop lesson plans to suit the students' needs in the following class. In English Discussion Class's case (hereinafter, EDC, a mandatory class for all first year students at Rikkyo University), the popular methods to assess the learners' degree of comprehension level would be with classroom observation and discussion tests. Each lesson consists of several student-centred activities, including pair and group work. This gives an instructor plenty of opportunities to monitor and assess if students can demonstrate better understanding of the subject matter of lessons. However, even an experienced teacher sometimes finds it challenging to judge if students understood the content of a lesson as intended or if they are having a burning question in their mind. What makes it more difficult, in the current teaching setting, is that it is hardly expected to receive feedback or questions verbally from students in class. Culturally, most students do not find it comfortable to speak out actively in class, especially in English.

In this paper, the Minute Paper activity-- also known as the One-Minute Paper-- was implemented and developed based on one of instructional principles, Meaningful Learning. The main aim of the Minute Paper is to assess if the new knowledge taught in class is attained and interpreted successfully in the learner's knowledge base. To be more specific, it can tell us- what students learned most and questions they are having after the lesson. The instructional principle, Meaningful Learning, emphasises that students can successfully store the new information and recall it even at a later time if the learner could relate the new information with the existing knowledge he/she already has. Brown (1994) described "Meaningful Learning" as" a process of relating and anchoring new material to relevant established entities in cognitive structure” (p.91). As a supplementary assessment tool to regular classroom observation, the Minute Paper activity was introduced to particularly quiet beginner group in EDC. The activity attempted to evaluate, after the lesson, whether students learned what they were supposed to be learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). If the activity result shows that students could not receive the information accurately, then an instructor can arrange the following week's lesson plan to re-send the information until it will make more sense to them.
The next section describes the aim of EDC and the target learners of this paper. It follows with the material and procedure of the activity in detail. The final section discusses the target group's reactions towards the Minute Paper activity and how the activity contributed to their learning development within the framework of EDC.

**CONTEXT**
EDC aims to develop the skills for having interactive discussion in English for 16 minutes. In order to achieve this goal, the course is designed to teach various types of discussion skills over two semesters, a whole academic year. At the beginning of the first semester, students are first taught the basic discussion skills, such as how to give your opinion and how to ask others to give opinion. As the course progresses, they learn more advanced knowledge to make discussions deeper and more interesting. In theory, by the end of the academic year, after building up a wealth of discussion knowledge, the students will be able to achieve the course aim mentioned above. In reality, it is not always the case that all students can intake the knowledge at the same speed. Some students find a certain class more difficult than others and they thereby require more explanation and time to understand the new information. This is because the individual's existing knowledge varies one to another.

The activity was tested with various types of learners over two semesters. In the autumn semester as a trial, the activity was tested with four groups of intermediate and higher-intermediate first-year students. Each group consisted of six to eight students. After the trial period, the amended activity was conducted in the beginner level class for 8 first-year students in the spring semester. The group was chosen for this paper as the students were particularly quiet and unresponsive in the first three lessons. For those students, it seemed to be too much to ask for demonstrating, in English, what they understood and what they wanted the instructor to explain again. The first minute paper result showed that many students in the group were experiencing the difficulty to discuss in English as follows; "How can I build up my vocabulary?", "What is the best way to improve my speaking skill with which I can speak English confidently?", "How long does it take to be able to speak better English?", "How can I express myself well to be understood by others" or "How can I come up with English words easily?". Hence, the Minute Paper was used to receive students' feedback and questions at the mid-semester to promote better learning.

**MATERIAL AND PROCEDURE**
The Minute Paper only requires a piece of scrap paper on which each student can write down their comments and questions freely. If you prefer to have a more formal sheet, a small ‘reflection sheet’ could be prepared. In either case, students are asked two major questions; 1) what is the most important thing you have learned today? and, 2) what is the question that is uppermost in your mind? The activity was implemented following the suggestions by Angelo and Cross (1993) as below.

**Step 1: Before Implementing the Activity**
Before implementing the Minute Paper activity in language classroom, clarify with the students that the feedback will not be considered as a part of their grading. Thus, it should be anonymous to receive their honest feedback.

**Step 2: Upon Implementing the Minute Paper (One week before review lesson)**
Make sure that you have enough feedback sheets and give it to students at the end of the class.
Allow them to write, for one minute or so, in the language they feel most comfortable with, either in Japanese or English.

**Step 3: After the Minute Paper**

After collecting the reflection papers, check through each response carefully, comparing with the teacher’s notes from classroom observation. Elicit any relevant questions which need to be discussed in the following class to facilitate their learning. Create a handout to make it easier to conduct a follow-up activity in a shorter time. If necessary, amend lesson plans for the following classes accordingly.

**Step 4: Follow-up Activity (Review Lesson)**

Ideally, in the following week, conduct a follow-up activity to share the students’ comments and questions in the reflection paper.

It needs to be thoroughly planned how often the Minute Paper can be conducted in a semester before implementing the activity. Angelo and Cross (1993) state that; “If Minute Papers are overused or poorly used, students will begin to view the technique as a gimmick or pro forma exercise in polling” (p.153). Considering the fact that EDC encourages teachers to teach lessons under the unified syllabus set by university, it is not feasible to conduct the activity in every lesson. In this paper, Minute Papers were given to the students a week before the review lessons, which are co-ordinated in a university curriculum to have students prepare for discussion tests. Their Minute Papers helped the instructor prepare more relevant and suitable classroom activities and material for the group at review lesson as students provided the necessary information- what they understood and they could not- through their Minute Papers in advance.

Step 4, a follow-up activity of the Minute Paper, is a fundamental part of this paper to maximise the obtained information. The follow-up activity can be conducted either as a teacher-fronted style or student-student discussion- or both of them if time permits. In teaching EDC, a key issue to be considered is how to squeeze an extra activity like the Minute Paper into a tight time slot of the university course curriculum. In fact, the follow-up activity, in either teacher fronted or student centred style, usually took only a couple of minutes as long as handout with students’ feedback and questions (see Appendix) has been prepared. If the lesson schedule is tight, have students read through the comments and questions on a handout and then give them feedback and advice for that. If you are concerned about reducing the time for student-student interactions, the follow-up activity can be turned into a learner-learner discussion. As shown in the Appendix, students discuss ideas to solve a particular discussion problem raised by their classmate(s) in previous week. During the discussion, the instructor should closely monitor and take notes in a same way as the regular discussion in class. After completing a quick discussion, the instructor can sum up the students’ ideas and, if necessary, add advice.

**VARIATIONS**

The activity was originally designed to be conducted several times during a semester to see the changes and development in the students’ discussion ability. The Minute Paper can be also used as a one-off activity. While teaching a 14-week course, you might experience a sudden change of classroom dynamics or students' attitude/performace in the middle of the course. Then that would make you wonder “What happened to those students? They used to respond and perform very well at the beginning of the course”. Carrying out the Minute Paper activity can be
a good way to approach students by involving them into creating a better classroom environment. The Minute Paper provides a means by which learners can participate in course development. Nunan (1988) claimed that “one important outcome of involving learners in ongoing curriculum development is that not only does it increase the likelihood that the course will be perceived as relevant, but learners will be sensitised to their own preferences, strength and weakness” (p.53). Of course, there is a limit to what extent an instructor can modify classroom materials and content to suit the students' preference due to the unified university syllabus. Despite this restriction, the activity might help an instructor gain better understanding of students' performance change and, hopefully, how to deal with it.

If time is an issue, an alternative way, such as an on-line written feedback, can be considered to respond to the students' questions. In EDC, all instructors send a written feedback on a university portal website every week. This can become a possible place to share the students' comments and also instructor's feedback to the reflection paper. In this way, it leaves enough time for conducting the scheduled classroom activities in regular lessons.

REFLECTIONS
Firstly, this section explains how the target group of students reacted to the Minute Paper and its follow-up activity. Then it will discuss how the implemented activity contributed to a particular group's learning development. When the Minute Paper activity was conducted, students undertook the activity seriously- some students reflected what they learned looking at the board work or flipping through the textbook to write their comments. For students, it did not seem to be an overwhelming task to write it up in their own language. The reflection paper included students' frank comments- what they understood and what they want the instructor to explain again to facilitate their learning. This was the information the instructor would not gain solely with the classroom observation.

As discussed in the Context section earlier, the Minute Paper was implemented in a class of a group of 8 beginner students. In total, the activity was conducted three times, at lesson 4, 7, and 11, in the spring semester. The result from a series of activities depicted some positive changes associate with the students' discussion skills. The first Minute Papers’ result showed that students found it most valuable to learn the basic discussion skills, such as how to give reactions, agree with others, or negotiate the meaning to be understood by classmates. The second result (see Figure 1) showed that the students acquired the skill to have a better and smoother discussion with the new knowledge, "Joining a Discussion" phrases. The final result (see Figure 2) assured the instructor that students were able to intake the new knowledge, "Connecting Ideas" and also to understand various types of discussion structure by the time of Lesson 11.

Figure 1: Sample feedback from lesson 7
- I learned how to start a discussion by saying "Can I start?"
- Our discussion went smoothly with the use of today's function phrase
- It makes easier for listeners to listen to my opinion/ question if I said "Can I make a comment?" or "Can I ask a question?" at first

Figure 2: Sample feedback from lesson 11
- I learned how to comment on the last speaker's idea along with my own idea
- I understood a new pattern of discussion- listening to other people's comment and add my opinion to it
- I learned we cannot connect our idea to others unless we listened to their opinion carefully
The activity was slightly modified in the second semester to make good use of the trial period. In the trial, during the autumn semester the obtained information from the Minute Paper was looked through by the instructor to mainly adjust the following lesson and classroom activities to suit the learners' needs. As a result, a questionnaire, conducted at the end of the trial period, showed that most students did not find the Minute Paper activity particularly beneficial or useful to promote their learning. This result was fair for students because all the collected information was used effectively behind the scenes. For students, it was not transparent how the activity was used. This may have led to the learner's hesitance or unwillingness to fill out the Minute Paper in the trial period. For this reason, the collected data through the Minute Paper was openly shared and discussed as a follow-up activity in the second semester.

Follow-up activities were implemented in every review lesson of the second semester. In each activity, a handout was provided to students. On a simply created handout, students' comments and questions were listed in Japanese along with the English translation as shown in the Appendix. During the follow-up activity, students seemed to be genuinely interested in reading through their classmates' response. In particular, the follow-up activity worked quite well in a discussion style. At the follow-up activity, students were asked to have a quick discussion to come up with the ideas to a certain language learning issue. The questions' content differs from one to another- some questions were about the function phrase, for instance "Am I using the phrase, such as 'Can I start?' correctly?" or "How can I associate my idea with others well?". Other questions were seeking for advice on a specific issue which occurred during their discussion, such as "What should I do if my group members could not understand my opinion?" or "How should I continue my sentence after I said 'I think so too'? ". These questions showed that learners were aware of further needs to hold a better discussion in English. Taking these questions into consideration, some of the classroom activities in the review lesson were designed to reinforce the weak points.

As a feasible assessment method, the final discussion test result was used to measure whether learners retained clear language knowledge taught in this course. This particularly focused on the function phrase section of the discussion test where it assesses the learner's ability to use all the six discussion skills; opinion, reason, example, joining a discussion, connecting ideas, and possibilities taught over 13 weeks. The results concluded that all students in the group could use, at least, five discussion skills while five, out of eight, students were able to perform all discussion skills taught in the semester. The limitations are acknowledged in measuring how the activity directly contributed to students’ language learning, and especially improving their long-term knowledge retention. The course only lasts for 3 months and there is no way to track down the same students' learning development afterwards. However, the final discussion test result is considered as the most applicable assessment method in this paper.

To successfully conduct the Minute Paper in class, there are two points to consider; 1) how to deal with irrelevant comments and questions on reflection papers and 2) language use on the paper. It is ideal if students write comments and questions relevant to, specifically, the development of discussion skills. As the Minute Paper asks open-ended questions, students usually wrote genuine questions, including how to improve their pronunciation, grammar, and listening skills. As the discussion class puts a particular emphasis on fluency and not accuracy, it is not preferable if students start paying too much attention to grammar and pronunciation. It is advised to “let the class know in advance that you may not be able to comment on every important point and question submitted” (p.153) (Angelo & Cross, 1993) in order to avoid unnecessary disappointment. If the instructor did not explain this point to students clearly, they...
might feel frustrated about the unanswered questions in time. Another point to be noted upon implementing the Minute Paper activity is language use. It is encouraged to let the students choose the language, either Japanese or English, they feel more comfortable with. If your class includes both Japanese and non-Japanese speakers, the instructor should be aware of the sensitive issue surrounding the language use. In this research, most learners wrote the reflection paper in Japanese as expected. This did not cause a major problem to prepare the follow-up activities as the instructor speaks the same language. If the instructor is not a proficient Japanese speaker, as long as students are capable of writing their thoughts in English clearly, allow enough time to reflect the class in English. Yet, this may lose the essence of the activity if some students find it overwhelming to write their comments in English. The Minute Paper is especially designed for reticent or unresponsive students. If the activity becomes a burden, and then it is against the purpose of the activity. The intention of the activity is to assess how well students understood the class and identify the issues to help their learning. Thus, if the instructor does not speak Japanese, it is preferable to seek for translation support in order to receive the valuable feedback directly from the learners.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, the Minute Paper activity was implemented especially for a quiet and unresponsive group of learners in EDC to assess students’ comprehension. The activity intended, for the instructor, to quickly and easily receive a written feedback, at the mid-semester, to adjust on-going lesson plans. The students’ voice has contributed to improving the quality of teaching on many levels to suit the particular student's needs and learning level. This process- making sure if all students received the new information in class correctly- was believed to help students retain the information for a long time according to the the instructional principle, Meaningful Learning, reflected to the activity development in this paper. Further research is required to provide the evidence if the Minute Paper activity directly lead to students’ long term knowledge retention in a discussion class. However, the Minute Papers provided valuable information about students’ language learning, which could not be obtained solely from classroom observation and discussion test scores. Thus, the activity is recommended to be used for those students who cannot respond actively in class to promote a better communication between students and the instructor, and hopefully it helps the instructor create a meaningful learning environment as a result.

REFERENCES
APPENDIX - Handout for Follow-up Activity

Lesson 8
Thank you for completing the reflection paper (感想用紙) last week.

Question 1: What is the most important thing you have learned today?
(今日の授業で一番ためになったことは、何ですか？)

- I learned how to start discussion with “Can I start?” (“Can I start?”というディスカッションの始め方を学んだ).
- Our discussion went smoothly (会話の流れがスムーズになったこと).
- I learned that it makes easier for listeners to listen to my opinion/ question by asking first "Can I ask a question?" or "Can I make a comment?"（前置きを入れることで相手が聞きやすいことが分かった）.

Question 2: What is the question that is uppermost in your mind?
(今一番疑問に思っていることはなんですか？)

- Am I using “Joining a Discussion” functions correctly? (フレーズを使うタイミングはあっているか)
- What should I do if my group members did not understand my opinion? (自分が理解していても相手が理解できていないときはどうすれば良いか？)

Discussion
Q1: What should I do if my group members did not understand my opinion?
(Discuss your ideas about the question above using the "Joining a Discussion" phrases).

- Can I start?/ Can I make a comment?/ Can I ask a question?
- Does anyone want to comment?/ Does anyone want to ask a question?