Deconstructing Jigsaw Activities

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Plan for the workshop

1. Quick check: What is jigsaw (and definition)
2. Background and benefits of jigsaw
3. Adoption of jigsaw into communicative language teaching
4. What was lost
5. Taxonomy of jigsaw activities
6. 2-3 original ideas for jigsaws
Quick check: What is Jigsaw?

My definition:

• A jigsaw is a cooperative information gap activity with two stages. The **input stage** involves input of information (usually a text), with different learners accessing different information to create an ‘information gap’. The **communication stage** follows this, and involves communication of that input to others in pair or group interaction, for a range of purposes.

Based on Aronson et al. (1978), but also recognising ELT perspectives (e.g., Johnson, 1981; Littlewood, 1981).
Background to Jigsaw

- Elliot Aronson’s work in Texas, USA, early 1970s; jigsaw introduced as means to reduce tension between ethnic groups after desegregation (see Aronson et al., 1975, 1978, and here).
- Aronson drew on principles within cooperative learning movement to encourage cooperative rather than competitive learning.
- In mainstream teaching, jigsaw is typically used to foster peer-teaching of declarative knowledge.
- Brought into CLT in the late 70s/early 80s (see Johnson, 1981), since when it’s been seen as a means to facilitate (acquisition through) skills practice: hence ‘information gap’.

Some benefits of, and evidence for, jigsaw

- **Text-based** jigsaw provides language input and output opportunities (integrated skills).
- Learners are both recalling and reconstructing content, involving short-term, intermediate-term and long-term memory.
- Adaptable to many EL environments (incl. CLIL, EMI, text-based LT) and curricular contexts (e.g., grammatical, thematic, lexical, task-based, etc.).
- **Support from classroom studies:** Increases cooperation, social skills and interest in school (e.g., Blaney et al., 1977). Coop learning supported in large class ELT contexts (e.g., Chen, 1999; Ning, 2010; Panhwar, 2016).
- **Support from SLA theory:** Potentially able to promote noticing (Schmidt, 1990), comprehensible/pushed output (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Evidence that it increases negotiation of meaning (Long & Porter, 1985).
- **Coop learning in the meta-analyses:** High achievement effect sizes demonstrated (e.g., Hattie, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Marzano, 1998).
Lost in translation: What may CLT have lost when it imported jigsaw?


• Importance of jigsaw as a means for learning declarative content (aspects of lexis, grammar, etc.), rather than just skills practices.

• Importance of jigsaw as a means for peer teaching.

• Potential focus on higher order thinking skills (HOTS).

• Base/home groups and expert groups – 2 essential stages to making (cognitively) challenging jigsaws work (Anderson, 2019a).
Base/home groups and expert groups - summary

**Home groups** (stable, mixed-ability)
Use for most activities

**Expert groups** (ability-matched)
Use for text input
From ‘comprehension...’ to ‘synthesis questions’

- Questions for jigsaws in ELT coursebooks tend to mirror typical comprehension questions for reading tasks.

- **Problem**: On their own, such questions tend to encourage ‘regurgitation’, rather than interpretation, comparison, evaluation and synthesis (HOTS) of what they’ve read (i.e. ‘synthesis questions’).
From ‘comprehension...’ to ‘synthesis questions’

Just the job! – Ken

When I tell people what my job is, their response is always: ‘Tell us a joke, then!’ This is the worst thing about my job. The best thing is that I travel a lot, working in clubs and theatres around the country, although I don’t work very sociable hours. When I’m on tour, I work two or three hours every evening, between 7 and 11pm. Some audiences are friendly, others aren’t, and I really hate it if they don’t laugh. My income is quite good - I make about £300 a night, but I can only do about 120 nights a year before I go mad!

People often ask me where I get my ideas from. It can be really difficult. I go out a lot, meet different people or just watch them, looking for something funny. It can be quite stressful doing this job, especially if I get bad reviews in the newspapers or online, so in a year or two I might try writing a comedy or sitcom for TV, but, at the moment, I’m really happy with my current job!

Typical ‘comprehension’ questions:
1. Where does she/he work?
2. What does she/he do?
3. How much does she/he earn? etc.

Think of 3-5 synthesis questions for the communication stage appropriate to these texts.

Just the job! – Carla

I’m originally from Canada, where I trained to be a teacher, but now I work in India for an international NGO called Child Aid. I work on our ‘out-of-schools programme’, managing a team of nine people. It’s our job to help children, especially girls who have left school early, to get back into education. This can be really difficult, because many are married with children and their families sometimes don’t want them to go back to school.

When people ask me what hours I work, I find it difficult to answer. I work from early morning to late in the evening most days, and I even do a few hours work at the weekend. The pay is not great – I earn about £2,000 per month, but I save a lot because it’s cheap living here and my accommodation is paid for. But that isn’t why I do the job. The joy of seeing children in class, learning and enjoying education is amazing. And when they graduate from school and thank me for my help, it’s the best feeling ever! I wouldn’t want to do anything else.
From ‘comprehension...’ to ‘synthesis questions’

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1. Who works hardest?
2. Who makes the most money?
3. Who do you think has the most difficult job? Why?
4. Who is happiest? Why do you think this?
5. Which job would you prefer? Why?

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The taxonomy

**Input stage**
- **Text source** (teacher selected; learner selected; learner researched)
- **Text type** (non-pedagogic; pedagogic; metalinguistic)
- **Text medium** (written; aural; video)
- **Text difference** (multiple texts; near-identical texts; fragmented text; different code; etc.)

**Time gap between stages**
- **None** (as in typical jigsaw reading)
- **Stage 1 completed before class** (i.e. flipped jigsaw)
- **Stages 1 and 2 completed in different lesson** (‘recall’ jigsaw)

**Communication stage**
- **Group size** (pairs; groups; whole class)
- **Interaction dynamic** (seated; mingle; IT-mediated)
- **Communication type** (retell; structured; synthesis; task; pedagogic activity; preparation)

(see Anderson, 2019c)
Grammar or lexis jigsaw

Discuss: How might a metalinguistic jigsaw work?

Input stage: Expert groups

Communication stage: Home groups
Grammar jigsaw: Narrative tenses

Input stage: Expert groups

Grammar review

- past perfect
- past continuous
- past simple
- time expressions

Communication stage: Home groups

Story writing

- A
- B
- C
- D

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Grammar Jigsaw: Example from Activities for Cooperative Learning

Uses ‘Test-Learn-Test’ (TLT) structure.

BLIND VIOLINIST

My friend Elza told me a fascinating story about when she was travelling to Cairngorm mountains in Scotland in July last year. She sat down opposite old man who had white stick, violin and wore dark glasses. There was dog sitting next to him, so she thought he was blind. They got chatting and she found out he played violin in Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He was on his way home from work.

Anyway, train had just left Edinburgh when old man went to restaurant car to get lunch and come back with some sandwiches and newspaper. He sat down and opened newspaper. His dog was now sitting next to him, and every time dog barked, man turned pages. Just then, train conductor came to check our tickets. He saw man reading and explained: “Sorry, sir. Dogs are not allowed on trains unless their owners are blind.”

“Oh, but I am blind,” said man, “but my dog isn’t, and he likes to read Times on long journeys.”

1. There is a problem with the grammar in this story. Read it, then discuss: What is missing?

2. You probably noticed that there were no articles (a, an) in the story. In your groups, insert articles wherever you think they are necessary. Use a pen if you are certain, and a pencil if not.

3. Now get into expert groups. Each group will learn about one of the three article situations:
   A. Situations where we use a or an
   B. Situations where we use the
   C. Situations where we don’t use article or the (called ‘zero article’)

4. Once you have worked in your expert groups, come back to your home group. Using the information you learnt in your expert groups, check your story again and make changes where necessary.

5. Your teacher will check the answers with you.

6. Working together, try to retell the story. One group member can look at the correct story and prompt the others if they forget anything.

Group A information sheet: a / an

Match the rules with the example sentences:

1. Use a/an the first time you mention something or someone.
   a. My brother Mark is a secondary teacher.

2. Use a/an with singular countable nouns when it isn't important which one you're talking about.
   b. The plane was delayed for an hour.

3. Use a/an when you state someone's job.
   c. I bought some new books yesterday.

4. Use a (not an) before words that don’t start with a vowel sound.
   d. I saw a really good film last night.

5. Use an (not a) before words that start with a vowel sound.
   e. Could you pass me a pen, please?

6. Use some instead of a/an with plural nouns.
   f. I have just had a coffee.

Now cover the rules, read out the example sentences and try to remember the rule.
Translingual news jigsaw

Access the following news story in a language other than English:

- **NAME OF NEWS STORY HERE**

Compare with colleagues who have accessed the story in different languages to you.

**Compare the following:**

- **Headline:** Compare literal translations; discuss connotation, etc.
- **First paragraph:** Do the different stories provide the same basic details; any differences?
- **Images:** Compare these: Which are more positive? Negative?
- **Bias and neutrality:** Can you find any difference in the ‘position’ of each text? Which is most neutral (in your opinion)?
Whole class jigsaw (e.g. story)

1. Take a simple story, ideally one with a twist or two.
2. Strip it down to the bare narrative.
3. Split it into strips (any number).
4. Hand them out randomly to students, 1 each.
5. 1 minute to memorise the info. on strip – then destroy/pocket.
6. Students mingle and tell their ‘bits’ of the story to each other.
7. Students return to their home groups and reconstruct the story.
8. Doesn’t matter if they haven’t all heard each part – it should all be there in the home group... and even if it isn’t – they can still create a story.
# Activities for cooperative learning – Contents

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| 6a | Expert writers | A2–B1 | Students learn from studying an example text in their expert groups, then write a similar text in home groups, followed by peer-assessment. |
| 6b | Translating jigsaw | B1–B2 | Students compare news stories in different languages in order to improve an English language version. |
| 6c | Informed debate | B2–C1 | Groups get facts and figures to prepare for a whole class debate and try to come to a class consensus, rather than "win" it! |
| 7 | Whole class | Activities where students work together as a whole class to solve a shared problem or complete a task. |
| 7a | Line stand | A1–B2 | Groups arrange themselves into lines according to difference between themselves and then try to guess what the other group’s line represents. |
| 7b | ‘People snap’ | A1–B2 | Students mingle to find classmates with similarities. |
| 7c | Whole-class jigsaw | B1–C1 | Students mingle to share information on slips of paper; then home groups try to reconstruct a story: rewrite a text or design a poster. |
| 7d | ‘Find everyone who …’ | A2–B1 | Pair create questions to ask classmates and report back on their findings. |
| 8 | Flipped cooperative learning | Cooperative learning that includes homework research activities, leaving more class time for interaction. |
| 8a | Vocabulary master | B1–C1 | Students check the definition of several new words for homework: in the next lesson, groups had a interesting task that includes the words. |
| 8b | Flipped jigsaw | B1–B2 | Students are given different tests to read at home. In class, they compare and synthesise what they learnt. |
| 8c | Research and share | B1–C1 | Students are given relevant topical research for homework. In class, they share and collate their findings for a text or presentation. |

## Pairs to groups
- **3a** Cooperative picture descriptions | A2–B2 | A cooperative variation on ‘Describe and Draw’: students work in twos to recreate their partner’s pictures. |
- **3b** Six questions | A2–B2 | Students work in pairs to write the answers to six questions on a mystery topic. They then play a guessing game with another pair by rolling a dice and asking questions. |
- **3c** Peer poster | A1–A2 | Students interviews their partner and complete an infographic. Then, in groups, they create a poster based on what they have learnt. |

## Peer needs-analysis
- **4d** Peer needs-analysis | A2–B2 | Students identify and analyse why they need to know the information. |

## Teamwork
- **4a** Team problem-solving | B1–C1 | Teams work together to solve a problem that requires analysis, evaluation and creativity, and then present their answers to class members. |
- **4b** Student teams achievement discussion (SACTS) | A1–A2 | Teams work together to learn and practice important grammar or vocabulary before each taking a quiz on the topic. |
- **4c** Peer quizzes | B1–B2 | Teams work together to create multiple choice quiz questions, answer them and then provide further peer-feedback. |
- **4d** Reciprocal teaching | B1–C2 | Team members work as a group to help each other understand a challenging text in English. |
- **4e** Cooperative listening | A2–B1 | A listening activity with a difference – teams only get the comprehension questions afterwards! |
- **4f** Decision maze | B1–C1 | Teams work together to make decisions in this interactive story-driving activity. |

## Jigsaw groupwork
- **5a** Four tests jigsaw | A2–B1 | Students read four different tests in the expert group, then share and synthesize their findings in their home group. |
- **5b** Grammar jigsaw | A2–B2 | Students learn about different areas of grammar in their expert groups then do an activity that draws on their shared knowledge. |
- **5c** Internet research jigsaw | B1–B2 | Students research different, but related, questions in expert groups using the Internet. They then work together in their home groups to find out how their research links together. |
- **5d** Story jigsaw | B1–B2 | Groups get part of a story and are challenged to remember it, then in their home groups, they share their part of the story to understand the whole. |
- **5e** ‘Spot the difference’ tests | B1–B2 | Each student gets one of three very similar tests which they can’t show each other. They must ask questions to find the differences and work out which one is wrong. |

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References


See my blog post on the origins of ‘jigsaw’ and ‘information gap’ activities here.
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