Weather Information Gap Task

I.   Rational

This weather information gap activity is designed for beginning Alutiiq language learners. It can be used and adapted for any age group of learners. In this activity, students work in pairs to complete two versions of a worksheet with missing information. This activity was adapted from ESLprintables.com. The weather clip art images were found at Best Clip Art Blog, Clip Art Pin.com, and 4vector.com.

This activity supports language learning through requiring students to interact and produce language output and allowing the students to reflect on their learning using metacognition.

1) *Output Hypothesis*

Swain (2000) postulates that it is dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge (p.97). She goes on to describe that the language use is mediating the learning of the L2. Swain explains that, "output pushes learners to process language more deeply- with more mental effort- than does input," (1995, 2000). When producing output, learners can 'stretch' their interlanguage to accomplish their communicative goal. When producing output, students are able to notice the difference between what they are able to say and what they want to communicate, they are able to develop and test hypotheses about how the target language works, and they can reflect on the language they have learned.

The weather information gap activity requires learners to produce output. Students must interpret the input (questions) posed by their partner and generate the appropriate answer. Students will have the opportunity to notice the gaps in their abilities, test out hypotheses, and to reflect.

2) *Metacognition*

Metacognition involves thinking about one's thinking. Anderson (2008) states that, "Metacognition results in critical but healthy reflection and evaluation of thinking that may result in making specific changes in how learning is managed, and in the strategies chosen for this purpose," (99). He believes that learners who reflect upon their learning are better able to make decisions about how to improve their learning. The author introduces five components to metacognition: 1. Preparing and planning for learning, 2. Selecting and using strategies, 3. Monitoring learning, 4. Orchestrating strategies, and 5. Evaluating learning.

During the post-task activity, students will be given a chance to reflect upon their learning. The teacher asks leading questions to get the students to think about and verbalize their experiences with the task. The students will monitor their learning and propose strategies that will help them improve their learning.

II. Description

1) Pre-Task

The teacher projects a number of pictures depicting weather in a particular city. The teacher has the students ask, "What is the weather in _____?" *"Cestun lla et'a _____-mi?"* Then they take turns answering the question by saying what the weather is doing in the picture. The teacher reviews the weather vocabulary with the students and introduces the term for "it is hot," *maqartuq*.

2) Task Cycle

Students work in pairs.

A divider, such as two folders, is placed between each student so they cannot see each other's papers.

In each pair, one student is given worksheet A, while the other student is given worksheet B.

Tell the students that they will need to get the missing information on their sheet from their partner. Each pair has the information that their partner is missing.
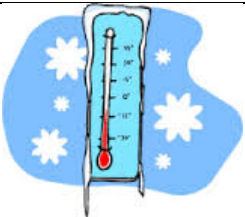
The goal of the activity is for each member of the pair to complete their worksheet WITHOUT looking at their partner's worksheet.

When students have completed their worksheets, they can share their worksheets and compare their information.

Worksheet A

City	Temperature	Weather
Seattle		
Los Angeles		
San Francisco		
Miami		
Atlanta		
Boston		
Portland		

Worksheet B

City	Temperature	Weather
Seattle		
Los Angeles		
San Francisco		
Miami		
Atlanta		
Boston		
Portland		

3) Post Task

The teacher calls the class back together. She asks the students how they felt about the activity. She can ask questions such as:

- How did you like the task?
- What did you find difficult?
- What did you find easy?
- What types of activities could help you be more successful on this type of task?

III. Reflection

For the pre-task activity, I reviewed the way to ask about the weather in a given place by asking the students what they already knew- the question "Cestun lla et'a?"- and provided them with a sentence stem to draw their attention to the grammatical form of adding the post base *–mi* to a place name in order to say "in" that place. I then showed them three pictures of cities from Europe and had them use the sentence stem to ask them how the weather is in that city. I then had the students answer that same question based upon the picture. After we reviewed the pictures, I re-introduced the vocabulary for "hot" because it is needed language for this task and we had only mentioned this language twice before in class. After we practiced how to say "It is hot," I allowed the students to ask questions about any weather language that they had.

During the task, I noticed that almost all students were comfortable with asking how the weather is in a given city. Several students struggled with how to say "It is hot." They had a hard time remembering how to say what they wanted to say. Their first instinct was to turn to me and ask how to say something. When it was obvious that I was not going to answer their questions, they began to formulate their own hypotheses and ask each other. Some of the students used a weather poster that we have displayed in the classroom. I had one student whose interlanguage hypotheses were close to being grammatical; when I let her know that what she said was close, she often self-corrected to the grammatical form on her own. My older students seemed to have an easier time with this activity. They used the least amount of English and they were able to complete the activity quickly. My younger students had a hard time remembering the weather language. I had one student that did not even attempt to answer his partner at the beginning of the activity. I paired his partner with another student, who was willing to participate. When one of my older students was done, I had her pair up with my reluctant student (they happened to be siblings). This worked much better. He was willing to put himself out there a bit more and accept her help.

After the activity was completed, I asked the students to debrief with me. I began by asking them what they thought of the activity. I got a "thumbs-up" from one of my older students. Her partner said that she enjoyed it. My middle level students said that they thought it was a good activity, but that it was kind of hard. My youngest students reported that it was hard. I asked students what was hard about the activity and everyone

reported that remembering the correct vocabulary for each picture was difficult. I had a few students that needed to be reminded how to say "It is hot," or "It is cold," each time they encountered it during the activity, even though that was repeated six times throughout the activity. In closing, I asked the students what they think would help them to practice and remember the weather language. They unanimously asked me to create a weather bingo game, which is something we have done to practice other language throughout the year.

IV. References

Anderson, N. J. (2008). Metacognition and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from good language learners* (pp. 99-109). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 97-114). Oxford: Oxford University Press.