NUFS Workshop 2015

Newsletter No. 3

Workshop in July

\<Part 1 \>

Date: July 11, 2015, 10:30-14:30

Venue: NSC College, Building Minami, Room A-31

Presenter: Sean Reid (Teikyo-kani Elementary School

Title: "Creating a Communicative Classroom Environment with Beginner Learners"

Abstract: After adhering to a curriculum that was teacher-centered, textbook-based and offered minimal opportunities for interaction, I began experimenting with revisions that would better facilitate my students' learning. This presentation outlines the means by which I was able to achieve my goal of creating a communicative classroom setting, which resulted in a significant improvement in my students' overall English ability. The manner in which I addressed the students' initial lack of English ability through strategy instruction, the careful scaffolding of lessons and by intentionally extracting myself from student interactions in order to strengthen their communicative competence will be outlined in detail

The number of participants: 37

1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- Drawing game is really interesting! I want to try it in my class. But I'm afraid junior high students might hesitate in drawing, so it will take time.
- I thought drawing pictures might be good practice for even JHS students. They can use their English to describe things Since I do retell in my class, I thought I could adapt this activity. And the most interesting point is interaction. They do interact in this activity.
- Practice test and peer feedback seem very helpful for students to improve their skills. Both assessing and assessed students can learn.
- I enjoyed the activities of drawing pictures. I want to know other interesting activities, too. When I told about the picture, I tried to use many English expression, and I thought teaching how to ask for help was important.
- I like the idea of giving a test. I have never done this before but I think it's a good way to encourage the students to work, learn harder to pass the test.
- Real world situation – students might want to use English in the real world situation.
- Dialogue between a clerk and a customer – my students would love them. They will help them a lot in learning English.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- I was able to review the points of CLT. Especially I reviewed the important points. We should pay attention to when we make activities; 'Real Life Situation' is the key point to make the activity success.
- I learned to try and encourage more learners' independence in my classroom. I like the idea of making students the teacher. I love the teamwork Sean allows for his students.
- I learned how to meaningfully put some CLT strategies, activities into practice. Definitely, this gave me many ideas. Also, I understood it's possible to have a communicative class even though the students are only 6 or 7 years old.
- There are two types of memory: semantic and episodic. Students learn more with experiences and engaging them to activities that they can use in real life.
- I've learned how to plan my communicative approach lesson starting with grammar points, following the process on the handout.
- I realized the importance of the student-centered class. We teachers tend to talk a lot but we should be in the class to encourage students to communicate each other for the language goal.
- Assessment is really important. It's crucial. Even for young students, the impact is huge.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): How much should teacher involve in checking errors?

That depends on the situation and the overall goal of the activity. If it is an activity designed to improve fluency for example, the teacher shouldn't correct the students during the activity. Also, if it is a carefully designed information-exchange task the other student(s) should notice the error and correct it in order to confirm the meaning of the information, as a grammatical error for example might alter the meaning.

That said, students should always have an opportunity to receive specific feedback about whether or not they are meeting the required goals of the course from their instructor, as well as specific feedback about how to improve. Rubrics and scoresheets for communicative activities are a good way to provide such feedback efficiently.

Q (2): I was very impressed with your fourth graders. They are very active and good at speaking English. Could you be more specific about activities you made for each grader? I'd like to know the names of activities and the simple contents.

Most of the activities that I use are ones that I have created myself in order to achieve a specific goal, and as such, they don't really have names. For the most part, I do information gap activities where students interact in pairs to share information with a partner. In these activities, the students have a clear, non-language goal, and must use the target language structures in order to complete it. It is important that the students are provided with all of the language resources necessary to successfully complete the activity, including: vocabulary, grammatical structures and any communication strategies that might be necessary for the students to achieve their goal.

Q (3): I'd be interested in hearing more activities to motivate, teach and 'student-center' my students.

I think the key here is to create well-designed activities to ensure that the students are genuinely interested in achieving a specific non-language goal. The activities that I did during the workshop are a few basic examples that can be modified depending on the teacher's overall language goal. Using the basic format of the activities that I presented, essentially that one student has some information, which the other student needs to complete his/her goal; you can come up with a lot of different and interesting activities related to your theme and target language. These can start with very basic activities requiring only one exchange of information, which progress to much more complex and creative activities. I think it is important that the teacher designs the activities themselves to ensure that they fit the teacher's individual learning goals for the students.

Q (4): I didn't find the activities particularly student centered. Yes, the teacher stepped aside but the activities seemed to be very teacher driven with pair work that was fun.

The activities that I did in the workshop were activities that I used during a grammar-based unit, and as such, in order to ensure that the students meet the necessary language goals, it was necessary for me to decide what they will be tested on and how they will be tested. Other non-grammar-based types of speaking tests, such as free talks in which the students determine the topic of conversation, and with their partner co-construct the nature of the conversation are much more student-centred, although they can't be used to assess a specific grammar point as there is no guarantee that students will use it in the conversation that they are constructing. My comparison of student-centred to teacher-centred activities was a concept that I did with my first year students whose curriculum is not at all grammar based. The point that I was trying to make though is that by monitoring the percentage of student-centred to teacher-centred activities in a given class, I became much more aware of how to consciously modify my lessons to make them more student-centred than when I initially designed them. I guess there are always degrees of "student-centeredness" and it is important to make activities as student-centred as possible, given your specific goals.

Q (5): What advice would you give to people who want to teach communication strategies plus useful questions, but don't have time or the resources you have? Can they still be as students-centered as your classroom is?

Absolutely. I have never taught communication strategies as a separate lesson, but rather have always integrated them into other lessons. This way the students can immediately understand why we use them and then practice using them in a meaningful way. Start with the input and demonstrate how they can be used effectively with a model conversation. Then put the students in pairs with a clearly outlined task and encourage them to use strategies to overcome difficulties in understanding. Point out examples where students used communication strategies effectively and also point out situations where communication strategies could have been used effectively, but were not used. Overtime using

communication strategies will become second nature to the students. The most important thing however is to integrate strategy instruction into lessons and activities that have a communicative goal. In that sense, they shouldn't take up too much time in any particular lesson.

Q (6): Do you have any idea how to do effective student centered class for public school or for bigger class?

I think your question of larger class sizes and public school relates to the potential difficulty posed by larger class sizes and a wider range of individual student abilities. One of the important points in my presentation was that teaching a lecture-based, teacher-centered style of lesson to people of different interests and abilities will not be as successful as the kind of group activities that I did in the workshop. I think these problems can be addressed by trying as much as possible to get the students doing a lot of pair and group activities. I have found great success in pairing strong students with weaker ones to compensate for individual differences. If the activities are well designed, and the students are interested in completing their non-language goal, they often discipline themselves and the large class size shouldn't make the task too difficult to implement. Also, when students are free to express themselves openly in a communicative task, it allows students of different levels to flourish, as stronger students can make more complex sentences while weaker learners can communicate the required information at a more basic level.

Q (7): Was it difficult to 'sell' this type of CLT class to your school? How did you convince them?

I actually just went ahead and changed the curriculum without consulting my school. There were a few situations where important guests such as a principal of another school visited our school and stepped into my class for a few minutes. At these times the principal of our school noticed that I was not using the curriculum that they had asked me to implement. I explained that I believed my job was to be giving my students the best curriculum possible, and that in order to do so I had stopped using the original curriculum. Before the end of that year, the dispatch company who recruited me was fired and I was hired by the school directly. I believe that the best way to implement changes to a curriculum when you deal with people who are resistant to change, is to take it upon yourself to make changes in your own class, and then show them the results. It's always easy to argue against theories, but is much more difficult to argue with results. If your students are communicating in English and enjoying the process of improving their English, that makes a strong statement for allowing you to continue to teach classes as you see fit.

Q (8): At the start, could you spend a bit more time addressing the teacher beliefs of your audience and defining terms like input or students-centered? For example, the teacher next to me refused to believe that students could talk to each other without making more mistakes. I think that if teacher beliefs are holding Japan back from CLT, you could spend more time on the theory and research, then have the teachers discuss.

Thank you for your comment. I tried to find a balance between theory and practical activities, with the

morning spent with a discussion about theory, followed by practical activities in the afternoon. I agree that more opportunities for teachers to discuss ideas themselves would have made the presentation stronger, but unfortunately I ran short on time. I think that a discussion of theory can be very important to changing a teacher's beliefs, but witnessing the theory put into practice first hand by observing and participating in communicative activities can also help teachers to think critically about their own teaching style.

\<Part 2\>

Date: July 11, 2015, 14:30-17:00
Venue: NSC College
Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh, Duane Kindt (NUFS), Robert Croker (Nanzan University)
Abstract: Monthly report on action research
The number of participants: 17

Workshop in August (Scheduled)

Date: August 8-9, 2015
Venue: Lakeside Iruka (Inuyama city, Aichi)
Title: Midterm presentation on Action Research
Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh, (NUFS), Robert Croker (Nanzan University)

August workshop is for Action Research members only.

Workshop in September (Scheduled)

Date: September 12, 2015, 10:30-14:30 (Workshop), 14:30-17:00 (Action Research session)
Venue: NSC College, Building Minami, Room A31 (1-9-6 Shinsakae, Naka-ku, Nagoya)
  (http://www.nufs.ac.jp/cms/cms-files/20150218-113526-1680.pdf)
Presenter: Takashi Miura (Shizuoka University)
Title: "Language Classroom for Genuine, Meaningful Communication: Learning Processes that nurture Human Quality"

Please send an email to Chihaya (chiha143@nufs.ac.jp) to attend this workshop.