NUFS Workshop 2016

Newsletter No.7

Workshop in November

<Part 1>

Date: November 12, 2016, 10:30-14:30

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room A-31, Bldg. Minami

Title: "The Power of Appreciating Others and Their Efforts:
    Motivating Students to Speak and Write"

Presenter: Joseph Falout (Nihon University)

Abstract: How to turn passive, silent students into active producers of the language? Recent studies in linguistics, social psychology, and positive psychology converge on a new approach: Less focus on the individual student's own faults and more focus on the strengths of others in the classroom. Self-confidence and value in speaking and writing English can improve when teachers help students to like their efforts, their accomplishments large and small, and their peers' good examples and assistance. This workshop highlights ways of engaging various pedagogies for helping language students to appreciate their learning, and language teachers to appreciate their teaching.

The number of participants: 28

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

- Speaking circle is interesting. To try to find similarities promotes to build good relationships among students. It makes good learning atmosphere. We both are, A or B conversation is really helpful.
- Interaction through pointing their good points makes students have confidence. I will do a lot of those kinds of games and activities in my class.
- 'Prefer or Differ' because students will be able to speak up personal preferences and to accept other's opinions at the same time.
- I enjoyed how Joe doesn't use 'red' a lot when correcting papers. It isn't done in class but I would like to give positive 'green' comments. I would like to do a kind of warm-up with the circle activity. It would let students know more about each other in English.
- I thought the circle activity was great. I can adjust it to my teaching context. 'It keeps you on your feet' is entertaining, and communicative grammar points can be addressed.
- Having a small talk with others in the speaking circle. We share our favorites and know each other. We get to communicate each other for other activities.
- 'We both prefer' game is really interesting. I can imagine my students are going to be crazy about this game. 'Communication circles' is also fun to establish corporate learning. I like it because teachers just facilitate and concentrate on coaching students.
- Circles – I want to throw away the tables. Expert groups – talking in small, then big groups was great.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

- The power of focusing on appreciating students. People need to feel safe. This is one way to create a productive environment.
- I learned language is such a dynamic phenomenon. In our classroom situation, we teachers tend to be more serious to make students hard learners. We often complain how bad their attitude is, but teachers can work on to change the situation. When teachers change, students change.
- 'First you like your English and then you improve the faults'. Based on this idea, I'll try to revise activities which can excite students to study more.
- Knowing your students strength can help improve the way you teach your students. More often than not, I always try to assess my students' weaknesses and work my way from there. Maybe trying this approach can work well for me and my students, too.
- I learned how beneficial for students to share their writing and speaking with others. I also learned that students can think better (critical thinking) when they have less pressure (no evaluation).
- I learned that it is important for students and the teachers to be genuine when they are giving feedback/helping each other. People are such more likely to responding in a positive way if they know we mean what we say.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): What are our students' strengths?

A: This is a good question that I recommend all teachers try to answer for themselves. Teachers are traditionally conditioned to look for what is lacking in their students' abilities and work. If asked about their students' weaknesses, probably many teachers can readily respond with accuracy. After all, they are expected to know these things so they can help their students improve. But can they answer just as quickly and concretely if asked about their students' good points? Are we ourselves capable of recognizing our own students' strengths, and if so, how often do we focus upon these strengths? How often do we share our own observations about students' strengths with the students? By doing so, especially to each student directly and specifically and honestly, we are opening up their eyes as to what they can potentially continue to use and develop. This can also open our own eyes about the quality and value of what students are learning.

In both written and verbal forms, try sharing your observations directly to individual students about what they are doing well. Make a goal of doing this with at least a few students each lesson. You may find this challenging at first, but it gets easier with practice. And as your perspective of the possible becomes more positive, so too does the participation and performance of the students.

Q (2): Although you said that you usually give students grades, full-marks or failure-marks on writing, don't you use rubrics to find out students' strength and/or weakness?

A: Sure, I use rubrics sometimes for both writing and presenting, depending on which class it is and what the learning objectives are. More importantly, the students are using the rubrics in giving feedback to their peers. Rubrics are good for identifying specific areas that are predetermined by the rubric. "Liking," as explained by Elbow (2009) as basically appreciating what works in meaning-making, does not necessarily

preclude the use of rubrics or structure, nor preclude rigor and validity. The kind of freestyle "liking" shown in one of my examples in our NUFS workshop (with green-starred specific feedback as opposed to red-marked error corrections on written reports) is good for both students and teachers to explore what works in meaning-making and why it works. It can also open up avenues of thinking about what is possible next time the students speak or write. The practice of "liking" can even point out what doesn't work and helps us embrace learning by trial and error: "Making mistakes makes me make more mature choices next chance!"

In other words, following a predetermined rubric can encourage working within the rubric, while following circuitous or discursive practices can encourage exploration that leads to powerful learning discoveries that are original and valid. In fact, our own field of applied linguistics has relied upon and been greatly informed by discursive practices, such as diary studies, ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry.

Q (3): I wonder how you assess the students. I'm sure you need to give them grades. Also, some studies show that assessment plays a great part in students' learning.

A: Of course teachers need to assess their students and give grades, me included. By presenting in our workshop different approaches to "liking" in classroom interactions, activities, and coursework, I'm suggesting that teachers occasionally mix their approaches, and yes, sometimes flip the meaning of assessment. Flipping traditional assessment does not have to be done for every activity or assignment. What does "test" mean? In one sense, when marking assignments simply as completed or not, that in itself is kind of a test, meaning a verifiable and quantifiable challenge to the students. It asks of the students, "Did you do it or not?" and "Can you keep doing the required work consistently and in a timely fashion?" Actually, many of us teachers are already tracking similar things, such as in maintaining records of attendance, tardiness, and absence, whether for a grade or not. This form of assessment is also commonly promoted in extensive reading and involves checking whether students regularly read books, with a tally of how many books each student has read by the end of the semester. Why not assess similarly for extensive speaking or writing? Journal entries, freewriting sessions, and extemporaneous speeches would make good candidates for this type of assessment. Can you think of any more?

More importantly, by placing less focus on grammatical forms and error corrections, more time and space can be opened up for investigating the ways of meaning-making. "Liking" can promote further and better meaning-making by inviting teachers and students to share with each other in asking, "What does this mean to you?" and "How do you feel about it?" and "How might we change this or add to it to make a clearer meaning, a better idea, or an expansion upon it?"

I myself like to mix and match various teaching approaches and forms of assessment, all the while thinking about the particular course objectives and individual psychologies and group dynamics in each situation. Here are just a handful of elements that often enter into the mix for my classes (in no special order): Formative assessment; process-based writing, presenting, and conversing; portfolio assessment; negotiated syllabus; project-based learning; strategy training; and peer feedback. Also, my students and I learn a lot from each other through the process of critical participatory looping (CPL; Falout & Murphey, 2010;

Murphey & Falout, 2010), which could be conceived as a kind of ongoing, iterative appreciation and assessment of the classroom that encourages student voice and student-directed learning. CPL can also be used for gathering data and providing validity in action research (Falout, Murphey, Fukuda, & Fukada, 2016; Murphey & Falout, 2012). All of these methods bring opportunities for sharing appreciation of efforts in coursework, qualities of character, and exchanges of opinions.

The key things to remember are that there is no single best way for teaching, action research helps us make informed decisions, and that each one of us teachers can uniquely mix and match as many approaches in teaching and forms of assessment as we (and maybe our students) choose for our own particular situations. As far as "liking" goes, this is just one extra element that might be included in the mix. Even a few written exercises or speaking activities for "liking" without focusing on error correction or using the traditional forms of evaluation might be fit into a busy semester.

"Liking" frees up the pressures of being judged by others that can make students self-conscious and embarrassed when using English. Fear of being judged poorly and humiliating experiences in front of teachers and classmates seem to be notable causes, respectively, of silence in the classroom (King, 2013) and demotivation in learning (Falout & Falout, 2005; Falout & Maruyama, 2004). "Liking" provides students ideas for what they might try again or develop further with their English. In my experience, "liking" helps students gain confidence, positive affect (emotions), fluency and duration (talking and writing longer), depth of expression and meaning, and even accuracy in their speaking and writing. They work harder on their English because they themselves like their English even more when others like it too. Given training and practice for showing appreciation among themselves, "liking" also seems to help improve the quality of student interactions and the explicit teaching of other classmates.

Q (4): My definition about "We can criticize something better when we like it" is: People who have interests and feel intimacy are trying to give more feedback, even though these feedbacks are critical ones. Therefore, it is important to create 'rapport' in the classroom to initiate communication. Is it a proper definition? What do you think?

A: Great definition of Peter Elbow's (2009, p. 449) quote about "liking"! This definition highlights that people can listen better to each other when they actually like each other. I like that you created a definition that makes sense to you, and I believe other teachers reading this can learn something from it too. How do you think other teachers might interpret this quote differently from your own understanding?

Q (5): What happens if a respected reader sometimes gives us negative feedback? Would that make us more or less motivated?

A: The answer depends upon many factors, including our history and relationship with the respected reader (or speaker, journal reviewer, family member, friend, colleague, etc.), the content of the message, the form and tone in which it was given, and the frame of mind we're in when we receive it. We might draw meaning from the same message differently at one moment or another, depending upon anything from the weather outside to our own internal weather (mood), and we may even reframe or reinterpret the meaning of the same message as time passes.

Something important to remember here is to be mindful of the way we teachers present any kind of feedback to our students, from well-intended personal advice to formal assessment. We might try to choose softer dictions and avoid imperatives. For example, using "might try to" instead of "should" in the previous sentence could lessen the level of pressure felt by the receiver of the advice. We might try explicitly teaching our students such pragmatic language use and its social effects, and they can practice it by giving feedback to each other. Rather than handing down quick, vague, and judgmental responses to an aspect of written work, spoken performance, or conversational interaction, we might use provocative, non-threatening questions to spark newer thought processes and meaning-making. Rather than determining the type of linguistic errors we are observing, we could be collaborating with our students on the elaboration of their thoughts and expressions, and in turn witness their continuation in using English and expansion of ideas. And all we need to do is ask, "What do you mean?" or "What could it mean?" Such questions can be encouraging.

For teachers doing action research and receiving what is interpreted as negative feedback from journal reviewers or editors, it might be good to: (1) allow some time to pass to help the negative emotions abate, and perhaps realize that the advice is actually quite astute, (2) remind yourself that these reviewers are on your side, and that their advice is intended to help you reach the mutual goal of improving the paper, and (3) try to revise the paper with the advice in mind, yet realize that sometimes there are different ways to solve the problems that the reviewers see, ways that might be considered by you and the reviewers as even better than what they had initially suggested. Reframing the reasons behind the negative feedback and what you might be able to do about it can help you stay motivated in publishing your action research.

Q (6): Have you ever taught at Japanese public schools – high schools, junior highs or elementary schools? With the JET program or a private ALT company?
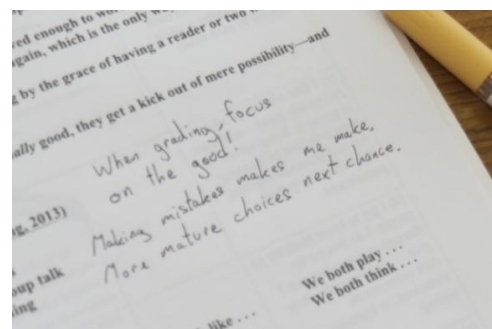
A: Yes, I've taught learners in different educational contexts and at all levels, from toddlers to seniors, and have been fortunate to experience assisting Japanese English teachers during lessons. For many years now, however, I have been teaching only at the undergraduate and graduate levels at my university, where I am also honored to be team teaching in multi-disciplinary classrooms with various Japanese professors from a science faculty. Additionally, conducting workshops like this one at NUFS has been a very important part of my own professional development: "Teaching others teaches me, so I'm learning by teaching!" I encourage all teachers to likewise experience classrooms beyond their own usual context, if possible. Such experience not only benefits them, but also their students.

Please allow me to illustrate in greater depth. We discussed in our workshop how some students in high school are not motivated to learn because they do not believe they will use English in their future. Their teachers might mention that English could be useful for their future jobs, yet this idea may seem too improbable or too far in the future for high school students to imagine. Many students really want to know why they need English now. The present purpose for learning English is something that teachers might help their students to address. Additionally, the near future is important. For instance, students in college are required to speak English in their classrooms, and many find that speaking English is possible and

enjoyable by this time. This information might be useful for students who are struggling with their English in high school. If students saw the connections of English classes across primary, secondary, and tertiary education—that is, if they understand how they will be using English in each stage of their academic careers—they may become more effective at academic goal setting and more practical in their preparations for learning. They may become more inspired and more interested to learn English.

Unfortunately, many teachers themselves have little direct experience outside of their own academic contexts, me included. Some teachers, like their students, cannot fully understand the current situations across educational contexts because many changes have been happening recently. And teachers are not often invited, nor have time, to visit classrooms in other contexts. Not only that, but it is difficult to find published research to read about what is happening. Some research in college and university classrooms is becoming more available, but it would benefit teachers and researchers if you publish your action research. More published action research from classrooms could potentially help other teachers and researchers see what is happening and what is working in English education in Japan. For example, in writing for a book chapter about "What's working in Japan?" (Falout, Fukuda, Murphey, & Fukada, 2013), we had a hard time finding studies particularly from primary and secondary education classrooms. There wasn't much published even in Japanese.

So please consider sharing your teaching ideas and research, especially at conferences and in journals operated by academic societies, such as JACET and JALT, so a lot of other teachers can access your work. You might also consider teaming up with another teacher or group of teachers, just as I have been lucky enough to do (explained in Murphey, Falout, Fukada, & Fukuda, 2015), because collaboration can increase your enjoyment, ability, and motivation to conduct and report the research. Good luck!

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\<Part 2\>

Date: November 12, 2016, 14:30-17:00

Venue: Nagoya NSC College

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Juanita Heigham, Duane Kindt (NUFS)

Abstract: Monthly report on action research

The number of participants: 17

Workshop in December (Scheduled)

Date: December 10, 2016, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Building Minami, Room A31

Presenter: Nancy Mutoh (Emeritus professor of NUFS)

Title: "Learn the "How" and "Why" of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) by Creating a TBLT-Based Lesson in a Collaborative Group"

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