NUFS Workshop 2006

Newsletter No. 8

Workshop in October

Date: October 14, 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30

Venue: Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room K306

Instructor: Michael Cholewinski (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: 'Computer Assisted Language Teaching'

The number of participants: 16

Abstract: Is it true that using Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) or E-learning in your classroom increases the demands on your teaching time and expertise? The truth is yes. Do those demands have to be incapacitating? No. It isn't necessary to be a tech-wizard to provide your students with very practical and useful CALL or E-learning educational experiences. In this workshop, I will demonstrate several simple activities that blend information technology (IT) and traditional 4-skills learning activities that anyone with a basic understanding of word-processing, internet and email can easily apply to their teaching situation. Will this take a little extra work (initially)? Yes. Will it be enjoyable and rewarding for you and your students? I think so. I will also provide a list of CALL and E-learning URLs <http://www.nufs.ac.jp/~michael/Pages/workshop.html> that have provided me with easy and practical ideas for this kind of teaching. We will conclude with some time to share questions, ideas and headaches.

1. **Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**
   - I want to make a blog and let students share their ideas about a certain topic. It's a convenient way to show and feedback students what others think.
   - I want to use 'blog'. I have never known that blog is such a useful one. I thought it was just for fun or hobbies. It's a very good idea to make students send their homework using blog.
   - Activities using WebQuest, because these activities made participants get involved in the activities with full attention. Today, we had to visit several websites and learned how to get useful information and write an opinion in English. I was surprised how quick to get responses from other participants in the blog page.
   - Activities using internet, because students are so interested in both internet and English. If we can teach the combination of studying English and using internet, they will enjoy themselves.
   - Using internet for listening activities and learning vocabulary. I liked using different ideas like meaning of colors or symbols to help students have a discussion, etc.
   - I found some quizzes in the files on the web page can be used in my class. There were various levels and kinds of quizzes, from introductory to advanced level and from vocabulary to culture.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- The use of PC in the language class. It is good for the students not to cram things, but to learn by themselves collecting information based on their own will.

- I think I have been a digital refugee, but from today I will be one of the digital immigrants. Today Michael showed us various ways to get students' attention by using digital or IT devices. That was an eye-opening and exciting experience to me. I would like to make use some of the activities I learned today in my daily classes.

- I didn't like computers because I didn't know how to use it. But today I knew there are so many possibilities in the computer. We can use it for listening, translation, news-reading, writing, and so on. I want to know about the computer and use it more often.

- Computers are very useful tools, but I never thought of using them in my lessons. Today I learned we can make use of PCs even if we have only one set in the classroom. I'll think of my own ways to use PCs in my lessons.

- What I thought was very useful was the certain need for technological expertise and teaching. I would love to try and learn how to make my own page like Michael's and teach some of the media and English level skills. He also makes a wonderful point about handling multiple tasks and skills.

- I don't use computer in class, but learned how to use it to get information to help my students learn and also help me make my classes more interesting and challenging to students. I learned a lot, but don't know if I can use all.

3. Questions and Answers

Q: You said you spent more than 20 hours for today's three-hour lecture. I know preparation is important but reflection after lessons is also necessary, I think. Do you have enough time to reflect your lessons?

I do two kinds of reflection, Ongoing (during the lesson) and After the fact (post-lesson). I guess I don't think about it as "whether I have time or not." I just do it. It's part of what I do as a teacher, ingrained. Ongoing reflection can also be called "reading the class" or "adjusting in real time," or some such label. The point is, try to maintain a constant awareness of where your lesson plan and the learners' engagement are flowing in unison. During our Saturday class I stopped several times to make notations on my copy of the prints about things that 'looked good 'in the planning/mental' stage, but that didn't seem to work well in the actual class. It's messy, but it makes for more involved teaching, I think. After the fact reflection is the more common kind, I guess. I went back to my office and sat and "decompressed," for lack of a better word. And that process continued as I sat on the train going home, and even when I was recounting the lesson with colleagues during chats on Monday. Were that an ongoing class, I would have put a lot of those reflections to paper (class prints), so that I could recall them when I recycled the material. For me, notes are essential as my day as a teacher is almost always a hectic, multi-tasking journey into the rabbit hole. Too much information to keep in the head.

Q: I want to know useful, user-friendly and free (if possible) software to create questions activities. Do you know anything?

The only one that I can think of off-hand is Hot-Potatoes <http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>. Of course, the level of "friendliness" for the user is dependent upon his/her technical skill, right? :-)

Q: These days I often hear the word 'corpus'. How can we make use of 'corpus' in our lessons? Do you have any ideas?

Corpus is definitely not in my bailiwick, but there is a great deal of information available on the internet. I suggest googling "corpus in EFL classrooms." You are sure to come up with plenty of ideas. Sorry if that seems like I'm passing you off, but I honestly have delved very little into corpus research.

Q: What's your opinion toward IC dictionaries? Almost all the students have one these days. However, the easy access allows them to skip the enough preparation for unfamiliar words, I guess. What do you think?

I'm a book person (digital immigrant), but I think those dictionaries are a brilliant technological advancement. Kids have adapted them to their school life so incredibly thoroughly that it is amazing. I have seen kids sit in front of me and have a relatively flowing conversation, WITH the IC dictionary acting as kind of a technical memory. Not something I encourage or allow, for that matter. I think it is sometimes necessary for kids to go slowly when dealing with words (searching for, choosing, using), and so I sometimes restrict usage of IC dictionaries, but never in a punitive fashion. That might sound odd, punitive, but from the students' point of view, they most probably see various restrictions as punitive or unfair...until the restrictions are explained to them. With some common-sense explanations, even they can understand the rationale behind the restrictions and will grudgingly comply. I do allow them in my writing classes, in my on-the-spot consultations in the classroom, but I do not like to have them part of my private conversations in my office (I try to get students in the habit of preparing what they want to say before they come to my office). I also do not allow them in tests or in conversation activities where students were supposed to prepare their content ahead of time. Mean Mr. Michael it seems sometimes, yes. However, I am consistent and at some time in the year the students come to understand and accept these kinds of restrictions as they are there to help them own the language.

Group Session

Date: October 14, 2006, 15:00-17:00
Venue: Nagoya University of Foreign Studies
The number of participants: 11
Abstract: The participants made their reports about their lessons. Some of them are very unique and full of ideas to

make all the students get involved or to motivate them to study English; such as creating a web page for students to review the lesson, physically practicing activity, giving information from internet, and so on.

Next Workshop

Date: November 11, 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30, 15:00-17:00
Venue: Nagoya International Center, Lecture Room 3
Instructor: Mathew White (Nanzan University)
Title: 'Extensive Listening'

I'm waiting for your attendance. Email to Chihaya if you can come.