

NUFS Workshop 2007

Newsletter No. 1

Workshop in May (Day 1)

Date: May 12, 2007, 13:00-16:00

Venue: Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room 322

Instructor: Juanita Heigham (Sugiyam Jogakuen University)

Title: 'Working Together to Add Communication to Grammar Lessons'

The number of participants: 30

Abstract: Building an understanding of grammar is essential for students who are learning a foreign language in the classroom. As teachers, we can choose to present grammar in a dull, lifeless way, or we can present it as a living part of the communicative experience. Choosing the latter way can help students better understand and importantly, retain what we present. This workshop will be about working together to find ways to present grammar creatively and communicatively.



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

- 'Jeopardy' in various ways. It is flexible. We can use it for various grammatical points. And students can work in groups so it has less pressure on slow learners.
- 'Jeopardy Game'. This is the most suitable activity for my students. I knew this activity but what was introduced today was new to me. And one of the groups suggested that the categories could be replaced by lessons they learned through their textbook. That's great. Then this activity can not be isolated from the textbook. Also, what they have already learned is used as an answer, so they can make questions more easily.
- 'Jeopardy game' is a competitive game which draws students' attention and also it makes group members cooperate to win the game. The point which was different from ordinary Jeopardy is that the students have to generate questions which correspond to the given answers. I think it's a good warm-up activity.
- 'Jeopardy'. The one I have learned here is not the usual one that participants just answer the questions, but one that requires participants to make questions to match the answers. Just by looking at conventional activities from a slightly different angle, it's possible to make interesting and exciting activities. I'd like to keep this kind of attitude in mind when I prepare for my classes.
- 'Find someone with the answer'. This activity can be done with full class students and easy to prepare. I want to do this activity as review and warm up at the beginning of the class.
- 'Find someone with the answer', because it is fun. It is simple and easy for students to understand. It won't take long time. I can use it as a warm-up activity.
- 'If-clause / Main-clause matching old maid game'. It's easy to prepare, and it can be a review from students' textbook. It's a good way to focus on the tense in the clause.
- 'Card Game' Though it is not easy to prepare because it would take a lot of time, I think it's one of the best since all students are given the chance to speak and think.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- Grammar can be introduced to students through interesting activities, not through boring lectures.
- 'Retention'. It's important to give the opportunities to students to use the items they have learned again and again; otherwise they would forget it soon. We tend to focus on one item in one activity. By using what they learned before, they could enrich their conversation as well as remember they target for a long time.
- Using communicative activities is not only to have better communication, but also to learn grammar better. So it is one of the ways to practice learning language. Now I am more eager to use communicative activities in my classes.
- I learned that it's very necessary to make grammar lessons communicative so that 'retention' will increase. I also found out that it's important to focus on a limited number of grammar items to make lessons communicative. Usually in grammar textbooks used in high schools, two or three items are included in one lesson and teachers feel pressure to teach everything. But we should be careful of this.
- 'Buddy system' is really effective. Teachers usually create activities on their own and keep them only for themselves. By dividing workload, we can reduce our work and also get something new from other co-workers.
- I was very impressed with some ideas that other teachers created. Teachers had better and more practical ideas than I had expected.
- Whenever I come back to this seminar, I am inspired to devote myself to creating a better English class. I sometimes don't know what should be improved and developed in my teaching style. By talking and learning together with other teachers today, I could be aware how I improve my way of teaching.



3. Questions and Answers

Q1: When and how much, do you think, teachers should give explanation about a certain grammatical point? I think we don't have to explain much to the students in class. Instead they should have time to share their answers for grammatical questions or exercises in the workbook. What do you think?

A: In general, I don't think there is a special formula to determine how much explanation is necessary. You probably should decide point-by-point because some grammar points will be easier for your students to understand than others. For example, frequency adverbs (always, often, never...) are relatively easy to understand while passive structure is more difficult. I'd suggest you give a short explanation to your class and see how they respond. If they seem to have (more or less) understood, move on to a communicative activity using the structure. Remember that students don't need to understand the grammar 100% before they begin communicative activities. One of the great things about communicative activities is that they can provide a context for an abstract grammar point, and that context can facilitate students' understanding.

Q2: There are many grammatical items we should teach. I'm wondering which one should be chosen for communicative activities.

A: Since I don't have time to use communicative activities for all grammar points, I have a simple system for deciding what points to provide activities for.

1. I make a list of the grammar points I'm going to cover in a term. If the students typically understand a grammatical item, I don't need to use communicative activities for it, so I cut it off the list. (I want to spend time on things that students need extra help with, so doing communicative activities for points they already understand fairly well isn't a good use of my class time.)

2. Of the points that remain on the list, I consider which ones are best suited for communicative activities. While most grammar points can be used in some sort of communicative activity, some work better than others. Points that I can't find a good activity for, I again cut off the list.



In the end, I have a list of points that I have time to cover and that are relatively easy to prepare for. Ideally, I would support each new grammar point with a communicative activity (or two!), but in reality I have to make choices, and this is the system I use to make those choices. I hope it's helpful for you.

Q3: How can we introduce a grammar point at the beginning in English? It's easy to have students play games afterwards, but when they don't know anything at the beginning, it's difficult to introduce grammar points in English.

A: Unless your students' English level is quite high, I'd introduce the points in Japanese and after they have a basic understanding of it, move on into English. From my own experience learning Japanese, getting a grammar explanation in English first always helped me understand faster.

If you are trying to promote the use of English in your classroom, you might try putting up a large colored card in the front of the room for "Japanese Time" and then formally change the card to another color for "English Time". If students use Japanese during "English Time", you can remind them of the color. You could also use some instrumental music during one time, but not during the other. You could try anything that makes the two times different.

Q4: I have a question about setting standards or deciding what percentage of the class time is devoted to communicative activities.

A: In my talk, I suggested that teachers should commit themselves to using communicative activities a certain percentage of the time. I said that because it is important for students to become comfortable communicating in English in class, and the only way they can become comfortable is by doing the activities fairly frequently. For example, if you only do a communicative activity once a month, your students are unlikely to become accustomed to them.

Some classes like communicative activities but others don't. Sometimes they are reluctant to work in pairs.

There are many different types of activities you can do in your classes. If your students don't like pair work, have them do activities like we did together (neither of them were "pair work" activities). Just a note, I have found that after students get a bit used to doing communicative activities, the types that they are willing to participate in gets broader. Maybe now some of your students don't want to do pair work, but perhaps in the future they will!

In my understanding, setting standards can mean a routine for students, and they may get bored with routine. How can we tackle this problem?

Routine is good in that it allows us to become comfortable with things, and this reduces stress. However, a completely predictable routine is boring, so as you plan your lessons, choose different *types* of activities; you need to be sure that there is VARIETY.

Q5: How can teachers evaluate the communicative activities?

A: It's impossible for a single teacher to evaluate a whole class of students at the same time! In our program, as long as everyone is participating in the activities in English, we believe that some positive benefit will result. Our evaluation comes when the students take written quizzes. (Students take a short multiple-choice quiz at the end of each period to check to see if they understand the grammar point(s) covered.) If we had a lot of time, we could either conduct oral interviews with students or oversee small groups of them performing certain tasks and evaluate them that way, but we don't have time....



Q6: Some of the games require instant reaction from students. So if the level of the students is lower, or if we have shy students or slow learners, how can we solve the problem?

A: A big challenge in making the first step toward adding communicative activities is finding the right level activities for your students. If the activities require skills your students don't have, then don't try to use them. Of the activities we did together in the workshop, the first activity would be good for lower-level students because the students are able to set their own pace as they circulate around the room.

Q7: Should we always make sure that students make correct sentences during the communicative activities? Sometimes it looks hard if it's not in a controlled activity.

A: Making sure that everyone is correct all the time is impossible – and not necessary. There will certainly be some mistakes during the activities, but overall students will work things out fairly well. Sometimes, if I hear a common mistake among the group, I'll either quickly ask the students to pause for a moment and

explain something, or discuss it at the end of the activity. One of the great things about communicative activities is that students have a chance to use English. If we, the teachers, try to be sure that what they are saying is “perfect” we will inhibit the students and make them nervous – in effect damaging the confidence we are trying to help them build. So, during these activities it’s important that you help students maintain some general level of accuracy BUT not put too much pressure on them to be perfect. Additionally, I’ve found that often, the first few steps in an activity are likely to have quite a few mistakes, but then later, with or without my help, things get better.

Workshop in May (Day 2)

Date: May 13, 2007, 9:30-12:30

Venue: Aichi Kenko Plaza, Conference Room 3

The number of participants: 26

Instructor: Seiji Shintani (Bihoku High School)

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: Orientation for Action Research

Abstract: Mr. Shintani made a presentation about his action research he has done last year. After that, the participants discussed their own action research plan in groups. Mr. Sato and Nancy joined the groups and gave them some advice.



Workshop in June (Schedule)

(Part1)

Date: June 9, 2007, 10:30-14:30

Venue: Nagoya International Center, Lecture Room 2

Instructor: Tom Kenny

Title: ‘Listening Strategies for Interactivity’

(Part 2)

Date: June 9, 2007, 14:30-17:00

Venue: Nagoya International Center, Lecture Room 2

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh

Abstract: Group discussion

Please email to Chihaya (chiha143@nufs.ac.jp) if you can attend.