

NUFS Workshop 2008

Newsletter No. 9

Workshop in November

<Part 1>

Date: November 8, 2008, 10:30-14:30

Venue: NSC College, Bld. IIS, Room 51

Instructor: Mathew White (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: "Exploring FUNdamentals in Teaching Topic Studies Courses"

The number of participants: 26

Abstract: Participants in this workshop will experience some activities and instruments for effectively teaching English through theme-based lessons. As educational professionals, we are always striving to engage our students in the target language, provide meaningful content, and achieve greater student and teacher satisfaction. We'll sample some of the ingredients available for well-crafted lesson plans that incorporate elements of group dynamics, methods for capturing students' attention, and vehicles that motivate them to master the content. In addition we'll look at some methods for providing students with opportunities to voice their opinions, check and refine their understanding of both the content and the target vocabulary and structures, and to recognize and celebrate the learning successes and class contributions of themselves and their peers. Hope you can make it!



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

- 'Pick out keywords and retell the story' activity must be suitable for my reading classes. I want to try it out soon. I also want to take up environmental issues. They sound heavy and hard to handle, but Mathew put them in more enjoyable way.
- 'Making a dialogue' as a follow-up activity. After retelling the story, it's good to think about the theme again by making a dialogue. Sometimes students forget to think about the theme as their problem. In order to relate the theme or the message of the lesson to students' lives, this creative dialogue is good. It's also related to our writing class, where students have actual conversation.
- 'Back to the board' is a good activity for reviewing vocabulary. It's possible to make this into an information gap activity for beginner-level students. Letting students make groups based on the degree of their interest in the topic is also an interesting starter of a topic-based lesson. This gives both students and teachers chances to learn different opinions.
- Video describing activity is one activity I want to use. Students are sure to enjoy the class. I once tried this method when I learned it from Nancy. It worked somehow, but something was necessary. And today I found what is necessary. After each



student describes the video, they learn new words and phrases, and then they alternately describe the video again. This helps students have more chances to use better English.

- The next unit of the text book (New Horizon 3) I am teaching next month is about environmental issues. Students are reading about danger of farm chemicals. So I would like to use the activities Mat introduced today: students read some text, write key words and retell the story. I think it easy to revise it for junior high school students. They can read about the topic, get new information about the issue and practice English. Perfect!
- I would like to use the vocabulary exercise Mat introduced. This is a good activity for students to review words that they learned in the previous classes. I also like to use the information gap reading activity. Since students have to explain about the reading passage their partners haven't read, it gives them pure responsibility to exchange the information. Creating their own dialogue which is related to what they have read is also a great idea as a final project.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- It's important to offer a heavy topic such as environmental issues as a fun way. I've learned that interactive activities can help students have their own opinions.
- I found a great opportunity to make a mere reading lesson into an interesting topic-based activity. I got great hints to introduce information exchange activities in every phase of a lesson. Unfortunately, I teach no reading class this year, so I would like to try what I learned today next year.
- As I realized before, it's very important to have various variations of activities. Without them, students will be bored. The most important thing may be to attract their interest and give them a chance to enjoy and learn English.
- One activity includes many elements; reading, listening, speaking writing performing etc. The combination and repeating the use of vocabulary and grammar improve students' English abilities.
- I often hesitate to introduce serious issues (like and environmental problem) to the class, however, I learned that there are ways to teach serious topics in fun and interesting ways.
- After learning the necessary words, the students can reproduce the story with more accuracy. Giving the key words after letting them reproduce the story would motivate students to learn new words.
- Mat gave us how to create a warm and happy atmosphere to study English. Assessment tool is also great. We can check everything on a piece of paper, and it can be proof and a king of syllabus to understand what they studied.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): Unlike task-based activities, topic-based activities need a wide range of vocabulary in order to enjoy the topic. How can we input a large vocabulary for a topic in a short time in advance?

A: It's impossible to know exactly what vocabulary items each student will and will not already know, but you can select the vocabulary that you think will be most useful. For instance, try to make summaries of articles or activities using only key words. Those key words are probably the



vocabulary you need to pre-teach. I try to avoid overwhelming the students with too many vocabulary items at the same time, so I focus on the words that I think will be most useful. With something like the Mr. Bean video, perhaps it's best to throw them in the deep-end and teach them only the nouns. Students can make gestures the first time around as they try to explain what they see. This will hopefully create a need to learn the verbs and motivate the students to learn them. The words are especially useful if you're going to follow up the activity by having students describe how to make "the ideal sandwich." However, if the topic isn't food or how to make it, you could let the verbs for making the sandwich go completely, and focus on vocabulary related to the topic of consumerism. What things did Mr. Bean buy in order to make his sandwich? How many things did Mr. Bean throw away? What things do you think he bought at a convenience store? What are three choices that Mr. Bean made that help protect the environment? What are three choices that Mr. Bean made that are bad for the environment? If environmental issues or consumerism is your topic, the vocabulary you want to focus on is very different from what you'd want to focus on if your topic is "food" or "preparing meals".

Q (2): I want to know how to introduce vocabulary at the beginning of a lesson.

A: Hmm... There are as many ways to introduce vocabulary items as there are ways to slice a cake! I like to divide the vocabulary into two (A and B) or four (A B C & D) lists. Provide the words on everyone's lists, but only provide the definitions or translations to certain words on certain lists. This creates an information gap. Make it clear that students may not look at each other's papers, but instead, must ask their partners to explain the vocabulary. Most people will agree that the person doing the teaching is the one learning the most, so this means the students will be more likely to remember the words that they explain. In addition, I think that the teacher should model the pronunciation for each of the words for the class and have the students repeat them. It's also important to think about whether you want the students to be able to use the words productively, which would mean teaching the collocations, or simply know the words receptively. The teacher's job is also to create additional encounters with the vocabulary for the learners, so creating big vocabulary cards for the class or making crossword puzzles or other types of review games is really important. Sometimes, either as a review or to check how many words related to the topic students already know, I begin with a rhythm game. We all stand in a circle and do the following steps: 1) Slap your hands on your legs 2) Clap your hands together 3) Snap your right fingers 4) Snap your left fingers. Keep repeating in a rhythm (slap, clap, snap, snap)



Q (3): Students always do pair works or group works in my class. I want to know how long (minutes) do I have to give them for pair works or group works?

A: The amount of time you give them really depends on the task itself. You might want to attempt the task yourself, and then add some additional time for them. I like to provide additional activities on the back of handouts, such as crosswords, unscrambling sentences in which I've mixed up the word order, or questions for discussion, for those who finish early. We can then go over them quickly after everyone has completed the main task. Design a system that makes it easy for the teacher to see how many people have completed the task (such as, everybody stands, and when a pair finishes, they can sit down and

work on the crossword puzzle). Sometimes, I don't let everyone finish the task, as waiting for everyone to finish could lose the atmosphere of the class. When students realize that they are only going to have so many minutes, and that the teacher might stop them before they finish, they often try harder to get the task/activity done in time.

Q (4): When students retell the story, some students choose too many key words and others choose fewer key words. For students, it's difficult to choose the key words and reconstruct the sentences. Do you have some activities students can try before they get used to choose key words and retell the story by themselves?

A: You can start by having students write 2 or 3 words for each sentence. I sometimes provide the key words for the students and have them practice retelling the story/article using my key words. Hopefully, this will be a good model for them when they start doing their own. Making mindmaps of stories also helps students learn how to select key words. You could begin with a Japanese story that they all should know, such as Momotaro or Urashimataro or some other story that they've just read in English. The Big Bad Wolf and the Three Pigs is a good one because there are not that many words needed, and the same words are often repeated.

Q (5): How can you include dictionary-use activities? Sometimes I find English-Japanese dictionaries help. Can we use E-J dictionaries?

A: Yes, absolutely. I think that using E-J dictionaries can be very helpful. Learning the matching Japanese equivalents is extremely powerful and a natural part of learning. I always want to know the closest equivalent in my own language. Even the process of students looking up the words alphabetically is useful, and can be done as a contest. If you have a class set of dictionaries, you can have the students work in teams to look up the words, write the page numbers for them, and the first two translations. Have them write the first two to reinforce



the idea that students still need to choose the correct translation for the context of the word. One useful follow-up activity is to provide two different definitions for the same word, and have students decide which definition is the one that matches the way it is being used in the case in your text. Students often choose the very first definition that comes up in their dictionaries without even checking to make sure it makes sense in that context.. I also recommend that students draw pictures and sample sentences on their vocabulary cards/notebooks to help them. Students can personalize words with stories to help them remember. Paul Crane taught me how to remember the Japanese word for the orange stuff that we press our *inkan's* into by saying “*shu*” and pointing at his shoe, and then saying “*niku*” and making a muscle. It's silly, but I'll probably always remember it now. My Spanish teacher did the same thing. I'll always remember that in Spanish the word for carpet is “*alfombra*” because she told us to imagine a little man named “*AL*” standing on the carpet wearing a “*FOAM*” “*BRA*”. She told us that when I was in my first year in junior high school. I'm 37 years old, and I hardly ever speak Spanish, but I can still remember the vocabulary she taught me using this method.

Q (6): How would you apply this to elementary school situations?

A: I'm not sure exactly what part of the workshop "this" is referring to. However, I think you could use a story book like "The Hungry Little Caterpillar" and spring board into many things related to the topic of food:

- a) Students explain the fruit words in a style like back to the boards (S1: "It's red" S2: An apple [alternate] S2: It's red and green. It has black seeds. : S1: Watermelon!).
- b) Students could make a list of foods they could eat a lot of.
- c) Students make lists of foods in their refrigerators as homework. Chris Hunt has a WiseHatNews Newsletter and homepage (<http://www.wisehat.com/>) . One time, he provided the template for a refrigerator. Students could draw the food items they wanted to inside or simply write the names instead of drawing the pictures.

Q (7): Could you be our school adviser?

A: Hmm... I'm not sure what I would need to do to that, but I love discussing teaching and learning, so please feel free to contact me if you have questions or great ideas you want to share. I'd also love to come to schools and see what is happening in the classes, so if it's okay with your school for me to visit, I'd love to arrange a time and observe a lesson.

I'd like to thank all of you for participating in the workshop and providing such wonderful feedback. Each time I join, I learn something and get more inspired about improving my lessons for my students. I look forward to meeting with you again.

P.S. The website I use for checking word frequencies is: <http://www.lex tutor.ca/>

The website from Oxfam was: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/> (The picture was from a lesson plan on water and our need to appreciate its value.)

<Part 2>

Date: November 8, 2008, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Bld. IIS, Room 51

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

The number of participants: 18

Abstract: Group discussion



Workshop in December (Schedule)

Date: December 6, 2008, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 51

Instructor: Tim Murphey (Kanda University of International Studies)

Title: "Student and Teacher Hope, Agency, Re-motivation, and Altruism"

Please email Chihaya(chiha143(atmark)nufs.ac.jp) if you can attend this workshop.