

## NUFS Workshop 2009

*Newsletter No. 2***Workshop in June****<Part 1>****Date:** June 13, 2009, 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30**Venue:** NSC College, Room 51**Instructor:** Suzanne Miyake (Nanzan University)**Title:** “Creating Dynamic Readers: Reading Strategies and Reading Circles”

**Abstract:** How can teachers assist students in becoming better and more motivated readers? Introducing a variety of reading strategies will help students improve not only their L2 reading skills, but these strategies can also transfer into their L1. Furthermore, helping students discover the pleasure of L2 reading can be realized with Reading Circles. In this workshop, participants will gain a greater understanding of what reading strategies are and how to create level-appropriate strategy activities for their students, as well as participate in an actual Reading Circle.

**The number of participants:** 34**1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**

- Activity 1 in which we put punctuation was interesting and maybe suitable for junior high students. Activity 2 was also good for my students, especially for third year students because they are encountering many new words in reading materials and this activity can persuade them that they don't have to stop and check every unknown word they meet.
- Forming questions, because when the students can understand the whole story, they will form the question. If not, they can't form questions.
- Reading Circle. Because each member has a certain role to help the discussion keep going smoothly. All the members in my group worked very hard to play our roles and we enjoyed discussing on various aspects about the passage.
- I found some activities that I could use in my classroom. One of them is to put punctuation in the text because it is good for pre-reading activity. Reordering the instructions was also interesting because using authentic text could activate students' ideas and performance.
- Reading Circle is very fun. I want to try it in my class. Choosing an appropriate textbook is important and I think it would take time to do this at first. So, after term-end exam, I'll try it.
- Literature Circle is a kind of dream or an ultimate goal I want to reach. This enables students to engage in English learning using all the four skills. Although my students are not ready and able to 'complete' Literature Circle, I can incorporate some part of it into my handouts of English II.
- I am always thinking how I have my students read something written in English. Reading Circle is one of the interesting activities I haven't heard. I am sure that my students will like this.
- I think that it's difficult for junior high school students to take part in Reading Circle, but we will be able to have the students read a story using the roles of Reading Circles as a group work. I mean, for example, we have groups of four try a role of Reading Circle.

## 2. What you learned from today's workshop

- I've got various ideas about how to activate reading activity. I learned how to conduct Reading circles in my daily lesson. I'd like to introduce this activity in my reading classes. I also learned that discussion leader plays an important role to lead the other group members.
- I think it is difficult for my students to read novels in class, but there are many materials except the textbook. I want my students to read more authentic materials.
- In Activity 4 & 5(Recipe for sherry trifle), I can see how the pictures work to help the understanding of the passage. In class, I would like to use pictures to help the understanding of the students. They are more useful and meaningful than translation.
- I learned it's very important to look at the problems of my teaching from a different point of view. Literature Circle gave me hints to change my problematic English II lesson into more interesting and beneficial to my students.
- I was a little hesitant at first but before I know it, I was deeply involved in Reading Circle. As Keiko sensei told us, even lower level students can join and enjoy it. One day I would like to try this activity after modifying and revising.
- I learned communication activities we had today help students develop not only English language skills but also they understand each other in class. These promote mutual understanding with classmates. If we have successful classroom activities, we can create much better classroom atmosphere. Then students can learn better.
- I learned a lot of aspect of reading. Especially 'recipe for sherry trifle' was interesting for me. I couldn't imagine the order of cooking at first, but after I saw the picture activity 5, I could understand and imagine how to cook. So, I thought to show and give an image are very important to teach new words and sentences.



## 3. Questions and Answers

**Q (1): I've already used 'activity 1' (punctuation correction), but I'm not sure what is the point. If the students are good at activity 1, what does it mean? Does that mean they understand the story?**

**A:** The purpose of this activity is to train the students to make predictions and guesses when reading a text. When supplying the missing punctuation of a text, we try to predict where the sentences are likely to stop and look for certain words functioning as signals of a new sentence or paragraph. If students are good at this activity, it means they are good at predicting text structure, but it does not mean they can understand the story.

**Q (2): For Reading Circles, is it OK to divide a long story into two and use two class hours on different days: one hour today and the other hour next week?**

**A:** Yes, I think it's perfectly acceptable to divide a long story into two, and to have the first Reading Circle one week, and the second Reading Circle the next week. That's basically what I am doing with "Teacher Man". The story is split into 20 chapters making it easier for students to digest all of the information.

**Q (3): Yoshi sensei said it's not enough to have reading circle once a month, but for some reasons, it would be very hard to have one every week. I wonder what to do. I could spend 5 minutes or so on a small activity every class, but... If you have any good suggestion, I would appreciate it.**

**A:** Since once a month is too infrequent (I definitely agree with Yoshi!), and if you are unable to do Reading Circles every week, why not try twice a month? A Reading Circle takes approximately 30-40 minutes of class time.

Also, see Q4's answer for shorter Reading Circle ideas. You could do one of those activities per class. It's better to do something related to reading than to do nothing at all!



**Q (4): I think today's activity is a little difficult for JHS students. Are there any useful ways to make use of reading circles?**

**A:** I agree that Reading Circles might be difficult for JHS students, especially if they are not reading lengthy texts yet. Are your students able to read short texts in English? If so, you could do Mini Reading Circles. Here are some ideas (and you don't have to do all of these activities at the same time!): (1) each member contributes 1-2 discussion questions, (2) all members verbally summarize the text together during the Reading Circle, (3) the Word Master finds 2-3 important words instead of 5, (4) the Passage Person finds 1 passage instead of 3, (5) the Connector finds 1 connection instead of 2, and (6) all members draw a picture which depicts the story they read.

**Q (5): I was curious about how to introduce 'reading circles' to lower groups. Please give me some ideas.**

**A:** Do you mean, "How can I do Reading Circles with lower-level students?" If yes, please see my answer for Q (4).

If you are wondering how to introduce Reading Circles to lower-level students, then I recommend explaining the role sheets clearly in simple English, or if that is too difficult for students to comprehend, then explain the role sheets in Japanese. Mark Furr (the creator of Reading Circles) recommends that after explaining the role sheets in English to the students, to have the students discuss these roles in Japanese amongst themselves to confirm their understanding.

**Q (6): How do you assess the reading class? Do you ask students to submit the worksheet? Do you give them 'normal' tests after they finish presentation?**

**A:** In my particular class Freshmen Workshop class (in which we do weekly Reading Circles), my evaluation is as follows:

Reading Circle Role Sheets: 50%

Movie Presentation: 30%

Attendance & Participation: 20%

During every Reading Circle, I circulate around the classroom and stamp each role sheet if it's complete and satisfactorily done with an "Excellent!" stamp. If the role sheet is only partially done, students receive a "Fight!" stamp.

Then, I have students hand in their Reading Circle role sheets on the last day of class. Students will have had a chance to do every role, and so I check to see that all have been completed. Students receive full marks for "Excellent!" stamps, and partial credit for "Fight!" stamps. Also, students are assessed on their movie presentation which is done in groups. I created a rubric for this. I do not give any tests in this class.



**Q (7): I'm trying out 'literature circles' in my class now, and I found a problem. Each student gets prepared at home very well, but they don't have an active discussion at school. They just read out what they have done at home and other students just listen to them. Even though Discussion Leader asks some questions, they just answer in a short sentence. How can I make them have an active discussion and a fun?**

**A:** This is what many teachers find challenging – how to get students to actively participation in group discussions. A friend of mine had this challenge when she was teaching English to non-English majors. The students did the absolute minimum during group discussions and honestly, didn't have much interest in English. My friend solved this issue by giving each group a mini-voice recorder, so that all group discussions were recorded. These recording were then uploaded to the teacher's computer for her to listen to. She told the students that every week she would grade a different group, and the students had no idea when their particular group would be assessed, and so every week they made HUGE efforts to talk as much as possible knowing their teacher might check their recording. My friend said this technique worked really well with her students. Why don't you give it a try?

## <Part 2>

**Date:** June 13, 2009, 14:30-17:00

**Venue:** NSC College, Room 51

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

**The number of participants:** 25

**Abstract:** group discussion on action research





## **Workshop in July (Schedule)**

Date: July 11, 2009, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 51

Instructor: Noriko Ishitobi (Ueda Junior High School), Hiromi Tsuji (Gihu Municipal Business High School)

Title: "Model Lessons and Report on Action Research"

Please email Chihaya ([chiha143\(at-mark\)nufs.ac.jp](mailto:chiha143@nufs.ac.jp)) to attend this workshop.