NUFS Workshop 2011

Newsletter No. 3

<u>Workshop in July</u>

(Part 1)
Date: July 9, 2011, 13:00-16:00
Venue: NSC College, Room 31
Instructor: Noriko Ishitobi (Ueda Junior High School),
            Mie Kato (Hida High School)
Title:
Noriko: "How can a rubric change students' attitudes
        towards learning?"
Mie: "My Action Research"

Abstract:

Noriko: A way of assessment might motivate or demotivate students for learning. The presenter conducted a speaking test to assess students' performance on their timed-conversation which they have regularly practiced. A rubric was used for students' self-evaluation and the teacher's assessment.

Was this use of the rubric effective for students' learning? Did students understand the meaning of each criterion and fully utilize it for the preparation? The presenter, a beginner researcher, has been collecting data from the students to look for the answers to these questions. The summary of data analysis from her action research is reported. The presentation also includes some teaching demonstration.

Mie: Action research in the past five years will be reported. Grammar and oral communication, essays and Focus on Form Instruction, literature circle, extensive reading, and essays relating to textbooks have been focused on each year. In the series of action research, the followings have been learned: 1 any activity has been developed through a trial and error process; 2 cooperative framework among teachers is indispensable in order to improve the actual condition; 3 open-end tasks will enable us to have a real communication with students. Any suggestions and advice will be more than welcome.

The number of participants: 25

1. **Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**
   (Noriko)
   - Students' survey with anonymous answers: It's very interesting to see how students reacted differently when they didn't write their names on their surveys. I thought students were more honest even though they wrote their names because the comments (for example, the feeling of taking speaking test) would not affect their grades. I've learned the students always try to give good impression to a teacher and that a teacher tent to overlook their true voices.

- To let the students set up their goal in rubric is a very good idea. So it was interesting to see in the video that some students say they underestimate their goal.
- "Which is correct?" on P.3 in Noriko sensei's handouts. The sentences are funny! I would like to use her way of making funny wrong sentences when I make sentences for True or False questions.
- Focus Group was awesome. I was a little unsure if I could do that or if it would be worth trying. But I can see how useful it could be to my situation. Without the video, I might not have been sold in the idea. But now I feel more confident in the idea of the focus group.

(Mie)
- I want to use 'Group presentation' because group work will be a very good chance to teach and learn together. Sometimes they will learn by themselves. Which is better, learning alone or learning together? I'm sure students can learn a lot on group work.
- Peer's attack – It helps students improve their writing. I have got my students to write comments on peer's writing, but have never got them to attack. I teach junior high school students and it may be difficult to do it in English, but I can try to get them to so it in Japanese.
- For low-level students, CSs that deal with checking understanding, or moving the conversation on when a partner doesn't understand, may be very useful.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.
- I did a speaking test and got my students to write self-evaluation and reflection, but I didn't know how to analyze the data. Noriko sensei's analysis was very interesting.
- Keeping better teaching strategies is important in order to become a good teacher like Noriko and Mie.
- How to encourage students to speak and talk with peers and read as many stories as possible.
- It is important to observe and to listen to students., There are many ways to collect students' voices, but is very important to analyze them and reflect on what has been done in class.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): As an English teacher how to cooperate with other English teachers at your school? New English system will start in a year or two, how do you think English teachers should prepare and improve English for it?

A (Noriko): To be honest, I am not cooperating with my colleagues well. This is the thing I need to work on the most now. I believe teachers always have to learn and improve skills. There must be various ways to learn. To improve English? It is me who wants to ask this question!

A (Mie): I copy the common handout with which we have everyday class. Students in any class of 2nd grade are offered the same materials and activities. We haven't reached the agreement yet, but it is not bad that each teacher has different ideas. We are required to have more communication when we have different ideas, which we expect our students to learn, don't we? I have monthly meetings with volunteer teachers and we discuss the new course of study. When we receive the models of the new textbooks, we will start to make plans and device approach.

Q (2): How do you introduce Dynamic Assessment?

A (Noriko): Shouldn't we have another workshop to talk about this matter? I am not the expert, so even if I dare to answer this question, it is not going to satisfy you.

In order to do this speaking test, I showed the rubric at the very beginning and the students practiced timed-conversation of a certain topic repeatedly. I tried to give them advice better performance as much as possible in the practice, but the students themselves also tried to improve performance with the help of the rubric.

I also use pair or group work to do writing activities including peer editing. I want my students to have a lot of group or pair work in their learning and I am trying to set the situation for that.

You may say it is not the Dynamic Assessment, however, to be honest, these are the things I can do right now when there are 38 students in one classroom.

A (Mie): Firstly, syllabus should be elaborated, where formative assessment and summative assessment are integrated systematically. Secondly, in the assessment, I would like to include students' self-assessment, portfolio or reflective journal which will encourage student to join in their own assessment, therefore, will promote their metacognitive learning strategies.

To Noriko sensei,

Q (3): Did you say you kept the same topic for the timed conversation for a month? I'm sorry I'm not sure. If so, why do you keep it?

A: First of all, I am sorry that I was lacking for words and the explanation was not enough in this presentation. I kept the same topic, either the next weekend or the previous weekend, for the actual speaking test. My students did the timed-conversation twice a week for about a month.

Q (4): What do you think of a "partner problem" in the speaking test? Students often feel the result depends on the partner, which is decided by lottery.

A: This time, I aimed that every student learned to have a conversation for one minute by repeating the practice on the same topic as I wrote above. The students had chance to talk with different partners by rotating seat until the speaking test, and practiced to keep the conversation despite the partner. Fortunately my students did not complain a lot to me this time. I think the "partner problem" would be crucial when the topic is more difficult. I would also like to ask some experts of the performance test here in this workshop about this problem for the future.

Q (5): Do you use Power Point in class, too?

A: No, I don't. My teaching circumstance in a public junior high school is not technology-friendly. Don't you think it would be great if we could use Power Point or Internet in the classrooms easily?

Q (6): How many times did you watch video to evaluate students' conversation in the speaking test?

A: At least two times, I think. I had to watch some parts repeatedly like three to five times.

Q (7): Regarding the focus group, have you done it with boys, too?

A: No, I haven't. It was first time for me to try the focus group. I gave the whole class a questionnaire to ask if anyone would join the focus group. Those five girls in the video clip were the only ones who answered "yes" in the questionnaire. I hope boys will cooperate when I do it next time.

Q (8): Have you found a useful rubric for pronunciation?

A: To create my own rubrics, I refer to different rubrics including the ones in the action research reports of the participants of this workshop. I often use RubiStar http://rubistar.4teachers.org/ but they don't have rubrics for evaluating performance of foreign language. I checked several websites which show rubrics to evaluate speaking this time. (e.g.

http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/frameworks/wrldlang/wlinstr3.html#Narration)

Most of the definitions for pronunciation use the expressions like "near native pronunciation" or "influenced by the first language." I believe the expressions I used for pronunciation criterion was not that problematic; however, the students' understanding about the criterion was not good enough. I had to clarify what the "*eigo rashii hatsuon*" is and show examples in class. When I gave the rubric to the students, I asked them if they could understand the criteria and if they wanted to negotiate with me to change the rubric, but they didn't say anything, though! I hope the students can develop their meta-cognitive thinking gradually.

Q (9): How do you teach students follow up questions?

A: The follow up questions I introduced to my students are very limited. I taught some every time they did timed-conversation. I also gave the list of question words; with who, when, what, and where as a part of conversation strategies.

Q (10): How do you explain grammar?

A: I use Japanese to explain grammar, but I try to make the explanation as simple as possible. I also use input activities to introduce new grammar items. We often talk about the way of giving input of new grammar items in Action Research report at this workshop. I am always inspired by other teachers' ideas.

To Mie sensei,

Q (11): Do you evaluate the students through the debate? If so, I want to know how you do it.

A: This year, debate is not included in students' assessment. Three years ago, speaking tests in pair were done. Criteria items were the first statement, follow-up questions, and answering questions.

Q (12): I often tell the students to write on argument from both points of view. After that, should I let them choose their opinion and write their own position?

A: I think the goal is that students have their own ideas toward the topic. Brainstorming and debate are preparation for the goal. Argument from both sides will encourage students to be objective, which will be useful when they write persuasive essays.

Q (13): Your speech was very clear. Did you practice talking before the presentation? Do you practice giving oral instructions before lessons?

A: Thank you for your kind encouragement. I am not good at speaking in front of others. Almost every day I practice talking for the next day's class toward the wall at home. For the presentation, of course I practiced a lot. Instead, I have a problem with improvisation.

Lastly, I should correct what I said. I said "My Hero" was a good topic because any student likes to talk and write about the person they respect. However, it should be avoided because it has much to do with their private belief, which may be dangerous to hurt their privacy. That is what I learned in the speech about human rights I listened to in today's business trip.

(Part 2)
Date: July 9, 2011, 14:30-17:00
Venue: Nagoya NSC College
Advisor: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh (NUFS), Robert Croker (Nanzan University)
Abstract: Monthly report on action research
The number of participants: 15

Workshop in August (Scheduled)

Date: August 6-7, 2011
Venue: Green Hotel Sangane
Abstract: Mid-term presentation on action research
Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato (NUFS), Robert Croker (Nanzan University)

This workshop is limited for action research group members only.
Please email Chihaya (chiha143(at-mark)nufs.ac.jp) to participate in this workshop.