

Newsletter No. 9

Workshop in January

<Part 1 >

Date: January 10, 2015, 10:30-14:00

Venue: NSC College, Building Minami, Room A-31

Presenter: Curtis Kelly (Kansai University)

Title: "Language Teaching and Personality Development from Preschool to Adulthood"

Abstract: "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." (Jon Kabat Zinn)

Optimal teaching means adjusting your means of instruction to fit your learners' stages of development. The brain is not built to learn anything; it operates by retaining skills and information that satisfy its needs at any particular time. Many of these needs can be identified by examining how we develop through life. Internally, that means the needs caused by physical and mental development. For example, each baby is so attuned its own mother's voice that it is the only voice it can learn from. External development means sociological stages of life we pass through and the key sociological needs produced by each. For teens, that means achieving independence, gaining self-sufficiency and finding one's "voice." Understanding and utilizing the stages of development can be a powerful tool of teaching.



The number of participants: 23

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

- I want to find ways of exchanging students' true opinions to encourage students' development of core executive functions and EQ.
- I would like to use the story about the man who stole to save his dying wife and the story about the runner to show students that each one of us has different perspectives in lives. Our choices, our own thought and path to choose.
- To make lesson wrap up, I will use self-evaluation at the end of classes. It's useful for students to review what they learned.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

- Giving/Getting the knowledge is not the purpose of education. We sometimes forget that English education is just one form of education, and try to teach some grammatical/lexical points in class. I've learned that we should always keep in mind we (teachers) are here to give people better lives.
- People need pass to stage of development repeatedly, changing that circumstance, namely workplaces, marriage and other events.



- It was a little hard for me to understand the concept of EQ and several terms in some theories. Sometimes I was at a loss to follow what you and other teachers were talking about. Actually, I wanted to have more time for hands-on and more concrete activities in our every-day English classes. I felt a little disappointed and frustrated today.
- This is my first time to hear about ‘Executive Functions’. So I’ve got very interested in this idea. I’ve learned many phases when people grow up emotionally.
- Today’s workshop was very interesting. I thought about school education a lot. Every single activity we do in school is working for developing kid’s characteristics. And it’s meaningful. It’s good to keep in mind the things I learned today when I teach every day, because sometimes it’s tiresome. We are doing meaningful things.
- Students-centered activities are necessary. Teachers should teach students tolerance, consciousness through lots of activities in classes.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): What are some strategies we can use to encourage our students’ development of core executive functions? Or, what strategies can we teach our students to cope with/steer their own character?

A: This, of course, is the question of the day. I think it is easy to do with children, because they are so pliable. In fact, my handout has a list of proven approaches. However, it is harder to do with jr. high – college students because of the level difference. I think project work is the most effective. We tend to divide study up into little micro-units. A day of school is 30 minutes of this followed by 30 minutes of that, which in reality, is not the normal way humans learn. Instead, we should foster passion for a topic and even obsession. Instead of just giving them many little things to learn at a superficial level, having them go very into one thing, for hours, days, or months, leads to a different kind of learning. So projects, which might include: zemi-like research, building something, a report on some topic, etc.

I remember being a jr. high student and making a diorama of a Roman attack on a walled city. It took many days, but I was so deep in it. I can’t think of anything I learned from it in terms of academic knowledge, but I think it was one of the experiences that led me to like making things later, such as textbooks.

That our schools are not doing this is obvious to me as a college teacher. Students have this habit of ignoring the subject matter until the day before the test, when they suddenly apply themselves. From zero to 100 for one day. It seems a weird way to learn to me, and in fact, does not lead to lasting learning. However, it is so widespread and universal; it has almost become “common sense” for students to study this way. I am sure it is a product of the high school system.

Paul Tough’s book talks about the importance of clubs in teen development, something teachers tend to underrate. If you have a student who is weak in class but completely devoted to some club, it’s probably a success story, not a failure. Unfortunately, our grading system does not let us take that kind of external growth into account.



Q (2): Any peer teaching materials that are highly recommended?

A: I'm not sure what you mean. Student peers? What age? I am a big believer in mentorship and there is a lot written in that. Mentoring is good for both the recipient and giver. In many case, I have set up sessions using returnees from a study abroad program mentoring the next group going out. If you are interested in trying, there is a lot available on the net. For example, search "The ABCs of school-based Mentoring" for a manual.

Q (3): How to teach writing, moreover, how to teach or develop students' ability to express themselves more fully.

A: Now we are in my territory, but again, I am not sure what kind of students you mean. Children? Doctoral thesis writers? Okay, I have a simple paper that covers it all: *The Stages of EFL Writer Development* (attached, or if not, search online)

Abstract:

This study examines the development of EFL students' writing skills through four stages: a) the Word Level, b) the Sentence Level, c) the Composition Level, and d) the Academic/Professional Level. These levels are organized around one major challenge each, and as a result, one or more methods of instruction relevant to that challenge. At the Word level, training in phonics is critical. At the Sentence Level, learning sentence grammar is important. At the Composition Level, the emphasis changes to expository organization. At the Academic/Professional Level, learning the rules of genre for different types of writing is the key challenge.



But maybe the short answer to your question is: 1) use sentence combining activities to get them able to use their latent grammar and vocabulary activities in writing, and 2) have them write paragraphs or compositions about topics deeply meaningful to them (i.e., related to life stage of development) that others want to read. For example: "Something you are sorry about and what you learned from it." I also like having learners keep diaries.

Q (4): If there are any good education programs or activities where we can cultivate 'grit', please let me know.

A: Our attitudes and expectations are huge. And I think the support we give is too, but I'm not sure how to perfectly mix praise and criticism.

Again, I suggest you read Paul Tough's book: *How Children Succeed*

From Net:

The story we usually tell about childhood and success is the one about intelligence: success comes to those who score highest on tests, from preschool admissions to SATs.

But in *How Children Succeed*, Paul Tough argues that the qualities that matter most have more to do with character: skills like perseverance, curiosity, conscientiousness, optimism, and self-control.

How Children Succeed introduces us to a new generation of researchers and educators who, for the first time, are using the tools of science to peel back the mysteries of character. Through their stories - and the stories of the children they are trying to help - Tough traces the links between childhood stress and life success. He uncovers the surprising ways in which parents do—and do not - prepare their children for adulthood. And he provides us with new insights into how to help children growing up in poverty.

Q (5): Tell me more ways to activities to bond with my Jr. High students.

A: The easiest way to bond with any students is to show you care about them, and not just as a group, but for each one individually. That means sometimes stopping one student in the hall and saying “I was impressed by your work today.” Or try inviting a couple learners to your office to talk to them, or ask their opinion on something. While reading a dialog, swap in a real student’s name. Jr. High students need to feel special.

For “difficult students” that means accepting them as they are instead of either writing them off, or trying to push them into something they are not. I think a lot of good teaching is simply forgetting yourself and your goals; trying to see the world from their eyes.

Use personalization whenever possible. Letting them share their stories builds their bonds with each other, and that always means a closer bond to you.

Q (6): How do you think that educators make their classes and their teaching approach to foster learners’ life development stages?

A: For me, the most successful application of life stage theories is in the activities I use with different age learners. Just understanding that they face different psychological challenges at different times of life, gives me a huge advantage. It is useful just knowing that waves of change wash through them as they grow, and sometimes, we can even ride those waves. For example, new 1st year students in jr. high, high school and college, especially girls, are deeply driven to find friends. I have crafted many activities that play on that need.

For example, in my 60-student ichinensei Business Nyumon class, I have students write interview questions on some relevant topic – like their favorite stores, part-time jobs, or telephone use – and then have them interview from 1 to 4 other students. I set up partners different ways each week so that they meet a lot of people. I also make sure they go through a self-introduction before starting (“Hi, I’m _____. Call me _____”), so that they know each others’ names. Dyadic circles are good for this too. Year-end evaluations are always full of comments like “I could make many friends.” Or “I could talk to many people.” I would have just brushed past those comments in my less knowing days, but not now.

For other students, I find these activities useful:

- stories with a conflict or moral dilemma
- pair, group, collaborative work
- values clarifications activities
- problem solving
- goal writing



- reflection and self-reflection
- class party or outing the first week

Q (7): Please tell me what is the most important connection between today’s workshop and English teaching. What should teachers do/know? Please explain about it showing some concrete examples.

A: This is a good question. Okay, the big thing:

Always keep in mind that your students are facing harder things in the process of growing up than the little things we do in class. Big things are happening in their hearts and minds, that if we ignore, we miss and mistreat. If the “purpose of teaching is to give them better lives,” then we have to take into account everything that is happening in each student. We have to adjust our lessons, our rules, or feedback to help them grow in all ways. Our ultimate purpose is to raise human beings rather than just pass on information.



Concrete example: A 15 yr old student always sits by herself and does not engage with the lessons. Normal response: bad student, so punish her. Life Stage Theory response: she is probably friendless and thus cannot engage. So set up activities whereby she talks to other girls, ask those girls to be friendly to each other. Talk to the class about of friendship. Use pair-work and “getting to know you” activities.

Concrete example: A 14 yr old boy who was a pretty good student last year, becomes rude, refuses to do homework, talks in class, and has a bad attitude. Normal response: bad attitude, so scold him. Life Stage Theory response: assume he is going through hormonal changes that cause hankoki, so go easy on him and wait it out. Try to find out if his parents are the strict types, which tends to exacerbate the rebelliousness. See if giving him special assignments in place of the usual, works; assignments whereby he can choose the topic himself. Maybe ask him if he would like to take on special duties that might make him feel more independent and adult, such as keeping a journal on attendance for you and a record of the class activities.

Actually, for the person who asked this question, I was interested in all your comments in your Reflection Log. Using what Levinson and Perry found, let me take a stab at your situation. This is just a wild guess, but tell me later if this is right. I got the feeling that you are in a difficult situation right now. Maybe your job changed or your students, or something else in your life. The way you wrote looked similar to the way someone in the middle of a transition does.



<Part 2>

Date: January 10, 2014, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh (NUFS), Robert Croker (Nanzan University)

Abstract: Monthly report on action research

The number of participants: 17



Workshop in February (Scheduled)

Date: February 21, 2015, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: NSC College, Building Minami, Room A31

Presenter: Junko Yamanaka (Chukyo University)

Title: “Developing Critical Thinking and Language Skills”

Please send an email to Chihaya (chiha143@nufs.ac.jp) to attend this workshop.