

NUFS Workshop 2017

Newsletter No. 6

Workshop in October

Date: October 14, 2017, 10:30-14:30

Venue: NSC College, Room 31

Presenter: Sean Reid (Teikyokani Elementary School)

Title: “Fostering Young Learners’ Communicative Competence: Techniques, Strategies and Activities”

Abstract: This workshop will begin with a brief explanation of how best to create an environment which will improve students’ communicative competence. The presenter will then outline various communication strategies and discuss how they can be integrated into curriculum for young learners by way of communicative, information-exchange activities. The participants will be asked to actively participate in these activities and experience the effectiveness of the strategies for themselves. The session will conclude by examining the strategies that we have discussed in light of challenges specific to our particular students and teaching environments.



The number of participants: 20

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

- Information gap activity with some useful words – it is a simple activity but students can use various grammar rules and words. At the same time, they can practice conversation strategies in real world situation.
- I really liked the activities where students asked questions about a country. If a student became an expert about a country, they could learn a lot by teaching others.
- Circumlocution activity – I tried it a little before. It is very useful for junior high school students to focus on forms. It’s very engaging and it helps the students to think outside the box.
- Circumlocution activities – because they will help students move away from direct translation.
- Acting problems students and guess what the problem is – I hope the students realize their problems and change their way to attend the class.
- S1 describes the clothes and what the person on the screen is like, and S2 draw the picture guessing. S1s need to try to make themselves understood, and S2s need to listen carefully to understand.



2. What you learned from today's workshop

- I saw in the video clips children moving comfortably in the classroom during the English class. I hope that I can help my university students to feel more comfortable in the classroom.
- In the last activity, one group of us pretended to have communicative problem and other group tried to overcome the problems by using conversation strategies. It was a good activity to teach the students how important to learn communication strategies and effectiveness of them. I want to try to introduce one by one again to foster my students' communication skills.
- Allow students to solve by themselves rather than teachers be ready to help them.
- We have to teach students when and where they should use conversation strategies. So we have to create activities which give students more chances to make use of conversation strategies.
- To make a conversation with students longer is not easy. One thing to solve it is to show that teacher is very interested in students' stories.
- Students to student communication is the most important. We have to make more chances to let them speak among themselves.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): My biggest problem in my school is time. I know you also know about the difficulty, but what's the tip to make 'once a week' lessons even better?

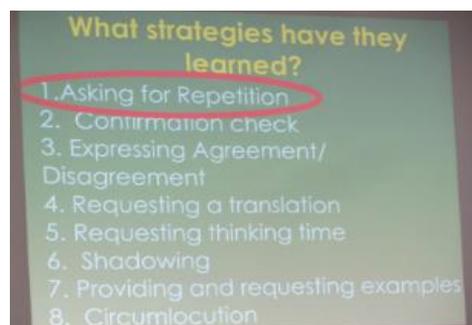
A: I think it is important that the students spend the maximum amount of time possible in each weekly lesson interacting with each other in pairs or groups. Depending on the level of the students that you are teaching, you can end each class by telling students what will be done in the next class and asking them to prepare for it at home. Worksheets can be assigned at this time, to provide students with input and practice for the structures and vocabulary that they will use to interact with their peers in the following class. Students can also be informed about the specific discussion topics and activities that will be done in the following class so that they can begin to prepare for and think about the language and strategies that they will use to interact with their peers ahead of time. They can then begin the next class by talking in small groups about what they learned from the homework sheets and how they have prepared for the activities that they will do in class. Once they have shared their ideas in groups and made additional notes on how to complete the communicative tasks more effectively, (based on advice from their classmates) most of the class time can then be spent on interactive, student-centred activities.



Q (2): I'd like to know the steps to prepare students to get to the point where they can have paired conversation.

A: Students can start right away! I have elementary school grade 1 students beginning a pair conversation in the first week of classes. The idea is to have students participate in increasingly more difficult and lengthy conversations. For example, in the first week, beginner students ask each other what their name is and then sit down. From there we add "How are you?", "How was your weekend?", etc. Students should have

timed conversations in each class and timed conversation tests two or three times per term that can begin with a very short amount of time and gradually increase to longer and more difficult conversations. This allows students to start slowly, and feel comfortable with small progressions while gradually developing their communicative competence.



Q (3): I have students who don't want to communicate with the classmates except good friends. They don't make efforts or take part in pair activities. I have other students who don't like to reveal their lives to other classmates. Do you have any good activities to build teamwork spirit and to improve the communication skills for those students?

A: Students don't have to always discuss personal things. For example, they can communicate information to each other with the type of information gap activities that I used in the workshop, where they are basically just describing various different things that their partner couldn't see. I would remind students that on the day of their pair speaking tests they will be assigned a random partner, and as such it is in their best interest to talk to as many different students as possible in order to practice effectively for the test.

It sounds like some of the students are not interested in the activities that are happening in class now. I would try to get a better sense of what interests them. You could give out a survey asking students to rank different activities in order of what they want to do. They can also suggest new activities. You can then use this information to get a sense of what students want to do in the class. You can then adapt these suggestions to fit to the particular language or grammar goal that you are trying to achieve. Also, asking students in class what they want to do makes them accountable. If they suggest something and then you allow them to do it, they have a responsibility to do their best. If they have no suggestions, you should tell them that they should participate actively in your ideas until they come up with their own suggestions.

Q (4): I've seen the facts that high level students sometimes cannot show their real abilities if their partners are very low level students, especially when they have a conversation test. What do you think?

A: That would depend on the content of the test. I try to ensure that my tests are open-ended in terms of their content, allowing stronger students to speak more, and use more difficult grammar and vocabulary, while weaker students complete the same task in a much simpler manner. My rubrics are adjusted so that the scores will reflect the complexity of the speaking and structures.

For example, if you ask students to discuss their weekend on a speaking test, some students will use a lot of detail, and long difficult structures, while weaker students will use short simple sentences. In this way, all of them can participate to their best of their ability. If weaker students can't understand what the stronger students are saying, both students are obligated to use



communication strategies to negotiate for meaning. Obviously in this situation, the students that speak more and use more difficult structures will receive higher scores, but both students can interact with each other to the best of their ability.

Q (5): What kind of school is Teikyo kani? Are most kids smart in all subjects? Are there other foreign teachers there?

A: There is one other foreign teacher at the school. I wouldn't say that the students are smart in all of the subjects. There is the usual variation that occurs in any school with different students stronger in different areas. Also, like most schools, there is no English content on the entrance exam, so I don't think that the students have any special advantages over students in other schools.

Q (6): Where did you get those activity ideas from?

A: I came up with the ideas myself. In order to do so, I first clearly outline what my goal is and how I would like the students to achieve it. I try to create a real-world situation with a non-English goal for the students in each activity in order to keep them motivated. Once you have a very clear goal in mind, it is easy to come up with possible ideas. Just don't be afraid to try new things and to modify the parts of the activities that were not successful. Designing new activities and then watching the students try them out is probably what I enjoy most about my job.



Q (7): Sometimes students need help. How can you tell when is a good time to support and when is good to retreat?

A: I usually give students as much time as I can to allow them to solve problems by themselves. If it becomes clear that they need help however, I encourage other students (not me) to make suggestions or give hints of how they could solve the problem, followed by more time and then more suggestions if necessary. After the activity I ask stronger students to share what they did successfully (how they prepared, what strategies they used, etc.) and have the weaker students take notes in order to improve their performance in future tasks.

Q (8): I'm just wondering if you think shadowing should be introduced after confirmations check.

A: It could be. Shadowing is not essential to solving communication problems, although it does help conversations to move along more smoothly. As it is very similar to confirmation checks, because it is repeating what the other person has said, shadowing is a logical communication strategy to be introduced after confirmation checks.



Action Research Session

Date: October 14, 2017, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room 32, Room 41, Room 51

Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato, Duane Kindt, Juanita Heigham (NUFS)

The number of participants: 14



Next Workshop (scheduled)

Date: November 11, 2017, 10:30-14:30, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room 31

Presenter: Junko Yamanaka (Chukyo University, Aichigakuin University)

Title: “Motivating Students to Speak and Write for True Communication”