

**NUFS Workshop 2017**

## *Newsletter No. 7*

### **Workshop in November**

**Date:** November 11, 2017, 10:30-14:30

**Venue:** NSC College, Room 31

**Presenter:** Junko Yamanaka (Chukyo University, Aichigakuin University)



**Title:** "Motivating Students to Speak and Write for True Communication"

**Abstract:** In EFL classroom settings, it is usually not very easy to promote natural communication in L2. How can “communicative” activities or writing tasks provide opportunities for real communication, not just practice? How can the teacher motivate students to really “want to” say something or write about something? Very importantly, will the activities effectively foster language acquisition? This workshop tries to provide some hints to answer the above questions through teachers participating in some communication activities and sharing insights. Some important elements for improving students’ writing skills will also be highlighted.

**The number of participants: 27**

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

- Free-writing – Many students worried about their mistakes when they write something. I realized that free writing in which students don’t care about their mistakes can lead them to their development of their fluency and at the same time, accuracy. To continue one activity make it different.
- Teaching about metaphors and getting students to use descriptions of their five senses in their writing. I liked the mini science lesson when everyone seemed so caught up in the activities that they forgot about the language they were using to negotiate meaning.
- I want to use content-based approach more often in Communication English II classes. I agree that content should be given priority and English teaching should be second. To do this, as an English teacher, I should prepare for my English class better, like interesting topics, questions, handouts and so on.
- 10-minute writing and replying is really cool. It’s great to have activities that allow students to express themselves and also get multiple chances to learn more.



- Free writing activity – I didn't give the chance to train my students to use what they have learned freely. This can be a way to develop their fluency.



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

- A new activity for me was 'free writing'. When I actually did it at this workshop, I noticed that my first plan to write about changed a lot through keeping on writing and I felt 10 minutes very short.
- Setting an appropriate topic is the key to motivate students.
- I thought to show our feelings or ideas in L2 is important because I think that allows L2 to become a part of 'me'. The key to connect L2 and L2 learners is 'feeling' and 'thinking'. So the audience is necessary.
- Content is very important rather than language. I have to choose a topic which is relevant and interesting. I really want to use what I learned today.
- 'One paragraph, one idea'. True communication is there when students enjoy communication in L2.
- Topic-based lesson is fun! I am using 'Impact' series in grammar classes. So students enjoy using English in choosing proper grammar forms. I believe meaningful language learning is important.

## 3. Questions and Answers

**Q (1):** *It's very hard to take in the writing activities for very low-level students, because my students don't want to write or even speak in English. What should I do for the test for English or communication in English?*

A: It seems that your students need more input. How about if they read very basic levels of ORT (Oxford Reading Tree) readers and at some point, they write to the characters in the books? Then other students pretend they are those characters and write back? That way they get both input and output opportunities. If they read the letters aloud, like two people making a conversation, that would be really nice too.

Another idea is a poster contest. Students make posters of their favorite book (ORT or any English book), drawing pictures of a favorite scene and writing what the character is saying or describing briefly in English. This can be individual work or group work. They will be reading books as they decide which book to choose, and which scene to select. They will be paying attention to the spelling and of course to the meaning of the words as they copy the sentences to make a poster. Also they can ask questions to each other about the posters and that would be good communication chances for them.

And / or, your students probably need basic training in "sound-symbol correspondence". Grab games using word cards might be enjoyable and effective. Think of other games or activities in which your students can practice recognizing words and train sound-symbol correspondence.



***Q (2): In free writing, what if students write sentences in Japanese grammar order?***

A: It is perfectly all right. They don't have to worry about spelling or grammar mistakes, including word order. Teachers also do not have to worry about them at all. As students get more exposure to English and learn the language more, their word order will improve. Free writing (or timed writing) is aimed just for writing a large amount, forgetting about neatness or grammatical correctness. By doing that, students will 1) be able to write with less anxiety 2) get used to writing, and 3) even start thinking in English. It is important that students are "free" to write anything, even if the writing is messy or full of grammar mistakes. Students should be "free" from any corrections or checking by the teacher. The only checking by the teacher should be the number of words they have written.



***Q (3): In my lesson, I'm doing writing essay. But some of my students are worried about grammatical mistakes. So how can I motivate them to write English?***

A: 1. Let students do the free writing (timed writing) mentioned above (Question 2). It is aimed exactly for coping with such a situation. I suggest that your students do both essay writing and free writing, and you evaluate both. For free writing, you can evaluate them by the number of words they have written and also the progress in the number of words throughout the semester.

2. For essay writing, teach them how to make a good paragraph. (One paragraph has one idea, try to put the main idea sentence at the beginning of a paragraph and stick to the point, etc.) Tell them that you are putting more importance on the logic than grammatical correctness. Tell your students that the evaluation is *not* affected by the number of mistakes they make, but is based on how powerful, persuasive or impressive the essay is.

***Q (4): What's the relationship between speaking and writing?***

A: This question is very general and so I do not understand what really is being asked. All I can say is that they are both output skills, and without sufficient amount of input, these skills cannot be attained or trained. With little input, it is not possible to make output. Another thing is that usually it takes more time to learn to write than learn to speak. Explicit learning is necessary for students in order to be good writers who can write effectively and logically.



***Q (5): I will tell my students that I will focus on giving advice on logical structure and content. I have grammar category in my rubric, though, should I keep on grading on grammar?***

A: Make clear what students are going to be evaluated on. Take the distribution of points, for example.

Out of 10 points, 2 is going to the “paragraph shape”, 5 is going to the “logic and content”, and 3 is going to the “grammar and spelling”, or something like that. You can change the ratio according to your idea which aspect should be the most important. If you feel grammar is more important than other elements, increase the grammar point. The evaluation standard should be explained to the students before they write an essay.

***Q (6): It is sometimes hard to prepare the topics for free writing each time. Is it also effective to recycle the same topic again and again or does it demotivate students to write because it is not new to them?***

A: Providing many different topics (titles) would be nice. It is better for students to have more chances to meet topics that motivate them to write about. At the beginning of the school year, have a list of topics ready. Keep collecting good (interesting and sometimes humorous) topics and add to the list. You can use the list every year and hopefully there will be new topics added each year. Each time, give students a choice. I usually give two titles to choose from. If students were still not happy with either of the two titles, I let them write about anything. For essay writing, however, re-writing on the same topic is effective. Through re-writing, which I used to assign one or two times for each essay, students had chances to improve their writing to a great extent, both in the logic and grammar aspects. If you want to use the free writing as their brainstorming for writing an essay, then of course use the same topic or title as the essay’s.



***Q (7): I’m wondering if there are any good exercises to get students to practice writing about metaphors and their five senses in English.***

A: Actually, I used books written for Japanese elementary school children (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders) to get ideas. There are many books and websites about how children can improve their writing. (See <https://www.juku.st/info/entry/837> as an example) Such advice really helps your students write better in English too. Those books or websites basically tell you the same kinds of things you tell your students. Make the main idea clear and stick to it; use specific words and examples, not just general words; give details that support the main idea; use five senses; use metaphors; etc.. In my case, giving examples of Japanese composition or essay helped my students understand the points very clearly. I gave a few examples in English too, and my students got the message. Once they got the message, their writing improved remarkably, to the extent that I was thrilled or even moved by reading their essays.



## **Action Research Session**

**Date:** November 11, 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: 16**



## **Next Workshop (scheduled)**

**Date:** December 9, 2017, 10:30-14:30, 14:30-17:00

**Venue:** NSC College, Room 31

**Presenter:** Nancy Mutoh (Emeritus professor of NUFS)

**Title:** “Assessment Shapes Learning: How to Use Speaking and Writing Assessments to Lead Students to Competence and Confidence as English Users”