

Newsletter No. 1

Workshop in August

“Building Reading Power”

Presenter: **Juanita Heigham (NUFS)**

Date: August 8, 2020, 10:30-14:30 (Zoom Meeting)



Abstract: The benefits of reading for language development are many, and there is substantial evidence that through reading, English language learners can build vocabulary knowledge, grammar understanding, and learning motivation. Thus, being good readers can give learners a greater chance of language learning success and enjoyment. Learners can be taught to be efficient and effective readers by actively using reading strategies. In this workshop, I will share a variety of simple reading strategies that I use with my students. Participants will be able to practice using some strategies themselves and to discuss reading strategies and approaches to reading in groups with other English language teachers.

The number of participants: 47

Message from Juanita:

Hello everyone and thanks for joining our first-ever NUFS online workshop! We wanted to start our online workshop series with one of us in-house NUFS teachers in order to test how things would go with Zoom, so I lead the workshop for you – something that I haven't done in a long time. I had a wonderful time with all of you dedicated, curious teachers!

As you know we had some problems at the beginning of the session. We learned a lot from them, so you can expect better, smoother workshops in the future.

For those of you who participated in your first online workshop or discussion, you did it! Well done! I hope that you see that although there can be unforeseen challenges when we use technology, online tools can provide us with many great opportunities! I hope you all join us for the September workshop with our guest speakers from Australia. It's certain to be a creative learning event!

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

- Take turns creating one story in each group. Everyone has to attend and add the interesting story and it's fun.
- Ignoring-unknown-words activity was fun, because readers can focus on the context naturally.
- The questions session what we did in break session are very important to make students think of reading. They need the guide before starting reading, while reading and after reading to consider principles of reading.

- I want to use two activities in my class. First one is to create a story after the particular situation. I would like to try like exchange notebook with students. They may enjoy it. Second one is to guess the meaning. I've often heard from my students that they cannot read long paragraph when they encounter unknown words. So, I would like them to try to read with created words. It would be a good practice for them to be patient and guess.



- All activities are interesting but I think KWL chart is very useful for my students. Many of them find reading difficult though they can find something interesting about the target passage. The KWL chart would make it clear that they can find something in the target passage.
- I would like to try the story making activity in my language school classes. Students often have problem writing in English. Giving a couple of sentences as an introduction will give some wiring ideas and inspirations to students.
- This is not an activity that I can use in with my students, but the demonstration with the writing activity did a great job at illustrating how different experiences can lead to different continuations to the stories. This can then be used as a conversation starter for how book can sometimes create similar perceived experienced despite having different experiences.
- I liked the pay attention to meaning and the blackout activities, they were fun ways to try reading something
- KWL Chart - it's useful to have students engage the text before reading it and nice to have them reflect what they think after reading it. Also, I can introduce it into my lessons easily.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

- What do you **Know**? What do you want to know? What did you **Learn**? Reading makes our brain active and cultivate our imagination.
- learned a lot from today's workshop. Personalization is very important but it is sometimes difficult to make it happen in the lessons for me. Through today's workshop, I got some hint to make it happen today.
- I was reacquainted with the notion of how important reading is to the development of students' overall language skills and boosting their motivation to learn a language. It made me recall childhood memories of when I used to read a lot for pleasure. Unfortunately, I don't read as much these days due to a busy life and other distractions.
- As a parent of two elementary school children, it was shocking to see the MRI photos to find out about how reading affects our brain. Reading is essential especially for little children to develop their brain. It "warms up" (activates) brain to process text to create meanings. On the other hand, watching a screen does nothing to their brain. The brain remains "cold". Oh, no! It might be too late, but I would like to encourage my children to learn to love reading for the sake of their brain development although they have already got addicted to screens (You Tube and TV). Reading is fun anyway. Same for my students at high school. I would like to try in my class the activities we learned today.
- I realized we, English teachers, make use of reading activity in various ways to make students learn English. Students can exchange their opinions after reading, make their own story. Reading serves not only as an input but also as an output. Teachers can create various activities through reading and make students' learning activate.
- I have learned that reading should not be overlooked and that the various benefits our students can get from

active reading are tremendous. I had tried to read a short story in Japanese before and I remember I did not enjoy it because I could not understand most of the vocabulary used. It is true that the reader should be able to understand 97-98 percent of the passage to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. I have also learned that the human brain is really amazing. I was reminded to read more when I saw the MRI image of the human brain and how my 3-4-year-old students can greatly benefit from me reading to them.



3. Questions/Comments

(1) First, I found every participant except me speaks English very fluently. I wonder how they learned and got their speaking skills. I couldn't express what I have in mind immediately. I've been an English teacher as an assistant (TT) in junior high school since last year. I'm enjoying the job, and helping students only using simple "Classroom English for Teachers". Today I took an English shower for 3 hours but time flew so fast. I enjoyed myself, though I spoke little.

It's wonderful to hear how you enjoyed the English shower and found the time went quickly as you talked with other teachers. I don't think that all the participants in the workshop could speak English fluently, but most were not afraid to use the English skills they have. No one speaks English perfectly (not even me, a native American-English speaker!) because there actually, there is no "perfect" English. (Our next presenters will be from Australia and you will find they speak English quite differently than I do). I hope you can join more workshops and try to speak actively because it's through speaking that you build your speaking skills!

(2) You explain that our brain is busy crossing and uses the other part of brain that is not related to reading when we are reading. Which part is used when we are reading?

When we read, the brain is active in many different areas as it makes meaning from the text. Everything it does during that time is related to reading. Reading is such an amazing and complicated process that I can't explain the science here, but I want to share these links so you can learn more about it.

This is a short video that has nice images of the main parts of the brain used in reading. While not deeply scientific, it provides a visual of the activity in the brain during reading.

[Video](#)

Here is a general article about reading that covers different aspects of reading and the benefits of doing it.

[General Article](#)

This article, although not recently published, does a nice job explaining some of the neurologic complexity of reading.

[Research Article](#)

(3) I understand the importance of personalizing and relating to the reader's life. When you read the book about danger species, you think about the wolf in North America you lived. But which is more important, choosing the material or questions after reading materials?

*Many, many teachers in Japan can't choose what reading material to give their students because of curriculum requirements of their school. This makes finding a way to personalize reading material (material possibly at first glance uninteresting to students) very important. The personalization should be done **before** the reading so learners feel there's a connection and/or purpose for doing it. Returning to the example I used about endangered species, if students don't know anything about endangered species, we could ask them about pets they have or would like to have in order to help them think about animals. Aim to get students into a topic through something connected to their own lives or interests.*

(4) Thanks for giving me such a good learning forum. Due to this situation, it is hard to talk to someone about education so I am craving for this workshop.

It's great to hear this!

(5) It was interesting to get to know other people. It's a bit shame that I cannot talk with them during break time. Anyway, I enjoyed the first ZOOM workshop a lot. Thank you so much.

It's really unfortunate that we can't meet face to face right now, isn't it? But Covid-19 will not last forever, and we can come together in person again!

(6) The session was really inspiring. Here is my question: When teaching a mixed level class, I have difficulty finding reading materials for students. Do you have any suggestions of good materials which can satisfy students in all levels? Or do you think it is impossible to find a single material which fits all (in college level)?

If a class of students has a variety of reading levels, it's impossible to find a single material that can work well for everyone. I wish I could share something magical with you, but I can't. However, the sites below have news articles written on the same topic at different levels. Using these, you can have students read "the same thing" (not exactly) but at their level. Doing this might help you manage this somewhat unsolvable problem. These sites offer a variety of things beyond reading, so you might like to check those things out, too.

News in Levels

<https://www.newsinlevels.com/>

Breaking News English

<https://breakingnewsenglish.com/>

(7) What are some other reading strategies?

Here's a [link](#) that gives tips on some important reading strategies.

(8) Thank you for a stimulating and informative workshop today. The large number of participants and reliance on technology are unavoidable issues for potential problems, but overall I had a great time.

Since it was our first online workshop, we did have some challenges to overcome, so it's nice to hear that despite them, you enjoyed the workshop.

(9) Thank you for welcoming me to my first workshop. I really enjoyed it.

Comments:

There needs to be more time for questions. I actually spoke up and tried to ask a question, but already the class had moved on. I would recommend at least 15 minutes for Q & A. I believe that these workshops are excellent not only as sources of discovery (for new activities, etc.) but also for furthering deeper discussion of the topic (reading) and how we can become more successful teachers of it.

I'm glad you felt welcome to our workshop and please join us again!

Thanks for this comment. We usually try to have time for Q&A because we agree with you about how important that is, and we will do our best to work time in for this into our online workshops!

The question I wanted to ask was regarding the two key “take-home” points: 1. Make reading personable and 2. Interactive.

Since I am an avid reader, I know very well that reading mainly is a solitary act. How can we inspire students to become active solitary readers of the L2 even if they are not active in their L1 (or if they are)? Since this task is very difficult, I suppose it is mainly through group work/interactions that we teach reading in class. But how can we personalize it and make it interactive for the “solitary” act of reading?

I don't have experience with this but will use what I've learned in today's workshop to begin activities that can personalize and make it interactive for my students when they do reading homework assignments.

My response to this question begins with two important words: Extensive Reading (ER). For those not familiar with ER, here is a short explanation from the Extensive Reading Foundation.

“Extensive Reading” or “ER” for short, is an approach to language learning that encourages students to read a large amount of books, or other reading material, that is relatively easy for them to understand. Ideally, the [material] should be easier than their current reading level so that they can read quickly, without having to look up words in a dictionary... Ideally, students should choose their own reading material, with the hope that they might forget that they are ‘studying’ if the material engages their imagination.

*There are many opportunities for building interest in reading through ER. Having an ER library is wonderful for students, but it is **absolutely not necessary** for students to do ER. I mentioned two links above for news websites that could be used as part of an ER program. And here is a link to the Extensive Reading Foundation and ER Central. Please explore these to learn more about the benefits and resources, including class activities for ER. Principles of ER can be applied to other sorts of reading, too, in order to promote interest in reading.*

ER Central

<https://www.er-central.com/>

Extensive Reading Foundation

<https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/>

(10) A question re: “Ignoring Unknown Words: Blackout”

This is a useful technique for extensive readings. Your advice of having students understand 97-98% of the context seems appropriate. What about the degrees of the students’ interest in the story? I use Oxford Reading Tree series (Biff, Chip, and Kipper’s story books) for my high school students for their extensive readings. The English level in terms of the understanding of the context seems right for them. But I am not sure if it is the right material for them. It might be too childish for them to enjoy reading. After all, the books are designed for primary school children in the UK. The students seem to be enjoying the reading challenge time, probably because they can be more relaxed with this easy reading while they feel stressed from reading their difficult high school textbook though. Do you think we should prioritize the understanding of the context rather than the readers’ interest in the story?

If the reading level isn’t right, the readers can’t understand the material, and if they can’t understand, they can’t be interested in it. So, a reading material shouldn’t be above students’ level.

As for the Oxford Reading Tree series, I would guess that some students really enjoy those stories but others don’t. I would recommend that you survey the students to see what their opinions are about the books. While they all might not love the stories, they may, as you mentioned, enjoy the relaxed, easy reading, and that is good. If you have the opportunity to get more books, you should aim to find some books with more age-appropriate topics or themes.

(11) Thank YOU so much for opening my mind to a new experience. Talking and exchanging ideas with different people in the breakrooms was a lot of fun, too! I am looking forward to the next one!

I’m so glad you joined us and we look forward to your participation next time, too!

(12) Thank you so much for having me realize the potential of reading activity. I’d like to carry out what I’ve learned today from Juanita and friends of breakout room in my English class, but I have to wait for a week when the school starts after short summer break.

I hope now that school has started you've been able to try something new!

(13) I'm not so good about conveying my opinion and my thought in English but I want to try to continue attending meeting as possible as I can.

That is the attitude of a lifelong learner!

(14) it was interesting and I enjoyed talking with new people, thank you!

You are welcome and thank you for your participation.

(15) I would like to try to offer reading classes to my students, which allows students to be personalize the text, use their words, want to know more and to be active. Thank you!

I hope that some of what we discussed together will help you achieve these goals!

(16) This is my first experience to attend the workshop by using ZOOM. I learned the difference between on demand presentation, which is one way, and on time interaction through ZOOM, which is two ways. Thank you very much for this opportunity. I am sure that I can participate better next time.

During this Covid time, we are all learning new ways to teach and learn. I'm glad that NUFS could give you the opportunity to try Zoom workshop for the first time, and I'm sure that all of us will be getting better using Zoom as we continue to use it.

(17) When can we introduce reading?

Reading can be introduced to any second language learner (who has at least basic reading skills in their first language) as soon as they know some words in the target language and can recognize them in written form.

(18) I was really impressed with Juanita's enthusiasm, content, and depth of knowledge. I'm looking forward to joining this group if possible.

Thank you. Sharing with and learning together with energetic and dedicated teachers is always a pleasure.

Next workshop will be held on September 12th.
Detailed information is on our web site:

<https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/>