Online NUFS Workshop 2021

Newsletter No. 3

Workshop in July

"Keeping It Simple: Strategies for Effective and Efficient Writing Instruction and Assessment"

Date: July 10th, 2021   9:00-12:15 (Zoom Meeting)

Presenter: Paul Kei Matsuda
(Arizona State University)

Dr. Paul Kei Matsuda is Professor of English and Director of Second Language Writing at Arizona State University. Born and raised in Japan in a monolingual Japanese family, he learned English in Japan primarily through reading and writing. He has published widely on issues related to language, writing, and identity, and presented numerous lectures and workshops on writing instruction and assessment in various countries throughout the world. He is founding chair of the Symposium on Second Language Writing, and the editor of the Parlor Press Series on Second Language Writing. He is also former president of the American Association for Applied Linguistics.

Abstract:

Writing has become an important part of language learning and use, but many teachers shy away from it because it is often considered too difficult and time consuming to teach. This workshop will provide various strategies for minimizing the burden on the teacher while maximizing student learning. The workshop will consist of two parts. The first part begins by a brief presentation demystifying writing in the context of language classrooms, followed by an interactive discussion of how writing can be incorporated into language instruction in various ways. The second part will provide an overview of key principles in classroom writing assessment, followed by hands-on activities in developing assessment rubrics. Both sessions will include highly interactive question and answer sessions about a wide range of issues related to writing instruction and assessment as well as language learning.

The number of participants: 43

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

- Self-assessment is surely one thing I would like to continue doing in class. I have not done any peer feedback yet, but I like the idea of showing a peer model.

- Front-loaded instruction - Because I have not tried it yet. I think it is important for students to go through steps and internalize the process for better writing.

- I think to have students keep writing in English everyday is quite interesting. I tended to think we should give them feedback or some grades for every students' production. I like the activity that teachers give points if students write in English every day. If they do not write it, they do not get any points. I also want to try to do self assessment. I remember that I used to keep sharing notebook with some students who want to pass the Eiken 2nd grade. They wrote about themselves, write answers about some questions and so on. Though they did not get any points, they had motivation to write almost every day. Luckily, all of my students passed their Eiken test. I think it is because they had a habit to write in English every day. If I have an opportunity to tech writing class, I will try some activities which I have learned today.

- Having students keep writing every day as a habit is good. Paul said students could improve their writing proficiency by themselves even without teachers' feedback.

- I like the idea of having them write for a few minutes every day, and I have a few minutes that we usually spend on speaking activities at the end of class I haven't been sure what to do with as Tokyo goes into yet another State of Emergency and we aren't allowed to do speaking activities again. I'm thinking about having them start writing about a topic relevant to our reading for a few minutes during that time.

- I was particularly interested in the "front-loaded instruction." In order to "streamline" my work in everyday teaching life it seems I've already conducted "group feedback" and "simple grading." I feel confident about what I am doing for students and myself to hear your lecture! Thank you very much! As for the front-loaded instruction, I'd like to try the activity in which you show sample writings before students start their tasks and tell them how you analyze the text and how you give feedback. I haven't tried this activity, or I didn't even come up with this idea by myself. I'm sure this will be very effective to have students well-prepared for what to write and how to write. In my class I explain assessment rubrics beforehand. So, after I talk about rubrics I will incorporate this activity. This way, I'm sure students will internalize the goal of the task and can be clear about what they have to do for writing in focus. And of course, I can reduce time to spend on commenting for individual students when evaluating because they already know what to improve without detailed explanations.

- Short and focused writing tasks. Self evaluated writing tasks. Writing where other students check if they can understand or not. Translation activities.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

- "Stop doing everything for your students". I want to advocate students-centered activities and to start small.

- I learned to put the burden of learning to students. A lot of times I feel like I've been talking a lot in the class. A student- centered class is really important. It also helps the students to not just agree on what the teacher is saying. But also study and research themselves. It gives the students freedom for their voices to be heard and will feel that their role as a student is vital to the class. Making the class environment more proactive and a fun learning experience for everyone.

- For writing instruction, formative assessment is emphasized as well as for instructions for other skills. Including washback, it is a teacher's big role to design how students' writing is evaluated. Assessment and tests should be designed in a way to reflect on student's revision during a writing instruction.

- I learned a lot. I especially feel profitable about how we evaluate students. I knew that there are some ways to assess the students. However, I have never taken the criteria seriously. It was eye-opening moment to see how we assess writing.

- Teachers work less, and students will get more accomplishment. Simple grading is the right thing (it is controversial, and teachers often have different views, but I have believed so.)

- I also liked the phrasing of "meeting standards/approaching standards" as compared to something like "good/bad" when grading, and the idea of using online reviews for an activity.

- Although I learned about the key concepts related to assessment before, I forgot many of them, and I learned those key concepts again! Particularly, I totally forgot about primary-trait rubrics, but I learned it again, and I think this will be useful especially when you want to have students acquire a specific strategy involved in writing such as cohesive connections of sentences based on the thematic progression principle. Because the focus is this writing strategy, you don't have to worry about other writing aspects such as grammar or the quality of information/message for evaluation. Probably primary-trait rubrics will work well in the middle of the course; not in the end, for the term-end writing.

- I learned that student autonomy in second language studies is just as important as in any other subject. We, as teachers, should remember that the students are already capable of mastering one language, so problem in a second one can be addressed by themselves, using the tools that they already have, and it is up to us to help clarify and guide, instead of give answers and solutions.

Key Concepts

- Norm referenced vs. criterion referenced
- Holistic, analytic, primary-trait rubrics
- Formative vs. summative assessment
- Washback
- Point addition vs. point subtraction
- Global vs. local issues

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): What are examples of how teachers are to facilitate students' collaborative learning for writing? There seems to be numerous factors for teachers to think about in order to conduct effective collaboration including psychological barriers.

Here are the steps I take to facilitate collaborative writing:

1. Explain the purpose, benefits, and other key principles of collaborative writing.
   a. Collaborative writing is an activity to facilitate writing and language development. Although there will be a written product, what you learn in the process is more important than what you produce. (I would even emphasize that students who take this task seriously are more likely to do better in their major individual writing assignments or tests.)
   b. Collaborative writing is not easier than individual writing; in fact, it tends to take more time and efforts, which is good for learning. (I use the analogy of lifting weights at the gym; to be effective, the weight should be just a bit heavier than what they can lift easily.) It challenges you in a different ways, and you will need to think more about your decisions about the process, language and writing.
   c. Collaborative writing is not simply a compilation of individual writing. Instead, it is important to discuss and work together throughout the process.
2. Tell a story of a successful collaboration effort and what writers have gained through the process. I usually use my own example (e.g., Matsuda and Tardy, 2007) so I can talk about what was going on in my mind during the process.
3. Explain the writing assignment and procedures to follow.
4. Have students form a group and introduce each other. Then have them brainstorm possible topics for writing, outline, examples, etc.
5. Have students start writing in the classroom.
6. Allow students to make progress at home using technology for collaboration (e.g., wiki, Google Docs, Word). Emphasize the importance of working together in writing every sentence.
7. Have each student keep a running record/reflection on the collaboration process, who contributed what, if they encountered any issues, etc. I would skim through them and talk with individual students or groups when I see major issues or discrepancies.
8. After several rounds of drafting, revising, and editing, have students reflect on what they have learned through the collaborative process, what worked, what they found challenging, and what they would do differently if given another chance.

9. Assign the same grade to everyone in the group. Tell students that, if they are not happy with the group grade, they have the option of revising the paper individually and submitting it for a revised grade.

Q (2): When teachers have students keep writing simply every day, should they give their students topics or keywords? Or, is it more effective for the students to choose what to write by themselves?

It could work either way. I would provide a few options, but then tell students that they are welcome to write about whatever they want.

Q (3): Regarding the activity in which you show sample writings before students start their tasks and tell them how you analyze the text and how you give feedback, where do you get sample writings? Do you get them from classes in previous years? Do you have any advice on choosing sample writings for this activity?

If you already have student examples from previous classes, they would make great examples. But I would also use similar genres from different contexts so students can see how the genre knowledge can transfer to different situations. For example, if I ask students to write a description of something, I would use examples such as product descriptions from Amazon.com, movie summaries (and note how they describe the beginning but avoid spoilers), profile articles (and note that physical features are often not described), etc.

Another great source is yourself. I would share my own descriptive writing (it can be the whole genre or just parts of a more complex genre). Or sometimes I produce a new text following the assignments students are working on. When I share my own examples, I talk not just about what is on the page but also about the processes and the decisions I made, what I thought of but I didn't use, what I might do to make it even better, and so on.

Workshop in July (AR Discussion)

Date: July 10th, 2021, 13:00-15:00
Title: Group discussion on action research
Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato, Duane Kindt,
　　　　　Juanita Heigham（NUFS）
The number of participants: 22

Next workshop will be held on September 11, 2021.
Detailed information is on our web site:
https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/