

Newsletter No. 7

Workshop in December

“Back to basics - Understanding the Underlying Principles of the Communicative Approach”

Date: December 11th, 2021 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30

Venue: NUFS Meieki Campus

Presenter: Kensaku Yoshida (Sophia University, Emeritus Professor)

Abstract:

In this workshop I will be looking at the history of English education in Japan from the end of WWII to the present. What has changed (?) in terms of the content of the Course of Study as well as in terms of the actual teaching of English in the schools. I will be looking at various issues from the perspective of the Fish Bowl Model and the Open Seas Model which I proposed over 20 years ago



The number of participants: 55

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

- I thought it necessary to look at English classes in my school to make sure those are ‘open seas’ classes to develop my student communicative skills. The result of survey by Benesse would be helpful to check it.
- The uptake and forced output and spiral learning. These will be useful to create meaningful lessons that can help improve the students’ ability to communicate effectively.
- Negotiation of meaning. My 4th grade student use Japanese whenever they get stuck during speaking activities. They continue speaking English after, but they never used English to negotiate what the other person meant.

- I really enjoyed the lecture on ‘noticing’ and the types of techniques used to get students to remember and recognize the rules of English. I will definitely use the technique of responding to the students with the correct language following them using the ‘incorrect’ response.



- I want to change my class structure. I want to do ‘Uptake and Output’ section. And now I show the students ‘can-do-list’. I’ll arrange it for my each class and I want to let my students say ‘I can do ...’.
- I will try to get my students to jump out of the fishbowl. Most my students like explicit instruction. I want them to focus more on communication.
- I want to take my students to the ‘open seas’. It’s important to make my students to use English and express themselves in English.

2. What you learned from today’s workshop

- I’m glad that we had a chance to deeply think about ‘can-do’ framework. ‘Can-do’ can be a measure of confidence, and that is very important for the language teaching because we want students to be confident and autonomous. CEFR concepts could be introduced and used for students in many situations in class.
- Communicative approaches can nurture students to swim not only in fishbowl but also in oceans. I want to make useful tasks to make students English-lovers.
- ‘Many possible answers’ is important sight for teachers and students. Varieties of English expressions should be accepted to expand their abilities to explain or express in English. Also, making a good atmosphere to make mistake and give some advice to improve learners’ English skills.
- Fishbowl vs Ocean – I had my students do performance tests in my safe classrooms always, but I would like to set a bigger context, maybe at least a joint class(?) for my students to be ready for using English in the real and authentic situation.
- I was very surprised that even though the amount of English used in the classroom has been increased, the content was very mechanical and teacher-centered. Activities should be communicative and meaningful to students; otherwise, learners will never be able to communicate in English.
- The most impressive quote is ‘Performance first, knowledge next like P.E’. Communication should be communication. Both accuracy and acceptability are necessary to make English classes in junior high school.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): How should we do to improve the communication skills of students in the lower level school?

A: I don't think there is anything fundamentally different. The only way to improve communication skills is by communicating. Maybe the students in the so-called lower level schools are the way they are because they have been given instruction in focus-on-forms (simply learning the rules and forms of language) without meaningful or communicative use of the forms. If given opportunities to communicate about topics of interest to them, they might be able find new meaning in the studying of foreign languages.

Q (2): Does the performance test rubric address Dynamic Assessment at all? i.e., Formative assessment or conducting speaking tests in dyads (pairs)

A: Dynamic Assessment and assessment in dyads are important future issues in testing. However, I do not know of any scientifically valid and reliable rubric including them. I believe personally the importance of dynamic assessment because it should show the proficiency as well as the problems a student is having at a specific time of learning and the kind of scaffolding necessary for the student to improve. I also would like to see assessment of dyads and groups because that's where communication ability appears. It would be great if we could do something about them. We actually considered assessment of speaking in dyads when we were creating the TEAP test, but we decided against it at the time.



Q (3): Is the Monkasho available in English online? If not, it should be.

A: If you mean the Course of Study, then yes. If you go to the following site, you'll see all the Courses of Study from elementary school to high school. There are also English translations (temporary) as well.

https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/1384661.htm.

Q (4): Why do the third year students want more mechanical lessons?

A: If it's because of high school entrance examinations, then the only way to solve the problem would be to have the board of education change the high school entrance examinations to a more communication-oriented format--including speaking and writing skills. If there are other reasons, I would have to know what they are before I can give any opinion.

Q (5): The ideas of scaffolding were interesting to myself and others around me because we are kindergarten teachers and have fears of the kids developing bad habits when they give wrong answers. Is scaffolding something you should be a bit more strict with when dealing with young learners or is it the opposite?

A: Scaffolding is an important concept in education and is based on helping the students learn things they are having trouble learning. If by ‘strict’ you mean ‘teaching’ students in a top down manner, then my answer is ‘no’. I personally would not impose ‘right’ or ‘correct’ answers on the students. The important thing is to lead the students to notice their problems on their own—that’s what scaffolding should mean.



Q (6): *I want my students to have a reading habit in English. What do you think is the best way for that?*

A: I don’t know what level students you’re talking about, so I’m not sure how to answer this question. However, if I were to give a very ‘general’ answer, it would be that people read things they’re interested in—novels, stories, manga, internet game manuals, etc. If they read things they’re interested in and are motivated to learn more about the topic, they will most probably read on and form a habit of reading. However, they will probably not form a habit of reading if the teacher or parent forces reading materials on them which they have no interest in. Extensive reading and, especially pleasure reading, where the results of their reading are not assessed, are good ways to provide students with the opportunity to find something that they might find interest in.

Q (7): *How do students better learn vocabulary through focus on form?*

A: Students learn vocabulary better through focus on form because the lexical items are always presented in meaningful context—in other words, it lessens the burden of having to learn vocabulary through simple rote memory.

Q (8): *I’m a junior high school teacher. We have to give grades in three areas: knowledge, expression and attitude. I gave C, B, A to one of my students, but the head of curriculum told me to change them. He said it’s not possible to give A and C to the same student. What do you think?*

A: Students should be given one grade as a Total grade, but if there are subsections such as the three areas you mention, then each section could be given different grades. In Eiken, for example, the student is given one Total grade (3rd grade, pre-second grade, etc.) but there are subgrades given for reading, listening, reading and writing.



AR Discussion

Date: December 11th, 2021, 14:45-17:30

Title: Group discussion on action research

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

The number of participants: 15



Next Workshop will be held on January 15th. Detailed information is here:

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