

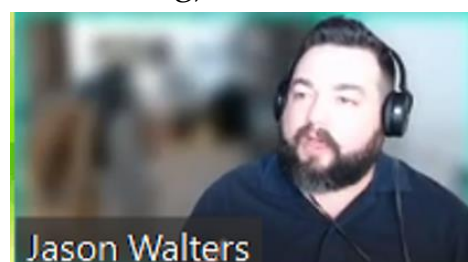
Newsletter No. 8

Workshop in January

“Building and Assessing Spoken in English in the Classroom”

Date: January 15th, 2022 10:30-12:00, 12:30-14:00 (Zoom Meeting)

Presenter: Jason Walters (NUFS)



Abstract:

This workshop aims to provide participants with a framework as well as practical tools and procedures for embedding formative speaking assessment into their existing class activities. Beginning with a look at what makes spoken language assessment not only unique, but uniquely challenging in the classroom environment, we will go on to examine critical questions all teachers must ask themselves about the aims of their assessment activities as well as the underlying assumptions that guide their practice. Jason looks forward to sharing his own takeaways from experiments implementing formative speaking assessment in his own classroom and his students’ success in developing their own peer and self-assessment skills. In the workshop’s second half, participants will take part—using their second language skills—in teacher/student as well as peer-assessment activities, and will be provided with supplementary materials to try out in their own classrooms. While it is true that one size rarely fits all, in collaborating with other teachers from similar teaching contexts, all participants will find something useful to take away from this event.

The number of participants: 38

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

- I believe the prompt cards are helpful. In a role play, I usually give students the situation. However, it is difficult for introverted students or low-leveled students to carry it on. In that case, prompt cards are very useful and they make the students get engaged in the activity smoothly.
- In our speaking and conversation practices, I’ll encourage more self-assessment and peer monitoring in class. Whenever I give my students a topic to talk about in pairs, I’ll tell them to take note of how many questions they can ask, and to evaluate their own answers to the questions they were asked. Hopefully after some time, they will be able to see their progress and be more motivated and confident to engage

in conversations using English.

- It was great to know about the time for growth (right after!) and the importance of formative feedback. Also, I enjoyed the review quiz using Kahoot, which can get everyone involved in a fun way. I think I can think about implementing this quiz idea for some review activities in groups.

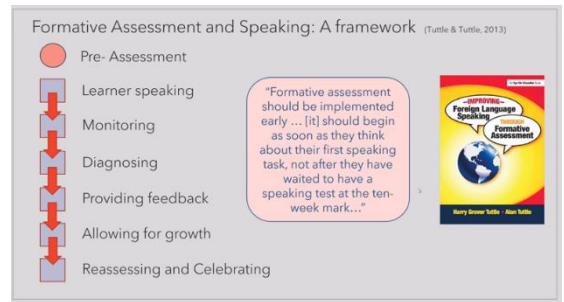


- The method and criteria of formative assessment
- First of all, I would like to thank you for having me and great inputs from the workshop. I learned a lot. As for the strategies/activities, I would like to use the activity in which student1 asks student2 as many questions as possible. Because I thought it's a good activity for introduction. Students can get to know each other and build good rapport. I would do this activity after a writing activity; students write about themselves individually so that they can think about and prepare for the questions they would ask. Also, I liked the idea of keeping the peer assessment tool simple such as counting the number of meaningful sentences. I would like to use this idea in my class so that students would not get confused.
- Speaking activities what I did on this workshop. Each activity has objectives and practical so it helps students to prepare the speech and contribute the activities.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

- Goal sharing and showing the model is important. This is the start of assessment. Also, once the practice for the goal begins, recording what you can do is important. This is a formative assessment, which is of great help for learners to restart to the goal.
- I learned more about formative assessment and that it is just as important as the summative assessment. Big tests, midterms and finals, are important but it shouldn't be the only assessment we must do in our classes. Also, we must teach our students to monitor and assess their own progress.
- I have tried to include some peer feedback activities in class a few times before, but often, students are hesitant to give opinions to peer performances. Especially in Japan, we do not often learn how to give constructive criticisms, so for a lot of students, giving feedback to each other is difficult. However, in the workshop today, I learned that students can learn how to do it by experiencing it regularly from the beginning of the course, and it is not difficult. I would love to have my students do some peer-feedback again in my future classes.
- Through the afternoon session, playing a part of a student, I learned the effectiveness of encouraging feedback.
- I learned a lot. I realized the importance of pre-assessment and feedback. As for the pre-assessment, not only giving clear instruction of the activity but also informing specific speaking goals to students is

important. Without proper pre-assessment, students may get confused. Giving good feedback (within 15 minutes after an activity ends) is also essential. I would like to focus on good points and how they could do better for the next time. I would also like to conduct student self-assessment, asking to fill in a questionnaire of what they liked and learned from the activity.



- Rubric is very important to show the goals for learners and should be reliable. Therefore, I must keep on making the rubric to evaluate students' speaking competence based on reliability and validity.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (I): I do a lot of performance tests such as speaking tests, speeches, and presentations in my classes. And I would like to know your opinion on this: let's say there are two students, one student gives a simple but perfect answer, but the other student provided a more complex sentence but had minor mistakes. How do I evaluate them fairly without discouraging the students to try on more challenging ways to answer? Also, I couldn't finish the workshop until the end, would it be too much if I ask a copy of your presentation?

- *Thank you so much for participating in the workshop, and for your question, which I imagine is a common one. I used to struggle with this kind of thing quite a lot, and looking at Cambridge's "six questions" really helped me to pin down what exactly I was trying to evaluate; specifically, "what am I assessing," and "how am I scoring?" It's difficult to know how to answer your question directly without knowing the answers to these questions. It sounds as if the test construct itself is unclear- what is the discrete skill (or set of skills) being evaluated? And further, how are you quantifying performance? Are you using assessment tools based on an established framework? Your own rubric? If you are able to answer those questions with clarity, evaluating the learners fairly should not be a problem. In your example, "simple and perfect" vs. "complex with minor mistakes"- the answer is that it depends on your test construct. I'm speaking broadly here, but if the task is to communicate using a complex sentence, then "simple and perfect" doesn't seem to fit the bill. If the task is to correctly use descriptive vocabulary, then a "small mistake" indicating a language gap in that area would mean that the simplicity or complexity of the utterance is immaterial. Having said that, the formative assessment process also gives us room to identify strengths- if we're doing this, and ensuring we communicate these strengths in learner-friendly terms, we shouldn't have to worry about discouraging students from taking on challenges beyond the target language. I hope this helps- I'd be happy to share my presentation with you or to talk with you about it further.*
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Q (2): Experiencing the role-play, I found “diagnosing” is not always easy. Especially as a non-native English teacher, it could be hard to provide appropriate feedback right after the exercise. How can we improve our skills for the immediate, effective feedback?

- *I appreciate your question- but first, I would like to push back and encourage you not to attribute your challenges to being a “non-native” English teacher. These are struggles we all share, and for my part, I find that so-called “native” teachers have much more difficulty than “non-native” teachers in providing critical feedback and giving direct, language-centered instruction. It is difficult to provide immediate feedback, and it is something I have struggled with this year as I’ve tried to implement more formative assessment in my classes. A few things I have found to be true:*
 - *Instructions for our language tasks should be simple enough that we can instantly compare the learner’s present ability to the expected level*
 - *If your activity has a specific enough language task, we should be able to focus on a very limited number of potential speaking gaps.*
 - *We can prepare improvement strategies for these gaps ahead of time.*

At the end of the day, it comes down to ensuring our tasks and targets are specific- probably much more specific than we are accustomed to. While it does require more planning ahead, preparing improvement strategies in advance should help the monitoring process to occur almost instantly. We compare the output to the target, identify the learning gap, and select an appropriate strategy. The only challenge remaining is to ensure we communicate this in learner-friendly terms- don’t forget to mention strengths as well!

Q (3): I am not familiar with Zoom enough to conduct group activities in online classes. I would like to know more on how to use Zoom for communicative online classes such as dividing participants into small groups and monitoring the progress of each group. The workshop went so well in this aspect as well. Again, thank you very much!

- *Thank you so much for your comments. I wish I had better news for you, but the truth is that Zoom still lacks a number of functions that I feel would make it much easier to monitor the progress of small groups working independently. The breakout room function is a good one, but I have struggled to make the most of it, I think. I have had some luck using Zoom in tandem with other applications. For example, I often use shared Google documents as counting/can-do tools. To do this, I create a single document in which all groups are given a section- in their sections, they record the results of their peer monitoring using color-coded text. I cannot be in all breakout rooms at once, but I am able to monitor one shared document being updated by multiple groups in real-time. Also, as demonstrated in the workshop, instant-response tools such as the poll/quiz features in applications such as Kahoot will allow your learners to conduct peer or self-monitoring activities using their smartphones and display results on the main screen in real time.*

I truly believe we've only scratched the surface of the tech possibilities available to us as we improve and build new frameworks for distance learning. COVID hit us quickly, and everything we've done in the past two years has been, for the most part, to try to adapt our regular classes into online spaces while making as few changes as possible. This is simply "emergency remote teaching," and as we can see with Zoom, the tools we have simply haven't caught up to the needs of a 21st century curriculum. I'm as eager as you are to see the improved functionality of the next generation of online learning tools.

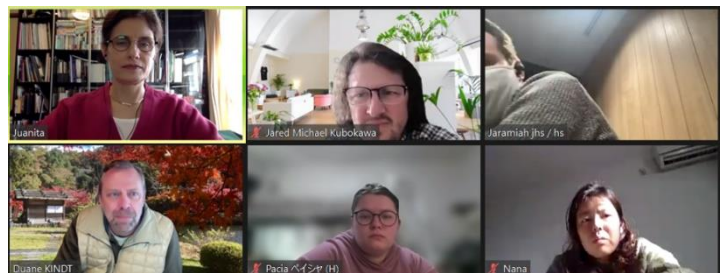
AR Discussion

Date: January 15th, 2022, 14:45-17:30

Title: Group discussion on action research

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

The number of participants: 16



Next Workshop will be held on February 26th, 2022. Detailed information is here:

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