

Newsletter No. 2

Workshop in June

Date: June 13th, 2026 10:30-14:30

Venue: NUFs Meieki Campus (BIZrium Nagoya)

"Activate Your Classes With Improvisational Drama Games"

Presenter: Tomoko Yoshida (Keio University)

Bio: Tomoko Yoshida has been in the intercultural field for more than thirty years. She has also been teaching content-based English classes in the Faculty of Business and Commerce at Keio University since 1998. Prior to her academic career, she was a Training Director at ITT Sheraton Hotels in Hawaii and Project Fellow at the East West Center in Hawaii, where she worked with Dr. Richard Brislin. She has numerous publications including *Intercultural Communication Training: An Introduction* (1994, Sage Publications), *Improving Intercultural Interactions* (1994, Sage Publications), *Ibunka Training* (2009, Sanshusha Publications), and *Academic Writing* (2018, Keio Publishing). She has published many articles on various topics such as returnee adjustment, bi-ethnic identity, and raising multicultural children in Japan. Tomoko is by no means an expert at improvisational drama but loves to use various improv games in her classes.



Abstract:

For many students, speaking spontaneously in front of others is something they fear. In this workshop, I will introduce simple improvisational drama games that will help students feel more relaxed about making mistakes and focus more on communication. Since neither my students nor I are actors, I have chosen games that do not require acting experience or expertise!

I often use a game or two at the beginning of class and sometimes devote a whole 90-minute class for these games. I found these games especially useful after COVID when students were less comfortable talking to their peers or presenting in front of a live audience. After doing these games, I found that students became better at expressing their emotions and being more dramatic when presenting. Please wear comfortable clothes and be ready to have lots of fun!

The number of participants: 33

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

- ‘Fortunately and Unfortunately’ game requires both students’ listening speaking skills. I think it will work well if teachers encourage students to express themselves through meaningful interaction.
- Advertisement activity – it has a clear purpose: to sell the product to others. We can vote one after all ads.
- Counting with different emotions – it will help students be more expressive as a warm-up for presentation. We can change numbers to other words and students can practice a lot and have fun.
- ‘Fortunately and Unfortunately’ game can foster students’ creative thinking and students can laugh. I would like to use this activity, and its modified versions, in speaking & writing activities.
- I enjoyed all the activities. The ‘Yes and’ is useful. The ‘1-20 with multiple topic’ is OK. The ‘origin of a product’ is also usable.



2. What you learned from today’s workshop

- I’m not shy when teaching English, but today I was reminded that some students can understandably be shy. I also realized that starting in a simple and relaxed atmosphere is a great way to get things started.
- I realized how nervous kids must feel before presentation. I’m used to the situation, but still I felt anxious today. So considering kids’ feelings is also an essential part of my job.
- Regarding today’s workshop theme, ‘Improviseational Drama Games’, I truly felt and understood that teaching is acting.
- All activities were fun. Students will be able to enjoy themselves and laugh. Utilizing ‘drama’ into language learning is very effective in elementary and middle schools.
- At the beginning, I thought ‘improviseational drama’ means acting without lines, but all activities were like games and I really enjoyed them. Thank you for sharing such creative ideas.

3. Questions and Answers

Thank you so much for joining me on Saturday and for sharing your energy and enthusiasm for teaching with me! I really appreciate the advice and suggestions some of you shared with me. Every time I do a workshop at NUFS I get so many interesting ideas from all of you and return home energized and inspired!

The improv games we did on Saturday were originally used by actors who perform improvisational drama. I chose games that were more structured and tried to include time for students to prepare so that it would be easier for Japanese students. Even so, you will most likely need to adapt the games further to fit your needs.

I use improv games in class for several reasons. The first is that it helps students realize that they cannot prepare for everything in life—some things just happen and they must figure out what to say or do on the spot. The other is for students to relax and have fun. Some students are too worried about



making mistakes that they do not know how to have fun while speaking English. The third reason is to help students get to know each other better on a different level.

Q (1): I would like to hear more about how these ideas are used in the classroom and how the level of the students affects the activities.

Sometimes, I use an improv game at the beginning of class as an ice breaker or at the end of class if I finish earlier than expected. For example, *Reinvention* works for most levels as students can use gestures and supplement them with simple English. I often keep a few items in my bag (e.g., the clapper, a deck of cards, a straw, a ruler, etc.) which I can pull out so we can play this game spontaneously. If you play this game multiple times, students will get better at it. I usually tell them that they should try to think outside the box, that they can give it magical powers, and they can pretend to be something they are not (e.g., “If I were a mouse, I would use it...” “If I were a ninja, I would use it...”). *Counting with Emotions, Pass the Clap, Counting to 20, Problem & Solution, Family Portrait, and Mirror* are nice little games to get the class energized at the beginning.



Depending on the class, I will devote a 90-minute class session for these games. If you look at my slides, I wrote down the English level required for each activity but that is just my estimate. You know your students best so please try them out and see if they work or not and adjust the games as necessary. For example, in its purest form, none of the games allow any preparation time but for some of them (e.g., *Customer Service, How it Got its Name, Magic Bag, Sell it to Us, Gibberish Interpreter, The Ad Game*) I give students time (e.g., five minutes) to prepare and practice before they perform in front of the audience. When we played *How it Got its Name* in my class, I was amazed at the creative and inspiring stories students came up with. The *Magic Bag* is such a great way to hear personal stories from the students, and the *Ad Game* is wonderful especially if you are teaching business students. As I mentioned during the workshop, any variation of the *Yes and...* game (e.g., the *Ad Game*) is a good way to teach students how to work in groups. By accepting other's ideas and building on them, they will learn how to work with others while at university and after they start working.

Q (2): What do you do with students who are not creative? Do you give them more time or skip them?

I believe that all students are creative, but some get nervous and freeze when put on the spot. In my classes, I sometimes skip them and tell them I will come back at the end; I also encourage others to help them if needed. I also praise everyone equally for their creative ideas. If you look at the way I organized the workshop, I started with easier games (e.g., *Pass the Clap, Counting to 20*) that can help students have fun without experiencing too much stress. Also, some games, like



Magic Box, do not require so much outside of the box thinking since it is a story about something they own that reflects something about themselves. Also, games like Problem, Solution are easy to do and can get them used to being silly.

Example:

You: I am having trouble sleeping at night.

Me: Read through my slides over and over, and you should feel sleepier and sleepier.

You will also notice that some students do better with some games but not others, so if you play a variety of games different students will have a chance to shine.

Q (3): What would you respond if students show negative vibes during communicative activities?

I go through the ground rules that I showed at the beginning of my workshop. If it is a 90-minute class, I begin by showing a TED talk about using improvisational drama. I embedded two at the end of my slides (look in the “Extras” section). I try to pick a video that the students can best relate to. For my Business & Commerce undergraduates, Mary Lemmer’s talk works well because she is close their age and is a business entrepreneur. If you do a Google search, you will find many TED talks about using improvisational drama to solve various challenges life brings us.

I also try to give them time to prepare and lot of encouragement. Improv really requires us to think hard but once they come up with a creative idea, but students often gain a strong sense of accomplishment and confidence afterwards.



Once again, thank you for being so brave and participating in all the games with me! One participant mentioned that they don’t get nervous teaching, but the improv games made them very nervous. I completely agree! I get very nervous when I participate in these games because I need structure and prefer to plan things in advance. At the same time, after playing the games, I tend to feel energized and creative! As I mentioned at the beginning of the workshop, I attended several improv workshops before I was brave enough to use them in class. It really was the after-effects of COVID that inspired me to use them in class.

I would like to close by saying that I included many more games at the end of my slides, in the “Extras” section as well as the links from where I found the games. Have fun trying out the games and adapting them—please share with us what works for you! Feel free to use my slides any way you like but please remember to include the links that I provided at the end as that is where I got the games from.

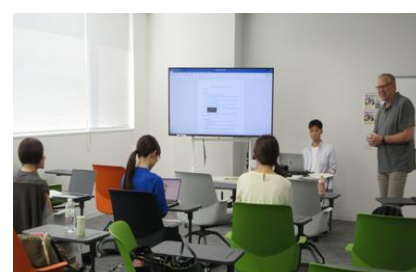
AR Discussion

Date: June 13th, 2026, 14:30-17:00 (Room: MW01, 02, 03)

Title: Action Research Report

Advisors: Takehiro Sato, Duane Kindt, Kevin Ottoson (NUFS)

The number of participants: 16



Next Workshop will be held on July 11th, 2026. Detailed information is here:

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

NUFS Workshop

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies

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Secretary: Chihaya Sugiura