

## NUFS Workshop 2006

*Newsletter No. 7***Workshop in September****Date:** September 23, 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30**Venue:** Nagoya International Center, Lecture Room 1**Instructor:** Philip Suthons (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)**Title:** Building Effective Persuasion Skills**The number of participants:** 19

**Abstract:** This workshop is about learning how to have discussions in English. Although discussions are a natural part of everyday life, they pose challenges both for teachers and students in the classroom. This is partly because discussion seems too difficult. We usually pay a lot of attention to vocabulary and grammar, but very little attention to meaning making and self-expression. As a result, we need to re-learn how to have discussions. Students who learn discussion often become more motivated, more self-confident and more eager to study English. Therefore, the purpose of this workshop is to offer a variety of activities that will help students organize and communicate their ideas in class.

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

- ‘Generalizing and Theorizing’. It was interesting for me to think of similarities about the examples on topics. It was easy way to generalize matters.
- I’m interested in ‘Tell me why’. Connecting the opinions and their reasons is a good way to involve any students. And we teachers can expand the contents according to their ability. Debate and discussion even in Japanese are difficult for Japanese people, but starting with such easy games makes them familiar with them.
- ‘100 years in the future’. Thinking about the future is always fun and students will enjoy it. But I learned there are many things to do before doing this. For example, we did a relay-race brainstorming session to stir up some ideas about the future. That was fun.
- ‘Various techniques for brainstorming’. Discussion might be very difficult for students at first. How to convey the idea is difficult, but to find what to tell can be more difficult for them. Going through this process, students can describe what they have in mind smoothly. I’d like to use this method in my class.
- “Even small children can discuss things.” I want to try to have discussion in my class in the future. Before having discussion, I will build students’ vocabulary, like “I agree.” or “I think”.
- I want to use the activity in generalizing and theorizing. I think it is a great idea that a teacher prepare some examples to talk and think about a certain topic. Lesson time at high school is limited. So, instead of spending much time to come up examples, in this way, teachers can have students generalize things soon.
- Thought experiment game; because it was fun, exciting and creative. We had to use our brains, and think about the future society. I enjoyed the game most.

## 2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- I learned that it is more important to respect students' opinions and ideas than just to teach new words or English. I'd like to offer lessons not only to help students improve their English but also to train them express effectively their opinions.
- Teachers need to provide students with various ways or topics that students feel like talking with others. Broad topics are not workable, but more detailed topics are better and easier to start talking.
- Students can enjoy discussion in class. There are many types of activities for discussion. 'Their opinions are more important than their language'; that's a wonderful idea.
- I had thought that discussion is too difficult for my students and that preparing for discussion takes too much time. But today, I learned that there are some easy and short-time activities to express themselves.
- The preparation before starting the discussion and writing is very important. Today brainstorming is shown as a typical example. To get ideas from various aspects is quite important to start a meaningful discussion.
- Self-expression is a key to motivate students to talk and write. When they learn the words and the way they need to express themselves, they might be able to express themselves.
- I have so many unmotivated students. I thought they are too lazy to learn. But I realized that I should try many tasks and homework to stimulate them, as today Philip had a lot of materials and sometimes gave much fun to us. I want to be a teacher like him. We teachers should think of the purpose in giving any activities in class.



## 3. Questions and Answers

### Q: How exactly, do you think, we can motivate students who have sullen behavior?

This is a big question. My first instinct is to leave the student alone. Students may just need a moment of privacy and may react badly to help from the teacher. There could be many reasons for sullen behavior: emotional problems, problems at home, etc. For teachers, sullen behavior means a student is not participating. There are several things we can do: we can explain the purpose of exercise, adjust the difficulty (sullen students may think the exercise is either too easy (patronizing) or too difficult (unfair)) or even ask the student outright: "What's wrong?"

In theory, students are always responsible for their own learning and their own motivation. In other words, teachers teach, but only students can learn. I think students deserve the credit for learning, not teachers. And students should be proud of their accomplishments. Obviously, a student who is unwilling to learn can not enjoy this satisfaction and empowerment.

In practice, however, it is the teacher's job to motivate students *up to a point*. You can motivate students by explaining the purpose, making students real partners in the classroom. Students also need to know that the teacher is interested in their opinion. Some students may feel there is no point giving an opinion; that the teacher isn't listening. In their diaries, students say they love positive reinforcement. Every time they do something that shows they are participating, I comment: "Oh, that's good." "Yeah, that's right." Some students are over-sensitive to praise, but celebrating their accomplishment at the end of a project is great. Sometimes they even applaud each other.

### **The teacher's role**

I believe any approach to this problem must keep in mind the purpose of education. We are trying to help young people *develop their minds*. Generally speaking, this requires exerting some control over students and then gradually giving them more and more freedom to experiment and control themselves. I think this experimental phase is necessary for education, not optional. Learning to take responsibility is a fundamental goal of education from the very beginning. (Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey all agree on this.)

Secondly, although a teacher's job is mostly to create learning opportunities and challenges, it is also to push students to do things that they would not do (or not be able to do) without the teacher's support. In this regard, the teacher is like an athletic coach.



### **Problem 1 – power**

Although we have to apply some pressure to students, this sometimes causes a power struggle between the teacher and one or two rebellious students. So the main tool I use is peer pressure. For example, in one women's university some students would brazenly read jewellery catalogues in class. No amount of cajoling could stop these young ladies from this outrageously rude behavior. One day I finally said to the whole class, "This is your education. I think your education is important. Do you think your education is important?" And most of the students nodded in agreement. After that, there was no more reading magazines in class. For me, sincerity (showing that you care) works much better than being overly polite and pretending not to be angry.

### **Problem 2 – alienation**

Many sullen students are alienated, they do not share the goals of the class. They may not understand the goals; or they may feel coerced. Therefore, it is often helpful to point out your goal for the class and ask them what their goal is. It is fine to give students goals, but ultimately the student has to accept the goals. That is, they must find their own goals.

### **The worst case**

If a student refuses to accept at least some minimal responsibility, then there is little a teacher can do. Students test teachers. One way a student can test a teacher who is trying to be democratic and student-centered is to refuse to participate. I think the worst thing a teacher can do at that point is to coerce the student. At that point the student may need to be left alone for a while, or in more severe cases, they may need counseling.

### **Rewarding motivated students with challenges**

Sometimes I assign extra readings or homework as a privilege. I only give it to students who ask for it. Voluntary projects show that the students are responsible and add to the peer pressure.

### **Q: You said the purpose of discussion is to become a stronger person. What kind of improvements could you find in your students?**

In 2005 at Aichi Shukutoku University, we used DISCUSSION MATTERS for all 2<sup>nd</sup> year non-English majors. Most of the teachers reported increased self confidence, willingness to talk in English and over-all enthusiasm. I usually teach lower level (high-beginner – lower intermediate) students. At the end of one of the lowest classes, the students gathered around my desk in silence. They didn't know what to say, but they all felt something moving. We just looked at each other for a few moments. These are students who had previously avoided English as much as possible.

As for increased language ability, I did not pre-test the students, so I have no baseline data. For assessment, please see the practice test in the book. Discussion is not, strictly speaking, a language skill, but it does stimulate a lot of language. (Please see the Shizuka-Ayano handout.)

### **Q: To meet students' maturity level, the topic should be complicated or difficult. However, it's quite hard for them to talk about such topics in English. My students used Japanese during discussion. How should I improve their speaking in discussion?**

I'm sorry, this is a very important issue and I did not have enough time to discuss it properly.

### **Self-expression**

First of all, the most important thing is the *topics must be interesting to the students*. Only students know what is interesting to them. Therefore, students should choose their own topics. If they do, they will be more motivated, they will be more successful and they will have fewer vocabulary problems.

Secondly, choosing a topic and presenting it as an interesting topic is a fundamental social responsibility that students need to learn. It is both satisfying and confidence-building to have your topic accepted by your peers. On the other hand, if the teacher chooses the topic, it is easy for students to say the topic is boring. In any case, students must acquire "ownership" of the topic; otherwise, they are just following orders instead of developing their own topics. Therefore, I think teachers should **not** choose topics.

I know that some topics are taboo or inappropriate, other topics have very difficult technical vocabulary. But if students choose their own topics, they will find a way to explain the ideas without difficult vocabulary. This is part of "unpacking" the ideas. Naturally, teachers will have to monitor proposed topics for appropriacy.

### **Using Japanese**

Using Japanese in the planning stage is an excellent idea (up to a point), but it should be limited as much as possible in the performance stage. What you can do is have the same discussion twice with different partners. This is a non-confrontational way to get them to use more English.

Bilingual resources are also helpful: Wikipedia and The Japan Times. They have articles in both English and Japanese and they even have articles in easy English.

### **Group Session**

**Date:** September 23, 15:00-17:00

**Venue:** Nagoya International Center, Lecture Room 1

**The number of participants:** 12

**Abstract:** The participants made a report about their lesson.



### **Next Workshop**

**Date:** October 14, 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30, 15:00-17:00

**Venue:** Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room K306

**Instructor:** Michael Cholewinski (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

**Title:** 'Computer Assisted Language Teaching'

I'm waiting for your attendance.