

## NUFS Workshop 2007

*Newsletter No. 7***Workshop in September (Part 1)**

**Date:** September 22, 2007, 10:30-14:30

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

**Instructor:** Philip Suthons (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

**Title:** "Using movies to Create a Near-Immersion Experience"

**The number of participants:** 23

**Abstract:** Most teachers use movies for listening. They explain the context, pre-teach vocabulary and use "viewing questions" to help students understand a one-minute video. Although this is fun and improves listening, students need a deeper experience. They need to interpret contexts, speculate about meanings, and theorize about people and life in general. Especially in Japan, students need real experience in the target language. Movies provide a manageable version of reality that can help students learn to solve language problems and accumulate valuable experience. The more you watch, the more you understand. Workshop activities and materials include how to view movies, how to teach movie viewing, several classroom activities, materials teachers can use in their own classrooms and suggestions for selecting and editing movies.



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

- Watching a movie with the sound-off is an interesting way to use films in the lesson. Students can use their imagination, and guess what they are saying. It's a good idea because they don't have language stress.
- I used movies only for listening activities. Today I learned that movies can be used for much wider variety of purposes, such as cultural items, not only language itself. Using movies to understand meaning is a very different aspect that I didn't think of.
- "Sawing" cartoon. By trying some kinds of questions (pre-viewing, first-viewing, second-viewing), students can understand how to express the story in English step by step, and all the activities (questions) leads to the final step (summarization). I'm really happy to know such a useful output activity. Students will surely like it.
- I'd like to use 'guessing the story'. It's a really good exercise to imagine the story. And talking about it with a partner or in a group is better exercise. Talking with others gives us more imagination and becomes a good communicative exercise. Using a cartoon movie can grasp the young learners' attention.
- "To Kill a Mockingbird"- to see the film segment without sound and guess who, when, where... seems very appealing. I'd like to use this with high school students who are so imaginative.
- Summarizing an interesting short story is very interesting and exciting. A story about a 10-year-old boy and a waitress gives the students the chance to know the culture.

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

- Showing the same video clip over and over again is not enough. Teachers need to show something new. If showing the same scene over and over again, they would be fed up with watching it. By showing something new in the second time, we can keep students attentive.
- I found characteristics of Hollywood style very interesting. This will help me choose proper parts of a movie for using in classroom.



I also learned that brainstorming is very important to stimulate students' imagination and this will be very useful in reading lesson.

- I learned that the teacher's role is to ask questions and offer support to the students. Today's workshop gave us good example of handout which will work in our daily classroom.
- The effect of using the movies is to let students involve in a communicative activity. (1) Let them show the movie, (2) Ask questions, (3) Repetition: these three circles enable learners to activate brain storming to use English.
- Prediction will work in every kind of activity: listening or reading. We can make the tasks active and interactive by using movies, which is a new idea for me.
- Movies can provide us with the real image of life. Visual images would be a big help to appreciate the situation. I want to find a video related with the lesson we deal with in class, and let the students see it for the review activities.

## 3. Questions and Answers

I would like to thank everyone who sent me questions. Your questions will help all of us understand a little more about using movies.

**Q (1): I have some Japanese animation films which are dubbed into English: 'Princess Momonoke' and 'Spirited Away'. Do you think this kind of DVDs is effective for students? Is there anything I should notice if I use them?**

**Q (2): I've used 'Lion King' for my students. Do you think animation movies are suitable for junior high school students?**

I haven't seen *The Lion King* or *The Princess Momonoke*, so I can not comment on them. However, Nancy has told me that *The Lion King* is a great film to show students because students can relate to the problems of the characters in the story. Based on her analysis, I would check it out.

Using Japanese films dubbed into English is an excellent idea as long as the films are old enough that the students haven't seen them yet. Most students haven't seen movies that came out ten years ago. A Japanese movie might be easier for students to understand if the characters, situation, etc. are familiar. And Japanese films might be more interesting.

**When selecting any film, animated or not, the most important thing is to show something interesting, not something easy to hear or translate.** It is quite natural for teachers to worry about difficulty, but a film that is too obvious (unless it is a comedy) is likely to be boring. So first find something interesting, then make it easier. For example as I did for *Working Girl*, you can give them a simplified script. Just copy the most important lines from the English subtitles and act it out in class. As teachers, we must simplify the task



of watching movies so that students feel confident and empowered. Everyone knows that they can't watch films in a foreign language. It's our job to show them that they can.

### **About animation and “sense of humor”:**

One problem I get from students from time to time is motivation. This problem is not uniquely about animation; it can come up about comedy and drama as well. Occasionally, a student will say that a movie is boring because it isn't “real”, or it isn't funny. Let me deal with the reality problem first. What IS reality? We are looking at projected images on a screen. None of it is real. What is real is how a person interacts with the images on the screen. The story is in your mind. So it doesn't matter if it is animated or not. The important thing is being able to relate to the story, which is actually the student's responsibility. Some stories are just plain boring, but if a story raises questions about life, it is not boring. If a student finds a story (animated or not) boring even though it raises questions about life, then maybe that person is lazy or not mature enough to deal with those questions.

As for humor, what is funny is very personal and immediate. We often can not explain why something is funny. But funny events are very liberating (disinhibiting) and moving. Comedy is necessary for all of us, but especially for teenagers who feel stress about exams, entering adult life, etc. What is funny? Ice breakers like unexpected situations; situations where people take risks and almost fail, but survive in the end, situations where powerful people make mistakes, etc. are often funny. If a student thinks a film is not funny, perhaps they can parody the film. (Every problem is an opportunity for students to get involved.)

**Q (3): I always want to use some movies in the classroom, but I wonder which movies are good for high school students and which segment I should choose. It takes long time to prepare materials such as question sheet for the class. Do you have any suggestions?**

### **Creating classroom materials**

Yes, it does take a long time. But questions are necessary, so we teachers have to “get the ball rolling”. What I do is watch the movie and try to guess what it is that the students will not understand, or what is necessary for students to understand the story. Guessing always means brainstorming – that is, making a list of possible questions – and then deciding which questions are not interesting enough. I start with: Who are the characters? What happens? Why is it important, or What does it mean? Do you like the characters? Why/ why not? Bring all your questions to class. When you see the movie and talk to students, you'll find out right away which ones are necessary and which ones aren't. When you show the movie, you will also get more ideas for questions – don't forget to write them down!

What is important in the story often depends on the ending. In the “ice cream boy” story the fact that the waitress was *moved* determines the meaning of the whole story. Then I went back and asked myself why she was moved. Then her impatience became important. Then how she felt towards the boy became important. Then there was the contrast between how she felt about him and how he felt about her. Eureka! This same process works in many other cases.

**Q (4): When you have a discussion on students’ brainstorming in a whole class, do you try to direct students to the actual plot of the movie? Or do you leave their imagination going in any direction they like?**

**Brainstorming: how much control should a teacher use?**

It depends whether I think the students can resolve the misunderstanding by themselves. If I think students are going in a wrong direction, I challenge their assumptions with a question. I think this is a naturalistic way of helping them explore the movie. I do not suggest an answer unless it seems impossible for the students to discover it themselves. So for example, when we watched the first two minutes of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (アラバマ物語), someone said the father looks like a land owner. That’s true, but it is not completely true. So I asked about his house. Was it a big house? This is pointing out contradictory evidence. If the house was not big, then he could not have been a land owner. And the search continues: maybe he was a lawyer or a doctor....

I do not usually correct wrong assumptions, because students will arrive at the correct conclusions if they continue to watch the movie. But by pointing them in the right direction you can make it easier for them. We want students to feel successful. That’s important.

**Q (5): Short movies can be used in 50-minute class of high school. Please give me more information about short length movies.**

**Short movies**

Finding good shorts is very difficult. The National Film Board of Canada sells shorts via the Internet at: <http://www.nfb.ca/index.php>. However, I have found that out of 50-60 films, I can only use 3 or 4.

This year a new movie called *Paris Je T’aime* was released. The film is made up of twenty or more short stories about love in Paris. One of the stories is about a Muslim girl who teaches a boy how to respect women.



**Whole movies in short episodes**

One of my biggest inspirations for showing movies in class was a nightly television show on Canadian educational TV in the 1970s. That show lasted 30 minutes each week night. Half of that time was spent talking about the movie and then there was a 15 minute viewing. Each night, we would see the next 15-20 minutes of the film. In this way, as a teenager, I was able to see movies in detail that would have been too

boring for me at that age. The show was very popular and lasted over 20 years on TV.

I use *Working Girl* for my TOEIC classes. Our time is very limited. We can only afford to use about 10 minutes each class. But I feel that giving students familiarity with business situations is worth it.

Apart from that, most movies have “stand alone” scenes like the excerpt from *In Her Shoes*. When you are watching movies for your own enjoyment, ask yourself if your students would like them.

**Q (6): Sometimes Japanese people can't understand the humor or wit that appears in the English movies. You said that we can learn the cultural differences from movies. How do we explain the difference of the culture effectively?**

### **Teaching culture**

This is really a difficult question because culture is a whole field apart from ESL. It is easy to make mistaken assumptions about cultural differences. For example, a lot of behavior is unique, idiosyncratic. It would be easy to think that one person's behavior is a cultural difference when in fact it may only be a unique personal quality. How do you know? Similarly, as a foreigner living in Japan for eleven years, I still make a lot of mistakes. The best thing movies can provide is exposure to foreign culture. From exposure, a person can create their own picture of a foreign culture.

**Q (7): When you use movies, do you always use a simplified script? Is it OK to use the actual script if it is available?**

**Q (8): When you showed the movies, you showed the English subtitles as well. Why? I think students would tend to read them rather than listen to the conversations.**

### **Scripts and subtitles:**

I think it is important to be flexible, so I would use almost anything depending on the situation. For example, sometimes I use English subtitles, Japanese subtitles, or no subtitles at all. Nancy said she does the same thing. If there is no time, or if the students need a break, I'll use Japanese subtitles. I really like using English subtitles. What other situation exists where it is actually easier to read a foreign language? But in any case, the viewing is usually repeated three times, in which case I only show English subtitles once (during the second viewing). You should probably tell students when you're going to use subtitles, so that they know it is their only chance to see the words.



As for scripts, I almost always use a simplified script because it's easier for the students (and the teacher); it helps them get the meaning. Furthermore, students need to learn to ignore irrelevant information. Only part of the information they hear is relevant to the story. On the other hand, if students feel “over-loaded” by too much information, they will simply “tune out”. That means they will stop listening. Tuning out is not laziness; it's a natural response to a difficult thinking challenge. For

advanced classes, you could use an actual script and have the students black out the unnecessary parts. But that's pretty advanced.

When would I use the actual script? When I want to highlight how native speakers really speak. For example, I was going to show a scene from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. Two doctors are speaking in very polite English. We very rarely hear polite English in movies. On the other hand, in *Some Like it Hot*, some characters use bad grammar. This shows that foreigners do not always use correct English.

Let's not forget that movies are fiction, so even the "actual" script is not *real*.

### **Q (9): How do you simplify the speeches of the characters in the movies? And for what?**

#### **Simplifying dialogue**

I simplify dialogue to ease the "cognitive burden" (that is, the effort students need to make to understand what is happening). What is irrelevant in a dialogue? Sometimes there are unnecessary flourishes of language; that is, too many words. The same thing could be said more economically, with fewer words. Sentences with several verbs are harder to process. Adjectives are often unnecessary. Sometimes the dialogue refers to a scene the students haven't seen. It depends on the situation.

### **Q (10): Is there a good way to make the most of subtitles?**

#### **The purpose of subtitles**

There might be a good way to use subtitles, but my focus is on the story. The purpose of using movies, as I see it, is to get away from textbook exercises. So I would only use subtitles to help students understand the movie. I doubt that subtitles could be used for shadowing because most subtitles are simplified; they do not match what the characters actually say.

Finally, any time you offer something new to people, you are taking a risk. The students may not like it. They may not take it seriously. But if students are going to learn English, they are going to have to find more communicative ways of using the language (than test taking). When that happens, they will need not only examples of realistic spoken English, but also topical references in the foreign culture. In the meantime, watching movies in English is fun and provides a huge range of information about foreign experiences and culture. I hope you will find showing movies as rewarding as I have.

## **Workshop in September (Part 2)**

**Date:** September 22, 2007, 14:30-17:00

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

**Advisors:** Kazuyoshi Sato & Nancy Mutoh (Nagoya University of Foreign University)

**The number of participants:** 15

**Abstract:** The participants discussed their own monthly report in groups. Yoshi and Nancy joined the groups and gave them some advice.



## <A small report of junior high school teachers' discussion> ( by Nancy)

Teacher A's activity was communicative, multi-skill, was demonstrated with actual data (we saw the students' written follow up activity and heard them speaking on tape), and included a survey of students' feelings about the activity.



Teacher B was very happy as she reported on her 1st ever communicative oral activity. She also had the set of students' papers with their comments, which were positive. A couple of students wrote that it was the first time they had ever spoken in English.

Teacher C said he tried one of the songs from the summer workshop collection. His students were enthusiastically tapping and saying the words. Their previous response to songs had not been enthusiastic.

Everyone had an activity so appealing that group members wanted to try it out themselves right there to be sure they understood it well, so they could use the activity in their own classes. They asked specific questions that showed that intention.

The mood was so positive and collaborative, very satisfying for all.

## Workshop in October (Schedule)

### (Part 1)

**Date:** October 13, 2007, 10:30-14:30

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

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

**Title:** "Using a project-based approach for improving students' writing skills"

### (Part 2)

**Date:** October 13, 2007, 14:30-17:00

**Venue:** Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room K304

**Advisors:** Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

**Topic:** Group discussion

Please email Chihaya ([chiha143@nufs.ac.jp](mailto:chiha143@nufs.ac.jp)) if you will attend this workshop.