

NUFS Workshop 2007

Newsletter No. 8

Workshop in October (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"

The number of participants: 16



Abstract: This workshop will give participants a chance to see (and experience a bit!) how a project-based approach can be developed for use in both large and small writing-based classes. There will be a basic introduction to the constructivist paradigm - on which the project-based approach is premised - with an explanation of how constructivist-based activities utilized over an extended period can allow students to develop a number of meaningful skills and attitudes (e.g., a greater appreciation for learning and self-directed activity, an understanding of the merits and rewards of near-peer collaboration, and a deeper understanding of both the topic and target writing structures).

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

- Mind-mapping – To start this type of activity, teachers need to give clear steps students take. Otherwise they would be at a loss what to do. Mind-mapping gives students a good start.
- Mind-mapping – It will have the students express their ideas freely. It will also help them think how to organize their ideas into a form of an essay.
- Pair work – Collaborative essay writing was a good way to get core idea or information about a topic and also can get partner's feedback.
- Writing project in a pair – this sounds interesting because pair work may help students broaden and develop their ideas deeper. Writing is considered a very individual activity, but looking at it from a different perspective is very important.
- In junior high textbook, there are some articles about discussion like "For or Against?" I'd like to use "Organizing Your Questionnaire Data" activity there. Students interview some people around them to ask about their own opinion. With the data, they can show their opinions.
- I like showing students structure before the writing project, especially 'green part'. Students feel comfortable and get confidence. They might say, 'Oh, I can write such long sentences!'
- I'd like to use 'to correct each other by using a correction code'. I guess it'll work in my class at junior high, too.
- Paragraph Feedback – the errors in paragraph will be checked by just the code, and the writer should think what is incorrect and how it can be changed.
- Making Group Mind Map and Individual Mind Map is useful for junior high school students when they write their papers, for example, a paper about 20th century greats they are interested

in. Writing their opinions or explaining something by using some sentences is the most difficult task for them. So they need to collaborate in order to make sentences and complete them.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- Working on a project in pairs or in groups is good. Students need to interact with each other in this activity. It means that they need to speak and listen to each other. Through this activity, they can improve those skills as well.
- Interview before writing is a good idea. I'll apply this for my essay writing class.
- The importance of discussing the matter before they start writing.
- I learned that scaffolding is very well. Because we could experience the procedure by ourselves, we understood it well. Working with near-peer is so helpful and fun. I'm a junior high teacher and I cannot apply exactly the same thing as we did today, but the way of scaffolding and near-peering can be used somehow. First, I want to try writing corroboration when we do 'Show and Tell'. Students may be able to work on writing about their dreams or even diary with their near-peer.
- Michael's way of teaching is systematic. I was impressed with it. I could understand the importance of the format of the essay today.
- Most of the students feel it easier by being given the useful information and by pair work to write a long essay, even if they thought it tough at first. Little things make students work much better.
- Writing your ideas is not easy to do. Thus, it is more effective/easier for students if they have an outline to follow.
- I was deeply impressed with Prof. Cholewinski's lecture. Students need to learn how to write an essay or a paper through near-peer collaboration. It's helpful for them to practice it. They will surely get "transferable skills."



2. Questions and Answers

Q (1): About peer-correction, what if students didn't have enough knowledge of English grammar? Some students may point out some correct parts as incorrect ones.

I realize that students worry about being 'competent' enough to make corrections to someone else's work. That's why I don't ask them to do that. I give them a correction rubric and evaluation guide (with an example) and ask that they try to notice aspects of the writing that they think/feel are questionable (based upon their own level of understanding). I do 'peer review' in this way because it takes the pressure off the students to do something they don't have confidence to do, and it also acts as a reinforcement activity (students re-visit grammatical or structural elements in the rubric and guide and peer work that they need to be mindful of in their own writing). Revisiting fundamentals in this way, I think, is a powerful reflective activity that pays off on several levels.

Q (2): So far, I tell my students to write the most important thing first. But is it all right to write in the opposite way (i.e. to write the most important thing last)?

I always let my students have a choice, as it most often is a matter of style. I suppose, to give everyone a chance to be aware of the different ways you can arrange information in a writing to stress meaning, you

could make a small writing task that forced each way. After that, students could be free to choose. Again, it kind of depends on the situation (of the writing task) and the writer's style.

Q (3): You mentioned five steps for writing project (Introduction, Background...), but can we simplify the steps for high school students?

Well, sure. The workshop time limit only allowed me to demonstrate one way these concepts (e.g., constructivism, authenticity, near peers, scaffolding, etc.) could be applied. One could come up with a lot of different tasks that utilize these concepts, but you'd want to stay true to the theoretical concepts when designing and applying them. I could see all sorts of things, for example, plays, diaries, blogs, show and tell, and so on. All of these could involve writing (or other skills) in their production...at many different levels.

Q (4): Which dictionaries do your students use, English-English dictionary or English-Japanese dictionary? Which do you think is better?

I let them choose, but honestly think the English-Japanese version is more facilitative for their learning in my classes (I have relatively low level students). I don't think anyone can say one is better than the other. There are just too many variables involved. Dictionary use in my classes is based on students getting the meaning rather quickly, and for that the English-Japanese version works well. Were I to use the dictionary in a different way, say, as part of an English vocabulary learning activity, I might opt for an English-English version. To do that, though, one would have to re-set activity and student expectations and also work up a set of lessons to facilitate students' transition to this version of the 'tool,' I think.

Q (5): When we put emphasis on improving students' writing skills, how important it is to point out and correct their errors explicitly by teachers at the final stage?

It sounds as though your "correct" is synonymous with "edit." I try not to be an editor. What I try to do is select a range of specific targets (plurals, conjunctions, etc.) and then provide models and a rubric and evaluation guide that are suited to those target areas. I then create activities that allow students to work with those target concepts (and of course, all the while they are using all sorts of other English, ne?). Then, when we get to the 'final draft' I evaluate the writing with explicit comments as they relate to the rubric and guide and target concepts. I also include comments about general strength of ideas and sufficient details and explanations and cogency, etc., but primarily comments are restricted/focused on the targets. There will be other days for different targets. As a course continues, I 'expect' my students to gain competency in the target areas that are covered. If they do not, I try to determine why they are not making it (it can be for any number of reasons, laziness being one of them). I try to avoid overkill on my 'correction' commentary. It can be debilitating for the student, I think. Besides, with well-understood targets (by the students and instructor), a lot of pressure is off to try and "do everything," or "catch every error." A focused teacher helps a student stay focused, ne?



Workshop in October (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 University)

The number of participants: 13

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



Workshop in November (Schedule)

(Part 1)

Date: November 10, 2007, 10:30-14:30

Venue: Nagoya Sakae Tokyu Inn (http://www.tokyuhotelsjapan.com/en/TI/TI_SAKAE/map.html)

Instructor: Mathew White (Nanzan University)

Title: : “Teaching Global Issues in English”

(Part 2)

Date: November 10, 2007, 14:30-17:00

Venue: Nagoya Sakae Tokyu Inn

Advisor: Kazuyoshi Sato (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Topic: Group discussion

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