NUFS Workshop 2008

Newsletter No. 5

< Summer Workshop 2008 >

"Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):

Theory and Practice"

<Day 2>

Date: August 5, 2008, 9:30a.m.-12:30a.m., 13:30p.m. - 16:30p.m.

Morning

Title: Tasks Based on Text

Instructor: Nancy Mutoh (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

The number of participants: 29

Abstract: How can language teachers modify the textbook by using tasks? Is it possible to incorporate tasks into regular

English classes? The answer is yes and there are ways to do that. Nancy will demonstrate various text-based tasks so that participants will experience them as students. Additionally, they will learn ways of getting students to use more English through tasks in class.

Afternoon

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

The number of participants: 27

Abstract: Participants will continue to work on a lesson plan in their groups. Yoshi and Nancy will be advisors.

1. **Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**
   - I want to use 'dictogloss', because we sometimes do dictation to assess the ability of listening and writing. But dictogloss improves the ability not only listening and writing but also communicative ability.
   - 'Dictogloss' helps me to motivate me to brush up my listening skill, and this activity had great impact on me. The combination of listening, writing and speaking activities with interaction between learners created good atmosphere of language learning. Moreover, this will help learners brush up or develop grammatical or linguistic accuracy, as well as enhance socio-linguistic comprehension.
   - I would like to use dictogloss in my class. It includes listening practice as well as meaning focused summarizing exercises. It is important for students to learn that there are more than one way to express one thing. Students can also learn a lot from other students writing.
   - Dictogloss. I think the best way to master English is not to memorize sentences but to learn how to use English words or how to make sentences. Also as dictogloss has an aspect of dictation, we

can listen to, write and speak English through this activity.

- Prediction activity is useful. It makes reading more interesting. Students feel like reading because they want to know if their guessing is correct.
- I want to use pre-text tasks, because it is nice for brain storming about the content. I will brainstorm with introduction of new vocabulary with pictures and let students to predict the content of the text. Then I'm going to make students to listen to the CD attached the textbook.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- I learned another aspect of teaching. I only gave material and explained it. But the most important thing is sharing and to improve their communicative ability. So I have to change my way of teaching. I want to use TBLT and others that I learned from today's workshop.
- The example lesson about spiders helped me to understand how to make a text-based lesson and task-based clearly. Activity ideas to develop discourse competence are also helpful.
- I learned good strategies for pre-reading activities using the TBL framework cycle we talked about yesterday. Also, it was my first time to come across dictogloss. It's a very good framework for comprehending texts and doing listening practice. I plan to use all this information in the future in my classes.
- We teachers must have goals in doing anything. Sometimes my plan is just for fun. Actually the students enjoy, but nothing move. So I must think of the flow for the plan. Nancy and Chihaya showed the stages of the plan and how to make a plan with tasks. Today, I reviewed about the components of the TBL framework.
- Task should be considered carefully so that students can attain some feeling of satisfaction, achievement, and the plan about how we can have students achieve the goal is indispensable. Task is a very important strategy for learners. I felt so from the past tow day's workshop. In that sense, the selection of text(book) is also important.
- I learned more about the importance of pre-tasking and also about the lessons from the 'True Stories' series. I'm interested in those books now.

3. Questions and answers

Q (1): At the No.4 of 'The four stages of dictogloss' in the handout of 'Dictogloss', it says 'Feedback from teachers'. How do you feedback?

A (Chihaya): After students reconstructed their version of the text in pairs, I collected students' sheets and checked their sentences. I just underlined the words which are grammatical errors, and wrote down words in Japanese like '品詞', '構文', etc. Then students have to think by themselves about how their sentences should be. For example, if a student's sentence is like 'Dogs gives us love and laugh', I'll write down '動詞'. I don't want to correct their errors, but want them to notice their errors.

After my presentation, Yoshi gave me a good comment: teachers should not put number on each sentence of the text. Because the main goal is to create the students' version of the text, they should not pay attention to the number of the sentences. They can express one idea in one sentence or two sentences. Either should be OK.

Q (2): When I use the textbook, should the task be related to the content of the topics that students actually read? Or it might allow to produce relating the topic of the textbook?

A (Nancy): If your teaching is based on the textbook, then tasks based on the textbook will help your students succeed in learning the prescribed curriculum. B. If you have the freedom to introduce other materials, then you can find high-interest, easy reading passages, such as the True Stories books. Your students would probably enjoy and learn by using them. C. You can also combine. You can use a short reading text that is not from the textbook but is closely connected to the topic of a textbook lesson. Ideally it should add new information to the textbook lesson, but contain some of the textbook lesson's vocabulary. Students will feel the vocabulary they learned was useful for reading other things!

Q (3): What are the things we should pay attention to when we plan the activity based on tasks?

A (Nancy): First is your knowledge of your students' strong and weak skills and general level of English as well as the kinds of topics you think they would find interesting. Then be sure any task you plan has a clear goal and clear instructions. A pre-task activity will help them get interested in the topic and succeed with the task. If their English is weak, the report activity can be skipped or made short and simple. As your students become used to doing tasks, you can introduce the report step.

Q (4): Today's morning presentations & handouts might have covered what Yoshi did yesterday morning, but what makes TBLT unique from the general term CLT?

A (Nancy): TBLT is not uniquely different from CLT. They have overlap in both goals (communicative competence) and many activity types. You can think of tasks as one format for conducting CLT activities. Communicative language teaching is a broader idea than tasks.

Q (5): I learned that task is 'goal oriented', and the goal has to be clear to the students, Is it necessary to explain the goal of the task to the students before the task begins, or students should learn the goal as they work on the task?

A (Nancy): Telling learners the goal would take maybe one minute or less. It will help them understand why they are doing the task, which moves them in the direction of understanding their own learning.

Q (6): I did a lesson with my students based on using real news articles, much like the True Stories books. The difference is though that I let the students each choose their own articles. Some students really enjoyed the lesson, but others complained it was too difficult. Is it better for the teachers to pick and choose articles? Or the students?

A (Nancy): Each way has its advantages, so you can do both for variety. An advantage of self-selected

3

articles is that students will all be interested in the article they choose. A disadvantage is that you can't do all-class activities based on the same article. You can have peer teaching and discussion in pairs of groups of three, however, with many different articles. For students who can manage that level of activity, it's engaging and worthwhile. It's a very authentic kind of activity, we often do tell a friend or family member about something we're read recently.

Q (7): Sometimes it's difficult to motivate students to learn English when they have no need (or see no need) to use it in everyday life or in their future (for example if they're in sports club and have their focus on that.) What are some good ways to show them that there are in fact many uses in the real world?

A (Nancy): Possible ways: 1. Share with them the information on at the bottom of the Focus 1 page that Yoshi handed out. That's the page that contains the survey on beliefs that you filled out at the beginning of Yoshi's presentation. 2. Have class activities that are as interesting as possible and help them succeed in by giving "do-able" activities to build their confidence. 3. Maybe they're interested in the lyrics of English songs. 4. Try to find true stories about people who never expected to need English, but did in fact come to need it for their job or living circumstances. Globalization is changing our world in many ways. There are many such people nowadays, not only Japanese people who go abroad but also Japanese who need to communicate with foreign people living in Japan (workmates or neighbors).   In the end, you may not be able to interest them in English now. In that case, they will learn it if they need it some day!

Q (8): I understand the easy ways to adopt these skills to the class in basic level. I want to know about the concrete skills to adopt this kind of the methods to the students in the middle level?

A (Nancy): The principles are the same. You can adjust them to students in the middle level by choosing suitably (more) difficult content of the reading or listening texts and also task activities that are more challenging and complex, especially in the report phase.

Q (9): Reading a few reference books is a lot of work. How does everyone use them? Do they make files? I can't remember everything I read.

A (Nancy): Yes, I admire the ability, energy and dedication of participants, too!   Comments: 1. It's not necessary to read a whole book. You can flip through and find ideas that interest you if the book is a practical one that offers teaching ideas. Beginning with that kind of book is good. The Table of Contents at the beginning will guide you.   2. If you find a book you want to read that is fairly difficult, note taking or outlining might work for you. First look over the chapter titles and subtitles. Look at pictures and diagrams if there are any. If you find an introduction or summary for the chapter, read them before reading the main body of the chapter. I wish you good luck in your reading.

Q (10): Is a task used anywhere in the class, for example, introducing a new grammar point, or practicing a certain pattern or used as final assessment of the unit?

A (Nancy): Yes, the only limit is your own imagination! The book of participants' lesson plans and tasks may give you a lot of new ideas.

Q (11): How do you think the task cycle could be applied to elementary school students? Maybe they could pick out pictures from a group and then negotiate their order, and retell the story using picture.

A (Nancy): Please look over Chapter 8 in Jane Willis's book *A Framework for Task-Based Learning* (the Day 1 and 2 presentations were partly based on). The title is "TBL for Beginners and Young Learners." I'll bring it tomorrow (Wednesday). Of course the task cycle needs some modification, especially in eliminating or changing the nature of the Report phase. Tasks need to be shorter, more physically active, etc.

Q (12): We learned that there are three steps in Task Based Learning: 1) task, 2) plan and 3) report. And about the third step 'report', from a teacher's perspective, sometimes it's hard to see how 40 students are reporting in pairs or groups. So, what are efficient ways to give feedback to students and also evaluate students' achievement? In my opinion, recording is one way because a teacher can listen to each individual's tape and writing a script of the conversation can be useful.

A (Nancy): Absolutely, as we saw on Day 1, preparing, practicing and recording a conversation is wonderful task. Then transcribing all or part of the conversation provides many useful opportunities to examine language through self-correcting and peer editing. The teacher has something concrete to collect and give feedback on. Videoing is another way. It's not always necessary for the teacher to collect and mark, either. Students can report to changing partners or groups as the teacher is monitoring that everyone is on task.