

NUFS Workshop 2009

Newsletter No. 1

Workshop in May (Day 1)

Date: May 9, 2009, 13:00-16:00

Venue: Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room 322

Instructor: Aki Hakamada (Shiroyama Junior High School)

Title: "Teaching English Communicatively to Junior High School Students"

Abstract: Teaching English communicatively is very effective for improving learners' communicative competence, but how can we teach? How are communicative activities different from mechanical activities? There are many kinds of activities, but we have to be careful about how to select them. Is the activity meaningful? Do students exchange new information from each other in the activity? Is the situation in the activity natural? As a junior high school teacher, I have been struggling over how to plan communicative activities with limited vocabulary and grammar. I have tried several activities with junior high school students and would like to share some of them with you.



Instructor: Seiji Shintani (Bihoku High School)

Title: "Developing Students' Communicative Abilities through Three-Year Integrated Writing Classes"

Abstract: How can we develop students' communicative abilities? What would happen to high school students if they continued to learn English through integrating language skills for three years? I will report how integration of language skills was implemented in writing class by adopting a variety of communicative language learning teaching. Students learned English cooperatively and became autonomous learners of English through three-year integrated writing classes. In particular, I will demonstrate some of the activities I used in my class.



The number of participants: 41

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

- I would like to make a quiz using Powerpoint as Ms. Hakamada has shown today. This looks fun no matter what age one is and can be used as a warm-up activity or a review activity.
- Greeting activity: Filling all students' names in a sheet is good because they think they have to finish asking all of them. Then they know other students little by little.
- Pre-listening activities using pictures: Prediction is an important reading skill and I've confirmed that this activity can increase the interest of the story I'm going to read. I use this kind of pictures

as pre-reading activities, but I have students guess and tell the story. This is difficult for them. Asking and answering about a picture is easier and more enjoyable.

- Shintani sensei's presentation just showed what my school needs to do in writing lessons. I'm going to follow his steps. Pre-listening activities and retelling activities with pictures gave me great hints to rethink & improve my English II lessons. I'm thinking of introducing discussion & debate next year when the second-year students become third-year. Shintani sensei showed us how to prepare them for stepping up to higher level activities.
- Group interview (Aki sensei): Even though it is a simple pattern, each interaction is meaningful and students will learn the target naturally. / This interview game contains a lot of factors like conversation, listening, writing and so on. Even low level students can do that. I mean all the students can be involved in the activity. I will change a little and adopt this activity to my class.
- Conversation strategies: In the textbook of JHS, some conversation strategies are introduced. But I had only taught the expressions and have students repeat them. So they cannot use the strategies in real conversation. By giving more chances to use them, they will be able to acquire them.



2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- Since I work at a high school, I'm not familiar with the English education at Middle schools. It was a great opportunity to see what knowledge the first-year students have when they enter high school.
- I liked Aki sensei's attitude. "Never give up. Try again". Her words are very encouraging. I learned this kind of attitude is essential to cope with problems we face in everyday classrooms.
- I'm impressed by the integration of four skills in writing class. The methods are very practical and fun. I'd like to improve my skills, reflecting today's workshop.
- When I teach, I usually want to do too many things. So students are too busy and sometimes can't finish the tasks I told to do. I think that the scaffolding is very important. Aki and Seiji showed us the example of trying and repeating the same things a lot of times. I learned that to learn something new, learners should repeat the same thing many times.
- I felt that Japanese teachers like me can't teach students in a communicative way. But now I think I may be able to do it by acquiring many strategies through this kind of seminar.
- From Seiji's presentation, I learned the importance of teachers' collaboration. He is successful and many teachers may think it envious. But he must have made lots of effort especially on talking with teachers to reach consensus.
- I thought the lesson plans presented today were really organized. Students can learn step by step and be evaluated by what they have learned. It will motivate students to learn.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): I'd like to know more about speaking test.

A (Aki): I set speaking test once a term. As a speaking test, students speak with the ALT individually. I usually set the speaking test just before the term-end examination, so other students who are not taking

speaking test can study for the exam individually. As for the seventh graders, in the first term, students answer to the questions like ‘Are you from America?’ and ‘Do you like skiing?’ In the second term, students explain how to get to the certain place in Nagoya. In the third term, students ask the ALT like ‘Let’s play tennis at school. Are you free tomorrow? How about noon?’ All conversations are from the activities during the term. I evaluate the speaking test by how eager the student has the conversation and how they continue the conversation (attitude) and how accurate and appropriate the student speaks English (ability of expressing).

Q (2): “What’s your favorite...?” was a little confusing. Is there any other better way to do it smoothly? If there is another better way, please tell me.

A (Aki): I agree with the idea that the activity is complicated, but I think it is nice challenge for the beginners like the seventh graders before studying third person singular s. If I can try again, in the next time, I will spend two lessons, instead of one and the goal of the activity will be making presentation with a graph or chart. Clearer the goal is for students, better they know what to do. So first I will demonstrate the presentation about students’ favorites, then each group has certain amount of time for the collecting information and prepare for the presentation.



Q (3): Please show me how students take interview tests. You may take video-tape them. What do the students who don’t take an interview test do?

A (Aki): It is up to students to take interview test or not. Of course, I want all students take the test, but it is their choice. To prevent students not taking the test, I told students about evaluation. I told students that I cannot evaluate their speaking ability if they do not take interview tests. Also if someone does not want to take the test, I assume that the students do not have positive attitude toward communication in English. Students who want to be evaluated better take the test eventually.

A (Seiji): I haven’t conducted interview tests between students and teachers but we have had speaking tests in pairs or in groups among students. At first, students had a speaking test in a different room apart from their original class, while the other students stayed and prepared for their speaking test or they wrote their essay, on the topic. However, toward the end of the year, when we conducted a debate, examinees performed in front of the other students and each student evaluated the performance of the other.

Q (4): Scaffolding is good but there are so many students. Some need a lot of help, others need a little. I can’t work well with a lot of people. Give me some advice.

A (Seiji): Students can sometimes learn from each other better. Those students who are ahead of the curve can further develop their own understanding while helping others gain confidence in their learning. Those who are behind can freely ask questions to their peers without having to worry about appearing ignorant in front of the rest of the class. If we prepare good lessons with good scaffolding

Q (5): On average I only see my students once every week. This makes it difficult to continue a new lesson based on a previous lesson. I have tried to make a better link between lessons by

giving out homework students can do in between. Do you have any other ideas to help bridge this gap?

A (Seiji): Have students personalize what they learn during the lesson at school. For example, if the topic is a lesson about the “environment”, students can write about their opinion on the problem. The homework can be just such an essay. I found the “List of Travel-Related Words” (p.7 in the handout) very interesting. I’d like to know how to use it and how you made it. That kind of word list may be used to activate a student’s schema. It is a reference and they can pick up some words or phrases from it that they want to use in their conversation or essay.

Q (6): I intend to do a mini-debate in my international course class. It must be hard to have students understand how to do it in a limited time. Please give me some tips.

A (Seiji): Teaching procedure will vary depending on how many periods you are available for the lesson, but students need to know some key phrases which are necessary for conducting a debate. They need to practice using some phrases like “Let me summarize what you said.”, “I disagree with your idea because...”, and “I’m on the affirmative/ negative side.” Showing students a video clip in which people are debating may be helpful in understanding the procedure of a debate.

Q (7): How often do you have a teachers’ meeting for lesson planning?

A (Seiji): We meet at least once a week on a fixed period during class hours. Before the time schedules are fixed for every teacher, we ask the staff in charge of making the schedule to spare us (English teachers in charge of the same grade) one period to have time for preliminary discussion concerning the lesson. We also ask the staff in charge of arranging the desks in the staff room to arrange our desks so that they are located side by side or face to face. That way we can talk whenever we feel it necessary.

Q (8): What is your pace for introducing each conversation strategy during the year? How do you let students retain strategies they learned previously?

A (Seiji): I usually introduce one conversation strategy in one unit. Students practice it repeatedly during the classes of the unit during timed conversation. When we move on to the next unit, we pick up another strategy but we require students to use the strategies they learned before with the new one.

Q (9): How do you persuade some teachers who are uncooperative?

A (Seiji): It’s not easy to change a teachers’ beliefs. Sometimes we may feel that a certain teacher is uncooperative, but it may be because they just don’t know what to do. We should not avoid discussing the matter, but instead ask the teacher who is having difficulty to share their opinions with the rest of the English staff. Once every opinion is out in the open, perhaps a compromise can be found.

Q (10): Why do you use verbal words in your handout; for example, ‘How ya doin?’ or ‘How ‘bout you?’

A (Seiji): Most students know the phrases “How are you doing?” or “How about you?” but when they are suddenly spoken to by a native speaker in such a way, they may not readily understand. By showing the way English is actually spoken it will help students respond



in real conversation.

Q (11): How many classes do you usually need for the activity like writing an essay as a goal; for example ‘Women don’t have the same opportunities’?

A (Seiji): When you focus on the essay writing, you require at least 4 periods; introduction of the topic, writing rough draft, peer-editing, and presentation. If you intend to develop 4 skills in writing class, you need more time to have different activities.

Q (12): You said “Students began to use English privately”. Does that mean they used English outside of the class? If so, how were they exposed to authentic opportunities to use ‘real’ English?

A (Seiji): Our students have lots of opportunities to use English if they want. If they use the Internet they can chat with people around the world. In our school we have extra curricular (activities) such as English Day, a letter exchange with American high school students and a 5 minute talk with native English speakers after school. Our school also accepts short visits from foreign students.

Q (13): When and why did you decide to research writing?

A (Seiji): Several years ago I learned topic based, integrated writing teaching method which includes a variety of activities using four skills at the NUFS workshop for English teachers. I tried this method little by little in my traditional writing class in which students mostly translated Japanese into English. I realized students actually developed their communicative competence. So I kept on trying the method through my action research.

Workshop in May (Day 2)

Date: May 10, 2009, 9:30-12:30

Venue: Aichi Kenko Plaza, Conference Room 3

Title: Orientation for Action Research

Advisor: Kazuyoshi Sato (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Presenter: Reiko Iwai (Agu High School)

Abstract: The aim of this Action Research is to seek how to actually implement communicative activities into my

conventional way of teaching grammar in high school English classes and to help students acquire grammar knowledge through letting them practice English. I employed focus-on-form instruction using both structured input and output activities were tried out. Drill-based grammar instruction alone won't produce students' communicative use of grammar. And in communicative grammar teaching, it was also necessary for students to interact with each other to negotiate the meaningful dialogue with the target grammar. Through this AR project, focus-on-form instruction was proved to be effective to enhance students' understanding grammar items and helped them express to make use of the target grammar.



The number of participants: 28



Workshop in June (Schedule)

Date: June 13, 2009, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 51

Instructor: Suzanne Bonn (Nanzan University)

Title: "Creating Dynamic Readers: Reading Circles and Reading Strategies"

Please email Chihaya ([chiha143\(at-mark\)nufs.ac.jp](mailto:chiha143(at-mark)nufs.ac.jp)) if you can attend this workshop.