

## NUFS Workshop 2009

### *Newsletter No. 7*

#### Workshop in September

##### <Part 1>

**Date:** September 19, 2009

**Venue:** NSC College, Room 31

**Time:** 10:30-12:00

**Instructor:** Juanita Heigham (Sugiyama Women's University) & Robert Croker (Nanzan University)

**Title:** "Promoting teacher development through peer observation"



**Abstract:** Teachers at all stages of their professional journey benefit from having another teacher come and observe them teaching. However, many teachers shy away from observations, as they feel that they will have little control over the process, and be evaluated subjectively by the observer. This workshop shows how the observation process can be teacher-directed not observer-directed, through 'reciprocal peer observations' with another teacher. The workshop will walk participants through one observation cycle, from pre-observation discussions to the observation itself to the post-observation feedback. Participants will practice a number of classroom observations tasks.

**The number of participants:** 21

#### 1. What kind of questions would you like to explore in your teaching?

- Giving instructions to students who don't give feedback.. Eliciting feedback from quiet students. Avoiding native language use in large classes both teacher and student.
- Time management (Finishing smoothly). Clear objectives/goals for the students
- What warm-up activity energizes students in grammar class. How can I shift grammar items from receptive level into productive level.
- Clear and encouraging directions: even though the task I ask students to do is easy and simple, they do not do the task sometimes. So I want to improve how to give instructions or directions.
- I would like to explore how to motivate de-motivated students. I think words of praising would be a clue and showing them learning strategy would be another clue.
- How to get students more involved in activities. How to make smoother transitions between activities.
- Time management. Clear instruction. Make comfortable conditions.

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

- The importance of observations. Pre-observation → observation → post observation. Teachers who teach the same class should observe each other and give feedback which is collected.
- I found it important to reflect my lessons from the observer's point of view as often as possible.
- The importance of pre-observation chat. When giving observation feedback, the observer actually shouldn't 'give' feedback, but should get the teacher to reflect his or her lesson by asking him/her

questions relevant to what to be improved.

- Good observers elicit the teacher's reflections first. Observers should focus on what the teachers asked them to observe. It is difficult for me. I need to practice more to be a good observer.
- I learned that the concept of teacher-directed reciprocal peer observation and how it will help the teachers improve their actual way of teaching. I felt that the teacher and observer need to have trust and rapport before they try peer observation.
- Observing a good listener: I think I learned some things about how to listen. How to ask questions to get people to solve their own problems, for example.
- I learned a lot from this workshop. Especially, I would like to keep in mind that procedure of peer evaluation. At the first stage, we have to decide focusing the specific plan to observe (pre-observation), then observation, finally we have to reflect and give feedback still focusing the plan. I'd like to make learning society within my school.
- When some other teachers observe my class or when I observe other classes, we haven't taken time to discuss the objectives of the observation in advance. Today I learned prior discussion is important to make the observation meaningful.



### 3. Questions and Answers

**Q (1): Is recording a class you are observing by video or audio recorders better than taking notes? Is it better to use both?**

A: If it's possible for you to record a lesson and have an observer, it's probably better to both video-record and have the observer take notes for a number of reasons. Firstly, during the lesson, rather than spending a lot of time taking detailed notes, the observer is able to spend more time observing the lesson – which is what is really important. (Although observers always need to take some notes in order to better remember what was seen and the impressions those things made.) Secondly, the video provides a factual record of what happened in the class; by comparison, the observer will tend to note what s/he wants to note. Thirdly, the video can be used in the post-observation feedback so the teachers can see what actually happened – not only what they remember and what the observer reports. If you have a lot of time, you and the observer can watch most of the video together. One way to do this would be the first time through, the teacher could choose when to stop the video to talk about a particular point in the lesson; the second time through, the observer could. If you don't have that much time, another way would be to fast forward to specific events in the lesson and watch and discuss those.

**Q (2): 2 observers possible (focusing on different things) video-taping could be reviewed later ...(by several people). Do you think it's realistic?**

A: It's possible to have two observers in the classroom, but there are two practical issues that you should consider. Firstly, having two "guests" in the



classroom can disrupt the normal class flow more than when a single observer is there. This can affect the way both the teacher and the students behave. Secondly, it may be more difficult to coordinate three people's schedules! However, if you are trying to create a learning community, having two people observe a class may be a fast way to develop an understanding of what different teachers are doing in their classes. TEFL teacher training courses have several observers in each class.

As to several people review the videotape later, that could be a great way to develop a teaching community, if the teacher feels comfortable with that. Having the video allows the group to look at the lesson again and again, with different questions in mind – keeping in mind that all the questions will be ones directed by the teacher. It is important that those questions are clear before taking the video, so the observer(s) know what to focus the camera(s) on during the lesson.

### **Q (3): Why do you avoid overt criticism?**

A: In our presentation, we introduced 'teacher-directed, reciprocal peer observations' – that is, two teachers observing each others' classes, for the purpose of helping each other develop professionally. This type of observation focuses on the teachers' questions, and they lead the discussion during the pre-observation chat, observation and post-observation chat so that the issues explored are ones that the teachers choose.

The purpose of this process is to help teachers explore their teaching and to better understand their own teaching philosophy. We believe that the best way to do that is for observers to ask questions and reflect back to the teachers what they said, so as to encourage them to dig deeper inside their teaching practice.

Does overtly criticizing the teacher assist that process of exploration? We would argue probably not. On what basis does the observer criticize the teacher? Who is to say that the observer is 'right'? Direct criticism isn't likely to help teachers explore and define their own teaching. Additionally, criticism might make the teachers feel that they are being judged or evaluated, rather than being supported and encouraged in their own exploration.



That being said, if the two agree that overt criticism is welcome, and they feel comfortable with that, then we suggest three ground rules be set for this criticism: the observer should be polite; both should recognize that the observer is looking from his/her own perspective and not from a universal 'good teacher' perspective (implying that the teacher is a 'bad teacher'); and that the observer should respect the teacher's point of view.

**Q (4): It's not always possible to practice peer observation. Is it possible to be an observer as well as a teacher? I mean, to be a teacher and an observer at the same time. Then, what specific points should be taken into account to be a good self-observer?**

A: Yes, self-observation is possible. It has the advantage that teachers can do it at any time that is convenient for them – even every time that they are teaching. However, it is more difficult to take notes while you are teaching, as you are playing two roles simultaneously – being a participant as well as being an observer. Here are three recommendations to help this be more successful.

1. Develop a system of taking notes that is easy to keep while teaching – for example, rather than using an observation sheet (such as we used in our presentation), write your notes on relatively large Post-Its, and stick them to your lesson plan.
2. Immediately following the class, make time to write up your notes, elaborating on them as you do so. Give yourself a reasonable amount of time for this. At least 15 minutes of uninterrupted quiet time would be a good target.
3. Take a video of your class so you can really be both the teacher and the observer. Watching it later and comparing it to the notes that you took, will also help you become a better self-observer.

**Q (5): You mentioned it yourself but perhaps you could explain more about reflective feedback (where the observer listens w/out giving too much opinion...?)**

A: The purpose of reflective feedback is to help teachers explore their teaching, and for the observer to refrain from projecting or imposing her teaching ideas or philosophy onto the teacher. It requires that the observer ‘switch off’ his or her critical voice, to remain neutral and to try and see the world from the teachers’ eyes.

There are some important skills involve in this: being a careful listener, reflecting back to the teachers what they said (‘So you’re saying that ....’ / ‘So, you feel that ...’ / ‘I hear you saying that...’etc), and asking questions to help the teachers explore what they are thinking. Sometimes, the observer simply follows the direction that the teachers are going in and uses questions to push the teachers to explore it further; sometimes, however, the observer’s questions can open new topics and areas for discussion.



An excellent reference for reflective feedback is Julian Edge’s book:

Edge, J. (2002) *Continuing Cooperative Development: A Discourse Framework for Individuals as Colleagues*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.

Here is his homepage:

<http://www.education.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/staff/furtherinfomation,86751,en.htm>

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Juanita on

[jheigham\(at-mark\)sugiyama-u.ac.jp](mailto:jheigham(at-mark)sugiyama-u.ac.jp) or Robert on [croker\(at-mark\)nanzan-u.ac.jp](mailto:croker(at-mark)nanzan-u.ac.jp).

## <Part 2>

**Date:** September 19, 2009, 14:30-17:00

**Venue:** NSC College, Room 31

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

**The number of participants:** 16

**Abstract:** group discussion on action research



## **Workshop in October (Planned)**

**Date:** October 10, 2009 10:30-14:30, 14:30-17:00

**Venue:** NSC College, Room 31

**Instructor:** Mathew White (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

**Title:** “Intelligent Choices: Designing Lessons that Cater to the Diversity of Learning Preferences in Your Class”

**Please email Chihaya ([chiha143\(at-mark\)nufs.ac.jp](mailto:chiha143@nufs.ac.jp)) to attend this workshop.**