

NUFS Workshop 2009

*Newsletter No. 10***Workshop in December****<Part 1>****Date:** December 5, 2009**Venue:** NSC College, Room 31**Time:** 10:30-14:30**Instructor:** Brian Cullen (Nagoya Institute of Technology)**Title:** “Understanding and Using Textbook”

Abstract: In this workshop, you will closely examine the textbooks that you are using in order to identify the underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. This will help you to consider whether these assumptions and the textbook activities are suitable for your students. Finally, by considering your student needs precisely, you will begin to adapt textbook activities and generate new ones. Please bring several of the textbooks that you are using (or have used in the past). Also bring your open mind and flexibility!

**The number of participants: 25****1. What you learned from today’s workshop**

- It depends on the teacher’s responsibility to decide how to use the textbooks. Since the textbooks are well organized to teach the language step by step, it could be helpful. But to get students’ attention, authentic language with graphics (ex. newspapers, magazines, etc) might be helpful.
- Brian’s lecture explained very well why Yoshi sensei always tells us to throw away textbooks. Those textbooks that focus on grammar don’t allow students to build generative ability. I guess it is the teachers’ role to help students gain generative ability as we modify the textbook activities and add supplemental materials.
- It’s not an exact quote but Brian said something to the effect of “don’t respect your textbook too much. Instead respect yourself and our students.” I thought that we should always keep this in mind. It helps us to view our textbooks in a more critical mindset, and gives us more confidence in our own abilities.
- Textbooks are not meant, or should not be the arbiter of what gets taught and how it is taught. Ideally it should be a tool, thus like a carpenter building a house, it should be the house, not the hammer, that the carpenter is focusing on.
- I learned that input, output and motivation are essential conditions for learning with textbooks. I also learned that textbooks have some assumptions. We need to have clear goals and try to achieve them Textbooks can support it, but it is just a tool. I found a nice textbook which my pair had. It is “Communication Workbook”. The flow is nice. After students get much input, they have chances to write an essay and give presentations.



- I could clarify again that deciding which textbooks is not a final issue, how we can adopt the textbook to each class room situation is one of main teacher's job. But for that teachers are required to have high understanding to evaluate textbooks and to improve our own skills and knowledge as a teacher. Three questions are significant points to design the curriculum. 1. What they know, 2 Procedure, 3 Goal: they are simple but clearly showing what teachers have to do.
- Thinking about the mouse in the circle was interesting for me. I thought about the three questions in different view point. The mouse (students) can't run away from their circle (learning environment). So I give the students better learning environment to train them. I want them to enjoy using or talking English.

2. Questions and Answers

Q (1): I'd like to know more about the language textbooks in other nations. Do they have such textbooks as the Monbusho-screened textbooks in Japan? Or can they choose material from the ordinary language books?

A: This is a very good question. In Ireland, where I did my education, the system was very similar to Japan and there were just a few standard textbooks to choose from. These were all approved by the government. In the United States, it seems to be decided at local level by each school board or county board.



Q (2): What kind of advice would you give to someone who would like to write a textbook? What's the toughest part?

A: Just do it! Write for students that you are familiar with. Prepare a sample unit or two and try it out in your own classes. Then after improving it, ask colleagues to try out the sample units and give you feedback. Other people will see your materials in a very different way to you and it is important to make sure that the materials are useful for other people, too. Then send it along to an editor (I'm always happy to give feedback) and get feedback. Be prepared to consider all feedback carefully, but remember that ultimately you should be able to be proud of it yourself as something that will help students to learn,

Q (3): In the metaphor of the backwards mouse, are we to imagine a student doing something that is unnatural, or out of the ordinary, in learning language? (as opposed to a mouse walking in a circle forwards?)

A: Another good question. Learning a language is one of the most natural things in the world. There are more bilinguals than monolinguals in the world. So, I guess that training a mouse to run backwards is much more difficult and much more unusual – so your job as a teacher is quite easy.

Q (4): I know about functions, but it was the first time that I heard about notions. I didn't quite understand what they were.

A: This page has a good description.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communicative_language_teaching

It says that: A "notion" is a particular context in which people communicate, and a "function" is a specific purpose for a speaker in a given context. As an example, the "notion" or context shopping requires numerous language functions including asking about prices or features of a product and

bargaining. Similarly, the notion party would require numerous functions like introductions and greetings and discussing interests and hobbies.

Q (5): My problem is how to reach the consensus among the colleagues to use the textbook to achieve the objective. Once we all teachers meet the agreement of the role of textbook, then we could teach English more effectively. What do you think?

A: Reaching a consensus can often be a difficult problem in English departments and finding a textbook that can satisfy everyone is also difficult. I doubt that all teachers will ever be in full agreement on the role of a textbook, and indeed that role may be changing from week to week. In one class, it may be necessary to use the textbook as a way of imparting information to the students, while at other times the most important thing may be its motivational role. Ultimately, I see the textbook as merely a tool and there are often different tools that can achieve the same jobs. So discussing the role of the textbook and the most suitable textbook are extremely useful things to do, but even if you don't agree with the final choice, you can still choose to use that tool and to adapt it to the needs of your students and your teaching style.



Q (6): I really was looking forward to working on how to adapt our textbooks to teaching methods different from the method the book expects us to use. I thought that is what the workshop was going to be about. I was disappointed. Please give me some advice.

A: I believe that all textbooks can be and should be adapted, and that was the underlying message of this workshop. When we discussed behaviourism, communicative approaches, and assumptions underlying the textbooks, we were talking about adapting already. Without an understanding of what the textbook is trying to do and what it assumes already, we will not be sure if our adaption is an improvement or not. Just like training the mouse to go backwards, it useful to consider what the mouse already knows and what we want the mouse to be able to do. Once we have established that, it becomes much much easier to see what we have to do to help it learn – much much easier to adapt our textbooks and lessons in the best way. From a practical point of view, all materials can and should be adapted to the needs of the learning environment.

You can rip the pages out of the book as Robin Williams did in *Dead Poet's Society*, or you can provide your own pre-reading exercises, or any number of other things. You can add, subtract, or simply use the materials in a novel way. When there are pictures in a book, you can use them to launch an entirely new line of learning. When a grammar exercise is boring, you can have students change the words to make it more interesting and real for them.

With regard to the “teaching method that the book expects us to use”, I have seen very few textbooks that cannot be used in a variety of ways. In the workshop, I discussed *Side by Side* with its simple exercises:

A: Where is Mr. Jones?

B: He is in the living room.

A: What is he doing?

B: He is watching television.

As the exercise is written in the book, students are looking at the same pictures and so there is no need to listen to the other



student. Thus the interchange is not meaningful. In my third year of using the book, I started photocopying the exercise pages, cutting them up and rearranging the order of the pictures. Now students had to actually listen because the pictures weren't in the same order. In effect, I changed the boring language drill into an information gap activity where students were actually engaged in a task-based exchange that they could only complete by working together meaningfully. All textbooks are only a tool – a launchpad for your imagination. Good luck in your future adaptation activities!

<Part 2>

Date: December 5, 2009, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room 31

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

The number of participants: 17

Abstract: group discussion on action research



Workshop in January (Planned)

Date: January 16, 2010 10:30-14:30, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room 31

Instructor: Paul Crane (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: "Rubrics for Busy Teachers: How to Create and Use Rubrics for Assessment and Grading"

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