

NUFS Workshop 2010

Newsletter No. 1

Workshop in May (Day 1)

Date: May 8, 2010, 13:00-16:00

Venue: Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room 322

Instructor: Nahoko Tominaga (Moriyama Junior High School), Miwako Kushiro (Kagamihara High School)

Title: Title: Report on Action Research

Abstract:

(Nahoko) How can we junior high school JTEs make the students involved in class positively and interested in English? I will show you some issues I have (and maybe I can share with you). Some students think that English is just one of the subjects and they don't regard English as a language to be used to communicate with others. Their purpose to learn English is to get good Marks in tests. I've tried to change them to be interested in communicative activities. I will show you some of my trials to solve the problems.



(Miwako) It seems rather rare and adventurous to implement incidental focus-on-form in a high school teaching context. This study presents the results of long-term action research on high school writing lessons where students have a lot of chances to use English communicatively. It shows what aspects of students' language ability have been developed by incidental focus-on-form instruction together with teacher feedback on common errors, and what needs to be attended more as future tasks. I hope this presentation may work as helpful hints for organizing lessons which enable students to actually use English more in class.



The number of participants: 31

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

(Nahoko)

- I really enjoyed the group speech activity. I'd like to try it in my classes. I think it is solid group activity which involves writing, speaking and listening, furthermore, it teaches students how to write and think reflectively in English.
- Among all, I especially like the handout about 'how' questions. It could be a great speaking practice to promote conversation with follow-up questions.

- Card game – when I teach grammar, I concentrate on one grammar point. But the game introduced today, we compare the two sentences, for example ‘I play tennis every day’ and ‘I am playing tennis now.’ Students can review what they learned before.
- Yome-Yome Sheet is very interesting because I believe that reading aloud is very important for the students to like English and to feel like speaking. So I would like to introduce this activity in my class if possible.
- ‘When’s Your Birthday’ Bingo – I think this provides a lot of repetitive, but authentic practice of real-life English which is appropriate and manageable for JHS students.



(Miwako)

- ‘People I admire’ was very interesting, because I could write the essay from 12 questions. Usually it is hard to make an essay without materials or talking point. But we can make construction of essay through 12 questions. It was also interesting to listen to the partner’s essay. So I want to use this pattern when I let the students make an essay.
- I really like the flow of activities. I’d like to incorporate the ‘common error’ activity and times conversation based on given questions in some ways.
- Writing with interview session is good. With peer editing and advice from the instructor, the students can find the parts to be improved. ‘Use it, or lose it’ – it’s a wonderful lesson.
- To record the conversation and transcribe it. During the conversation students concentrate on what they talk and cannot notice how they talk. It’s a very good way to reflect how they talk and they can notice what they have learned/not learned through this activity.

2. What you learned from today’s workshop.

(Nahoko)

- Routine deskills teachers. Although we teachers are busy, we have to find and catch time to brush our lessons up. Through the lessons I learned today, I would like to improve my English teaching skills.
- We should think about the balance of input and output activities in order to improve students’ communicative abilities.
- In regards to music activities, even having students fill in the same words, like in ‘Let It Be’, can provide beginning language learners with confidence.
- Through games, students can communicate with each other in English. That’s great.

(Miwako)

- To practice English conversation, it is very effective to use IC recorder. It was first time for me. But I thought it is very convenient and effective to improve conversation ability.
- I learned from Kushiro sensei’s presentation that there is no end for the journey of curriculum reform and development. It is difficult to change teacher’s belief, but she has been tackling with many obstacles by identifying the problems and goals. Her story gave me a great encouragement.
- I was reminded of the importance of trying new activities and how difficult it is for students to write abstractly. So more concrete writing activities might be more beneficial for young writers.

- More than anything, the workshop has me thinking of how to restructure or fine-tune my individual lessons with more self-reflection on the students' part and peer editing.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): During the speeches, do you have students listening write anything or take any notes?

A (Nahoko): Yes. I tell my students to write down their impressions about the speeches and what they learned from the speeches. And I assess the contents. They can use Japanese if they feel difficulty to write down in English.

Q (2): How willing were students to provide feedback to their peers?

A (Nahoko): They were not positive to welcome others' opinion or exchange their opinions for feedback. That is because my students are premature. That's hard for them even in Japanese. However they enjoy their group work.

Q (3): How much passage do you think is appropriate for third-year junior high school students to deal with in Yome-yome sheet?

A (Nahoko): In each grade I don't change the form. I make one sheet for one page of the text. As for 3rd graders, one page has long passage. So the reading time should be longer.

Q (4): When do you do the group writing activity, the beginning of the year, the end? Do the students do it with enthusiasm?

A (Nahoko): When the students have writing activity, I often tell them to work in a group. Peer editing works very well. In April my students made two speeches. In both cases, they worked in a group.

Q (5): What do you have to be sensitive for when you teach English?

A (Nahoko): One of my goals as English teacher is to make all the students involved in class. When one or a few students do not do well in class, I talk with them and find what I can do for them. Almost all the students want to be cared by teachers. So even if they say, "I don't like English. I don't want to study it," they want to do well in class. We teachers should talk with all the students and show them the attitude, "I want you to help you study English.."

A (Miwako): Let me list what I often think of at random.

- To set the clear main goals of the course: what students will be able to do through taking it for one year.
- To set the clear main goal of each unit. This works as one of the sub goals of the course which leads to the course main goal.
- To set the clear main goal and sub goals of each lesson. Each sub goal is fulfilled by each activity which works as preparation for achieving the main goal of the lesson.
- To devise activities which enable students to use English many times.
- To incorporate some kind of personalization as a main goal of each lesson.
- To make handouts look fun with "eye candies" (pictures, photos, different fonts, etc.)
- To time each activity with a timer to make lesson go on speedily.

Q (6): How can we develop both accuracy and fluency effectively?

A (Nahoko): This is what we can't pass. When we introduce a new grammar, we should start with very simplified and easy examples. Then the students follow the examples easily. And the students should have a lot of opportunities to output later. Repetition is very important.

A (Miwako): By giving a lot of chances to use English through writing and speaking, fluency seems to develop greatly. However, this is not enough for accuracy to develop. Reading a lot and having chances to notice their own language use are very important to develop accuracy. I think it essential to give students different kinds of activities: some are focused on fluency, and some on accuracy.

Q (7): Talkative and cheerful teachers have advantage in CLT. There are some teachers who are shy and reserved. They have disadvantage. How can they improve their own personality?

A (Nahoko): Well, this is a quite difficult question to answer. Some of my colleagues are calm and are not happy people. But is that disadvantage? They have their own teaching style which is suitable for them. And also they have patience to listen to their students for a long time. I can't do that.

A (Miwako): I think teachers need to act as a "cheerful teacher" in their classrooms. I hear that drama lessons are provided in teacher development courses in some countries. I think it necessary to put a "teacher" mask and go to the classroom. Once the classroom door is open, this is your stage.

Q (8): What can I try for third-grade students to let them pass examination?

A (Nahoko): Usually in juku most of the students solve the problems. I think that they should start with remembering the words, idioms, and sentences. They should keep writing, reading, and listening. After that they should try the tests which were given in the past. And after that the students should have a goal of themselves. Each student has his or her own goal to overcome.

A (Miwako): I think it is necessary to practice drill questions similar to entrance examinations as preparation at some point of learning at school. We should think of the following two issues about this matter:

- 1) What students should be able to do to prepare for entrance examinations.
- 2) How to develop the necessary ability and knowledge throughout the three years.

As for 1), I think it is important to examine exactly what is required to cope with entrance examinations. Many teachers tend to think of "grammar drill questions" when preparing for examination. But is it really the largest part of entrance examinations? Isn't it more necessary for examinees to cope with reading comprehension type of questions? What kind of examinations do many of our students take? For example, quite a few students of my school go to university or college by a principal's recommendation (推薦入試). In this case, most of them pass the examinations just by their educational records, essay writing in Japanese and interviews. A lot of students of my school take Center Test every year, but not all of them are to take ordinary entrance examinations after that. I think it important to examine things particular to our own students.

As for 2), I think it essential to provide steps toward the goal (English knowledge and ability to cope with entrance examination in this case). Looking back on the schools I have worked for, most of the teachers think it necessary for students to work on practice questions with equivalent level of Center Test and actual entrance examinations. I used to



be one of those. Many students get tired with working on drills higher than their levels. Here, how to bridge the gap between the present students' level and the one needed to pass those examinations is usually ignored. For example, it is said to be necessary to guess the meanings of unknown words in a text while reading. Students are encouraged to use this reading strategy when working on reading comprehension questions on workbooks. However, a learner needs to know 95% of the vocabulary in the text to use this strategy. How can we cope with this problem? I think it is essential to provide materials with proper levels for our own students and teach them some learning skills, such as how to use memory hook in vocabulary learning, reading strategies, and so on. It is said that high level students have their own learning strategies, so they can keep on their study even when they become demotivated. On the other hand, low level students are said to have less learning strategies and don't know well how to cope with demotivation. It might be a good idea to somehow incorporate learning strategies into our teaching.

This is a tough question to answer. I'm not sure if my answers are useful.

Q (9): How did you negotiate to buy 50 IC recorders?

A (Miwako): Last year, I bought 10 of them first myself because I wanted to try out recording with an IC recorder in my class. Then, I made a proposal document which explained why and how IC recorders needed to be used in English lessons, together with the specification of the model I wanted to get. I turned in this document to the school administration and my request was granted. I also arranged with the administration so that I was able to buy 40 with the budget of 2009, and buy another 20 with the budget of 2010.

Q (10): Collaborating with other teachers is not always easy. Could you give us some successful stories, strategies or any suggestions? Have you got any strategy to defeat teachers against our project?

A (Nahoko): That's quite difficult for me. My colleague who shares the grade with me teaches in old style and conservative. It's hard to change her. So we don't talk about lesson plans and each of us keeps own teaching style.

A (Miwako): I have many failures to tell you, but not many successes. I found it very difficult to encourage some of my colleagues to have positive attitudes toward the lesson reform project. It takes not only plans but also good relationship among teachers involved to succeed in lesson reform. I am not very tactical in establishing good relationship among people who have opposing ideas and thoughts, which has made collaboration even more difficult. Looking back on the last two years of the lesson reform project, I found a couple of different reactions of the teachers involved in the project. One is a type of teacher who has TESOL background and somewhat understands the meaning and importance of lesson reform. Another is someone who feels a little perplexed with the project but is eager to take a risk and try out new teaching approaches. There is also a type of teacher who has doubt in communicative teaching and has difficulty to accept the reform. The first two types are all right. They are interested in trying out new approaches. The third type is a very difficult one to cope with. Some of this type at least try new methods of teaching in their classes, but they feel they are pressured to do so because this is a school



project. Others just ignore the project because they don't believe communicative approach helps students develop their English ability. They think the approach simply is not useful for entrance examinations. This type might not be satisfied until some numerical data, such as mock test results, show the development of students' English ability through communicative approach. However, the problem is that it is not likely for their development to easily appear in the results of mock tests.

Q (11): Do you use recorders for every class?

A (Miwako): I'm going to use IC recorders in the second year and the third year Writing lessons. I made a plan to use the recorders after each topic is covered, and I'm going to videotape a speaking test twice a year.

Q (12): At what point should the students be asked to produce output?

A (Miwako): It is difficult for me to say exactly at what point output should be made, so let me explain about this with an example grammar lesson to teach modals.

(1) (Input): Students read some rules of their high school written on the worksheet. (Modals, such as "must," "can," "mustn't," "should," and "shouldn't" are used.) Some rules are intentionally wrong. Students are to decide true or false about each rule.



(2): (Input): Students read some rules of their sister school in Australia on the worksheet. This time, they are to choose proper modals for each rule. (e.g. Students [can / must] wear a hat in out-door activities.)

(3) (Noticing): Students make sure and understand the meanings of each modal.

(4) (Output): Students make some ideal school rules using the modals they have just learned.

(5) (Output): Students work on drill questions on a textbook and a work book.

During the input (1) and (2), students attend to the meaning of each sentence, not the structures of target grammar items. In noticing process (3), students make connection between forms and their meanings. After noticing, students are ready for output, I think.

Q (13): I'd like to know more about 'common errors'. Kushiro sensei may have said students work on this activity with a pair in competition. How does it proceed?

A (Miwako): I usually go through the following procedure. (1) I divide the class into some groups of 4-5 students. (2) I pass out the sheet with common errors written on it to everyone. (3) Students correct the mistakes by working together with their teammates. I usually give 10-15 minutes to finish this. Each group compete against each other, and the first group who complete the correction is the winner. They can get some extra points. I usually give extra points to the first two groups who complete the error correction within a limited time or who get most correct answers.

Q (14): Do students use a dictionary to make English sentence4s to talk about the person they admire? How much do you usually spend on activity 3 and 4 in a real class situation?

A (Miwako): Yes. My students use their dictionaries while writing. I usually spend 5-6 hours on activity 3 and 4, I think.

Q (15): I want to know the way of the peer correction or peer editing.

A (Miwako): In peer editing, students first have a pair talk with one partner, and exchange their essays and read them. Then, they work on peer editing following the procedure below:

1. Underline and mark “ _____☆” under interesting points or good expressions.
2. Underline and mark “ _____?” under the part you find difficult to understand.
3. Underline and write “ _____” more under the part you want to know about and write questions.
4. Finally write positive, encouraging comments about your partner’s essay.
5. Students develop their writing to be richer and longer based on the questions and comments from their classmates. I haven’t started peer correction. I don’t think my students are not ready for that yet.

Q (16): You do a lot of rotating pair work. Do you find this affects the relationships among the students? Are the students more comfortable with one another, more supportive?

A (Miwako): I think it very important for students to have communication with different classmates many times. This makes communicative activities in the classroom legitimate. Also, students can understand each other better by sharing their information and ideas. I think this is very important to create a better and receptive learning environment. Actually, some students commented in the questionnaires I gave them that they enjoyed rotation and talking with different classmates.

Workshop in May (Day 2)

Date: May 9, 2010, 9:30-12:30

Venue: Aichi Kenko Plaza, Conference Room 1

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

Presenter: Hiromi Osuka (Takashidai Junior High School)



Title: Action Research Report

Abstract: I had a chance to learn how I made use of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) in my English classes at the workshop held by NUFS in 2008. Since then I have tried to improve my English classes using TBLT and have developed tasks which enable students to enhance their abilities to express themselves in English. Is teaching grammar communicatively through TBLT effective in order to improve JHS students’ communication ability? There is little academic research about how to teach grammar effectively or sufficiently to Japanese JHS students. I’ m going to report my practice and action research about the effects of TBLT on JHS students.

The number of participants: 22

Workshop in June (Schedule)

Date: June 12, 2010, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 51

Instructor: David Barker (BTB Press)

Title: "Getting Back to Basics in ELT"

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

