

NUFS Workshop 2010

Newsletter No. 6**Workshop in September**

(Part 1)

Date: September 18, 2010, 10:30-14:30

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 31

Instructor: Paul Crane(Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: "Developing Communicative Language Skills Using Input and Output Activities"



Abstract: Swain (1995), as part of her tentative “output hypothesis”, proposed that input of the language may not be sufficient for language acquisition to take place because, although a learner may be able to comprehend messages without regard to syntactic analysis of input, it is in the production of output where the learner is forced to pay attention to form in order to express meaning by producing language syntactically. In this workshop, participants will take part in a variety of input and output activities based on an interesting and challenging topic. Following some reflection and discussion, participants will then work together to create and adapt activities for their own teaching situations.

Reference: Swain, M. (1995). Three Functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook and B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principles and practice in applied linguistics* (pp125-144). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The number of participants: 29

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

- Reading Activity: Sharing information with other students by use of three different reading materials. Students can focus on reading because they have to share their idea.
- Reading – writing down 5 key words and reproduce the reading is good because Japanese high school students have tendency to read English with bottom-up method (Analyze vocabulary, grammar), which prevents them from understanding the main topic and it takes time. As a result, the amount of input in classroom is not sufficient to encourage them to produce the language.
- I would like to use ‘non-stop talking’ as a warm-up activity because this is good to practice speaking and listening. Also, students can practice to summarize what their partners said.
- Vocabulary game was interesting. I would probably give hint cards and word cards to start with. One student in a group can pick up one hint card and read it, and other students in the group can find the right word card. After students get used to it, I would give only word cards and have them come up with their original hints.
- I liked ‘the cards’ we used for discussion. I think we can make the phrases easier for students, like “I think so, too,” or “I don’t think do.”
- Cartoon – I think students will enjoy drawing pictures and it is a good activity to practice describing something.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- I learned the importance of content-based learning and integration of four language skills. By learning English this way, students are able to express their ideas and use English as communication.
- Balance between reading, talking, listening and writing should be kept to develop students' English ability. I think writing is the most difficult thing. Students tend to give up writing soon. I have to give them useful advice and raise their motivation.
- I think content-based English curriculum is very effective. Focusing on one topic for a certain period, students can get a lot of information. They can also learn something more through learning English.
- CBEC can provide students with real opportunities for communication. Although it is not possible to do the same in junior/senior high school classes where we have specific textbooks to use, many of the activities I experienced today can be adopted in my classes.
- Content-based classes would be fun. Various activities make students look at the topic from different view pots, and make them share their ideas and help make their opinions.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): I'm still wondering about the music during the activities. Have you ever surveyed students' thoughts?

A: As a matter of fact, I have not, but I have often thought about surveying them. I have made the assumption that music could help to create a more relaxing and comfortable atmosphere in the classroom by helping to lower their affective barriers, but in fact, I don't know if it's working or not. OK - I promise to survey my students and I'll share the results with you all sometime in the future.

Q (2): Concerning music, I have a hard time concentrating when music with words is being played. So instrumental music is better for me. Have you noticed any difference in production among students during different styles or types of music?

A: To be honest, I haven't done any actual action research in my classroom about background music, but it is worth looking into. I have always thought that it would not be distracting if it was played low enough but I see your point that it could be. I do tend to play quieter, ambient electronic music for writing activities and for speaking activities, more lively music like easy rock or ballad-type songs.

Q (3): I would like to know good CB materials for low-level Japanese high school students.

A: Well, I think the first step would be to do a kind of "needs analysis" by surveying them about what kinds of topics they would be interested in. In my opinion, I think it would be easier for the students to choose topics which are closer to their personal lives, like music, club activities, food, etc. To prepare our materials, we usually start by looking for news articles on the Internet related to the topics and expand from that point. One good website for simplified news summaries



is “Breaking News English” [<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com>]. Search for a topic like “food” in the search bar at the bottom of this HP and you will be given many news articles related to “food” from this website. There’s a bonus to this website, too! Sean Banville, the author/creator of the website produces several types of activities based on the article, including listening activities. It’s wonderful! From that point, you can easily create and adjust activities for your students. So, in other words, you might try creating a few activities on your own.

Q (4): Could you tell me again about an assessment form? I’m really interested. / I would like to know about evaluation; how to score or grade students.

A: I’m very sorry that I didn’t bring one to the workshop. I can send you a sample if you send me a direct email at pacrane@nufs.ac.jp. Basically, we use different assessment forms in the Academic Writing classes and the Discussion and Debate classes. For those classes, there is a grid with several columns for the points and rows for each week of class. The column on the far-left would have the dates of the classes during the semester, so in our case, there are 15 weeks of classes per semester. Next would be a column for keeping points for attendance/participation, usually between 5-10 points. Then there are columns for each type of assignment, quizzes, etc. In the far right column would be the “Total Points” for each class and a Cumulative Total. I think it would be easier to show you than to explain so please send me an email, OK?



Q (5): I would like to know the category of Discussion Management Techniques, (ex. clarification and so on) and also phrases in each categories.

A: Please send me an email (pacrane@nufs.ac.jp) and I’ll send you the list that I made. Just to give you a few examples, there are 11 categories that I used, but this is by no means an exhaustive list! **Expressing Doubt:** [Ex. “I’m not so sure...” / “Do you really think so?”], **Disagreeing:** [“You can’t be serious!” / “I can’t agree with you on that point.”], **Agreeing:** [“I couldn’t agree with you more.” / “You’ve got that right.”], **Summary & Summary Clarification:** [“In other words, ___ right?” / “You mean.....?”], **Interrupting Somebody:** [“Excuse me, but I have a question...”/ “Uhh, sorry for interrupting, but...”], **Volunteering an Answer:** [“May I say (that)...” / “Well, if you ask me...”] **Expand Ideas:** [“Another (idea/reason) would be...” / “That’s a good point! In addition....”], **Taking a Position:** [“Well, if you ask me, I think....”], **Checking Understanding:** [“Do you know what I mean? / “Does that make sense?”] , **Ask for Details:** [“Could you give me an example?” / “What do you mean by?”], **Asking Follow-Up Questions:** [no examples because it depends on what the speaker said...]

By the way, somebody at the workshop commented or asked if these “DMT” were similar to conversation strategies and I would say that yes, they are. They certainly fall under the broad category of Communication Strategies with “conversation” and “discussion” being sub-categories of different types of communicative events. The difference that I explain to my students between “conversation” and “discussion” is that usually with discussion, there is a goal to accomplish by the end of the discussion such as “Make a list of the reasons why the lay judge system is beneficial for Japanese society”.

Q (6): In today's 14 activities, which one is in which class (ex. Activity one is in PUT class)?

A: Well, basically, you could use any of these activities in any type of class, like in the case of the NSS activity. In the case of our curriculum, we tend to order the activities to suit the building-up of knowledge about the topic. In other words, we wouldn't play the vocabulary game until the students have been exposed to the vocabulary in the reading class and the discussion classes at least one time. Most writing activities are done either in the writing classes or as homework. Reading the sample essays is usually done in the writing classes, too. Listening activities could be done in any class, but we do them in the discussion classes as well as assign them as homework. Cartoons and quotations can be done in any class as a warm-up. The "KWL" activity would be done in the class which introduces the topic, which depends. In the case of our freshman, the topic is introduced in the discussion class, but for the sophomores, topics are introduced in the reading class. I hope this makes sense.



Q (7): Could you show me the way of preparations before the free-talking about serious problem which is hard for the students without any preparation like learning technical terms?

A: Well, actually, we don't do any "free talking" until the students have been prepared for the topics. Topics are introduced with a series of general discussion questions for which they are encouraged to think about before the class in which they are discussed. Technically, it's not really free talking because many of the students do write down their answers first. In the case of your students, either JHS or HS, I think some brainstorming activities like creating a mind map of the general topic first might help them to activate what they already know or can talk about and then move on from there. In the case of lower-level learners, vocabulary needs to be introduced to help them talk about the topic.

Q (8): How much time do you usually need for the preparation of one class? There are a lot of handouts. How do you get information about topics?

A: To be honest, there is a **LOT** of time that goes into preparing these materials because we are not using any textbook, and that is also why there are a lot of handouts. However, once you create an activity which is successful in your classes, it gets a little easier and more time-efficient in creating activities for the next topic. For a 90 minute class, I probably spend at least 3 hours preparing when it's a new topic that I have not ever taught before (and that's probably why I don't have much of a life outside of teaching during the semester, ha ha!) As for getting information, it begins with a search for possible input reading information and that starts with an Internet search. I also try to collect articles, cartoons, and pictures from the newspapers when I come across something that could be used in a future class.

Q (9): In my integrated skill class, sometimes I would do writing first before the speaking because students can remember English when they write. Do you always use the same step of those four skills?

A: I agree with you. In general, I think students do need to prepare something before they begin speaking about it and that means reading and writing before speaking. I think



varying the order of activities is a good idea, however, and you might experiment with your students.

Q (10): How does what they learn in one two week cycle carry over to the next cycle and topic?

A: *This is an excellent question which we are asking ourselves, too! Vocabulary and expressions are definitely one thing that needs to be considered so that students can recycle and use their new vocabulary as much as possible, including the topics and content that follow in the curriculum. My amazing colleague Mr Mat White is especially focusing on vocabulary related to word frequency lists as well as the Academic Word List. It is especially interesting when I notice vocabulary that was highlighted in past classes and is useful for the new topic as well. In my own Japanese study, I find this extremely satisfying to see words or Chinese characters used in different contexts so I am sure our students would feel the same way when they encounter previously “learned” vocabulary or expressions.*



Q (11): I liked the cards which have discussion roles are on, but it was difficult for me to focus on the discussion itself, because the other members were more concerned with using those phrases and the content was secondary. What do you do to deal with this problem?

A: *Before the workshop, I had only used the cards in a small class. This past week I used these cards for the first time in a large class and I now understand what you mean. The content should be primary and I noticed that at times the discussions were kind of quiet. I walked around among the groups of 3-4 students and when I noticed they were silent, I told them get the discussion moving by encouraging them to ask a question, even if it wasn't one of the discussion management techniques (DMT). In the future I will set-up the activity more carefully by explaining that the discussion topic is what they need to focus on and the cards are to help them make it more “natural”.*

(Part 2)

Date: September 18, 2010, 14:30-17:00

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 31

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

Abstract: Monthly report on action research

The number of participants: 13



Workshop in October (Scheduled)

Date: October 9, 2010 10:30-14:30, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room31

Title: "Why do we cooperate in English classrooms?"

Instructors: Tamami Wada (Nanzan University), Harumi Kimura (Temple University Japan)

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