

## NUFS Workshop 2012

*Newsletter No. 7***Workshop in November**

(Part 1)

**Date:** November 17, 2012, 10:30-14:30**Venue:** NSC College**Instructor:** Keiko Takahashi (Motosu Shoyo High School)**Title:** "Developing a communicative writing class through students' collaboration"**Abstract:**

The new Course of Study for senior high school English emphasizes nurturing communicative ability in English through the integration of listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. Prior to implementation of the new Course of Study next year, I started to conduct Communicative Writing class in 2002, where speaking activities and writing activities are integrated through students' collaboration. Surprisingly, students improved both writing and speaking skills by building a learning community through classroom interaction. In this workshop, I will show how I started to implement this approach in all second-year Writing classes and how I developed it into all third-year Writing classes with my students and my colleague teachers. I will also demonstrate the teaching procedure and involve participants in communicative writing activities.

**The number of participants: 17****1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**

- I wanted to try complete shadowing since we were using partial. I think it's useful for 9<sup>th</sup> graders. The ping-pong conversation is also challenging for them. It's simple and I think students will love it. I should introduce more communicative activities wherein they could compose their own simple sentences so that they'll gain more confidence and get used to it.
- Ping-Pong debate – It's a very interesting activity but they need to learn strategies and four basic English skills, so before we try, they need to learn a lot of things.
- I would like to introduce the chance to debate the topics about social issues to the students in my writing class.
- Students of my school rarely have a chance to speak English even in English class. So to encourage them to speak English, the conversation strategy of 'shadowing' is very effective, even in the form of 'partial shadowing'. By shadowing, they can join and enjoy conversation with other people, concentrating on the top.
- How to summarize activity without taking notes: through summarizing, students try to listen to their partners more



carefully than usual. It's interesting to have students think about the reason why they are for or against. Moreover it's interesting to change their roles while their discussion.

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

- I've learned a lot of strategies about communicative writing. I'm also encouraged to take (small) steps in integrating these techniques so that my students will also improve little by little. It'll be a tough move yet it will bring great result for students and teachers.
- To have a better conversation, practicing is important. We should give students enough practice about how and what to talk, for example, conversation strategies.
- Some students may learn slowly. I am afraid I usually give too little information or explanation to them when we do some activities. Today I was able to experience how students feel during activities. I will try to simplify explanation.
- Even though I sometimes ask students to turn in essay writing, I never conduct speaking test. I would like to make a chance of speaking test.
- What I learned from today's workshop is how to combine writing and speaking. BY using peer editing, students learn how to expand their vocabulary in speaking.



## 3. Questions and Answers

**Q (1): Did discussing with your colleagues what an A or B or C speaking test look like help you refine your rubric?**

**A:** Yes. Rubrics should be developed and refined by the teachers who know the students' learning stage. The rubrics we are now using at our school are also the guidelines of the learning goals for both students and teachers. By refining the rubrics, we can also talk about the lesson goals and reflect our teaching.

**Q (2): What are some other topics that you've found are really interesting for your students in addition to co-habitation and pet-peeves?**

**A:** Plastic surgery and cyber love were the topics they liked three years ago. I haven't taught third-year students for three years, so this information may be a little old.

**Q (3): Do you know how these activities effect students' motivation? What reasons do students give for being motivated or not?**

**A:** These are the voices from the students.

< Students learn from their partner >

*We had a lot of timed conversation with different partners. I learned many expressions from my friends. (semester report)*

*Even if we talked about the same topic many times, I never got bored. When I had a different partner, I got different questions and answers. I had to respond to the different questions and answers, which was difficult but very useful and fun way of learning English. (semester report)*

< Writing activity is helpful to have a conversation >

*I usually don't do homework of any subjects but I try to do this writing assignment. I cannot have*

*a conversation if I don't write down my idea beforehand. And I want to enjoy timed conversation with my friends.*

*(semester report)*

<Having a conversation is helpful to write more about the topic>

*Conversations help me write more about the topic because I can get more ideas (semester report)*

<Students enjoy communicating with their classmates>

*At first I just said the sentences I'd prepared and I didn't enjoy having a conversation at all. It was not a conversation. But as I got used to having a timed conversation, I enjoyed talking with my friends. I tried my best to understand what my partner said. When my partner understood what I said, I was very happy. (semester report)*



<Students are influenced by their peers>

*I remember the timed conversation I had in the first class. I couldn't speak for one minute even if I tried it several times with different partners. But when I saw my partner trying hard to keep up a conversation, I was encouraged. I thought I should not give up. Then I gradually came to use conversation strategies, and I now enjoy talking with many friends.*

*(semester report)*

**Q (4): How long (How many classes) does it take to finish speaking test? What other students do during the speaking test? Isn't it difficult to evaluate performance tests?**

**A:** <time>

In the case of two to three-minute conversation for 30 to 36 students, it takes one period (50 minutes) to finish. In the case of four-minute conversation for 40 students, it takes one and half periods. When we give a speaking test, we ask an English teacher as a helper, which helps us carry out the test more easily.

<what other students do>

For the first half of the period, students practice timed-conversation with their classmates three or four times, even if some of them have finished taking a test. For the latter half of the period, they start writing reflection reports as a portfolio assessment or start thinking about the design of fun essay.

<how to give a test>

We usually divide the class into two when we teach. However, we give a speaking test to whole class so that students have a new conversation partner on a test. We also ask one English teacher as a helper who draws the chopsticks to decide the conversation pair in the classroom. That teacher also gives a direction of practicing timed-conversation and writing a reflection report during the test.

Students wait for their test with Teacher C. They practice timed-conversation. They write reflection reports. (Room C)

  
Teacher A gives and records speaking tests. (Room A)

  
Teacher B gives and records speaking tests. (Room B)

<Assessment Procedure>

It is difficult to assess their performance if we give the score like written tests. However, if we have a rubric and give the level (A,B,C) according to the description of rubrics, it's not so difficult. At first, I felt uneasy to give only A, B, C to each category of the rubric because many students got the same score. However, once I got accustomed to doing it, I don't feel uneasy any longer.

As for students, rubrics are their specific learning goals. Rubrics and speaking tests encourage them to take participate in the activities in class. Then, when they finish taking a test, most of them are satisfied with their performance and feel a sense of achievement because they can perform better than they did in class. They also want to hear a quick, short verbal feedback after the test. For example, "You used a good gesture when you want to explain the meaning of the word 'muscle.' That's good!" They seem to like to hear such a quick feedback rather than the score of the rubric. So we don't have to be too nervous about scoring their performance. Giving (not scoring) performance test with a rubric can have a great impact on their learning.

**Q (5): About writing essays, our school counts the numbers of words. Third graders write about 120 words now. / Why do you tend to count the number of the sentence not the words? Is it easier? Is that the only reason? I tell my students to count the number of the words.**

**A:** At the former school, I always used the number of the sentences. Now I use the number of the words as well. It depends on the teaching context.

There were three reasons for using the number of the sentences. First, it was more practical for both students and teachers. When I developed the rubric at the former school, the level of the students varied. For example, students in advance classes wrote longer sentences (8 to 15 words in a sentence) whereas students in general classes wrote shorter sentences (4 to 8 words). If we give the rubric based on the number of the sentences, we can use the same or similar rubric for both students, which do not confuse us when we teach. Second, we emphasized on the notion of 'sentences'. We encouraged them to be aware of 'subject and verb' in a sentence when they counted the number of the sentences. Third, the term 'sentences' was more familiar with students because we always said, "Try to add two more sentences!" or "How many sentences did you write?" For these reasons we used the number of the sentences at the former school. Now I use 'the number of the sentences' for the first two topics and move on 'the number of the words.'

**Q (6): At peer editing, do you put speaking activities before students write down their comments?**

**A:** We give 'Timed-conversation' speaking activity after peer editing of the first draft. At peer editing, students have a short speaking activity (Ask 5 questions!). It helps students to write down the comments. For example, if the partner didn't write about the five questions, they can ask their partner to write about them. It also helps students to practice talking about the topic before they try 'Timed-conversation.' What's more, we can create the good atmosphere during editing time.



**Q (7): How will I encourage students (especially those who belong to lower levels) to participate in peer editing? They have difficulties in reading English words themselves.**

**A:** It is true that peer editing activity is difficult for students. I do these things for them to get accustomed to it.

1) When I introduce the peer editing activity, I gave the handout about 'Peer-Editing'. It explains how to edit and why we edit. Then we practice how to edit, actually, how to write comments and questions about their writing. I give the same composition to all students. Students are asked to edit in pairs first, and then share their editing in class.

2) I give a test question of peer editing in term examinations.

Not always but once or twice a year. It has a strong message. Students realize that they have to learn how to edit according to the steps they do in class.

3) I encourage students to ask their partner about the meaning of the sentence if they can't understand. Students also learn how they can explain it in easy English for their friends who are not good at English.

4) I also make comments and questions when I read students' writing. It works as a model of peer editing.



(Part 2)

**Date:** November 17, 2012, 14:30-17:00

**Venue:** Nagoya NSC College

**Advisors:** Kazuyoshi Sato (NUFS), Nancy Mutoh (NUFS),  
Robert Croker (Nanzan University)

**Abstract:** Monthly report on action research

**The number of participants:** 10



**Workshop in December (Scheduled)**

**Date:** December 8, 2012, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

**Venue:** Nagoya NSC College

**Instructor:** Rob Waring (Notre Dame Seishin University)

**Title:** "How to set up and run a successful Extensive Reading program"

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