

NUFS Workshop 2013

Newsletter No. 2

Workshop in June

<Part 1>

Date: June 8, 2013, 10:30-14:00

Venue: NSC College

Presenter: Tim Murphey (Kanda University of International Studies)

Title: "Exciting Classes as Socially Intelligent Dynamic Systems (SINDYS) Through Critical Participatory Looping"

Abstract:

Critical Participatory Looping (CPL) is a process of gathering information from students through surveys or classroom activities and returning the information to them for further reflection and processing in some way. Research is showing that when groups receive information about themselves they become more active and engaged. They become an active SINDYS (socially intelligent dynamic system) rather than remaining a dormant SINDYS. Many examples will be given that teachers can experiment with that also emphasize student centered teaching. Finally it will be proposed (and illustrated) that a certain amount of improvisation is healthy in the classroom.



The number of participants: 41

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

- Speed dictation – It'll be easy to make the students concentrate on study.
- I'd like to foster a healthy SINDYS. More than anything, I see it as a tool for developing my students' awareness of agency and empower them with positive interactions. Of course, I would hope the good feelings that come from this will get students more actively engaged in my lessons and thus become proactive in their own education.
- "Read Walk" will be helpful in my class after lunch. It's not only refreshing themselves by walking, it also helps them to read correctly and clearly to the other students.
- Everything. All activities. Especially the turtle which is trying to fly is more beautiful than the bird which stays on the branch. I'm very inspired and motivated not only to study English but also improve my way of teaching English.
- I'd love the workshop we had. It gave me an opportunity to restructure what I have been doing in the classroom. What I really like most is giving a student to pause for a break in a minute or two for them to reflect what they have learned. Through this, students would have an active participation and good interaction regarding the lesson.



2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- In my class, I usually try to use the time fully. But I learned dormancy is also important.
- I learned that students don't learn much where they are not happy and positive about themselves. I've never imagined a teacher standing in front of students to say, "I'm here to make you happy and healthy." I guess it's a good idea to say these words to myself at the beginning of lessons.
- I like the ideas of CPL. I want to try this to empower my students.
- I strongly think I have to change a way to teach English or add something to it, because students are 'alive' and teachers have to be flexible to make them interested. Honestly I think teaching grammar is very important, but it won't work well without other skills. Students come to school to study every day, but at the same time we teachers also come to school to try and learn from them.
- I enjoyed today's class, because I think I could relax myself. I would like my students to have a relax in class as well.
- When students have to listen to long presentation, we make them talk for a few minutes to make sure what the presentation is.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): The level of my students is quite low. I want to know what is good for this kind of students to study English.

A: I also do a lot of TPR and juggling. When low-level learners are involved in physical tasks, the language starts making more sense. Probably the best activity I ever do with low-level students is letting them have Mention-Conversations in which they only need to use a few words. [e.g. a) Hungry? b) No. a) Sleepy? b) Little a) Sports? b) Soccer!] Being able to interact and exchange information in a foreign language successfully (don't worry about mistakes) is a rush that they will remember and want more of. You can give them lists of possible words as questions and answers in many categories (food, sports, movies, etc.) For a fuller explanation of [mentions see the article.](#)

Q (2): I'd like to learn more about positive ways to teach English because students think it is hard, difficult and they don't like it.

A: My Advice: See the answer to #1 above. Subscribe to the Positive Psychology blogs and feeds. They have lots of great ideas and research that you can share with your students and that will also make you happier as well. Ask students to bring English song lyrics to class, teach them songs, short speed dictations at first.

Information about other things is more difficult and less interesting to understand than information about the students themselves. Find ways and activities that help them use the language in a student-centered way, talking about themselves. Forget John going to the post office in NY. Taro snowboarding in Nagano is much more exciting and it is what they want to talk about and say. Also ask students what they want? Let them have some control in the classroom.

Q (3): Your teaching approach of lecturing for 2-3 minutes and then breaking in to discussion groups will help students internalize the content. It also caters to ADHD children. I wonder if you ever considered positive ways to also help children develop their attention spans.

A: [Lumosity: For memory, attention, speed, flexibility and problem solving](#) seems to be a good site with lots of ideas you can borrow. One way to help students keep their attention is with “**advanced organizers**” that make them curious and they wonder what they will be. So for the 7 ways of improvisation, I give them (as I did with you) the first letters, PLYARRF (yes there are 8 letters there, and their brain asks Why? and that makes them curious and they wonder what they all are). Another crucial thing is to review, even every few minutes to keep them on track. Then hopefully their own brains get into the habit of advanced organizers (my list of to-do things for this morning is organizing me right now). If you know you have three main points for the lesson, tell them you have three main points and ask them what they were at the end. If they cannot tell you, you need to find ways to give them advanced organizers, ways to remember them.



Q (4): Have you tried any actual improv activities with your students?

A: Sorry we did not have time for a few of these during the workshop. I take a bunch of paper that is destined to be recycled anyway, and give one sheet to every pair. I tell them to hold the sheet up in front of them by one corner as I do, and then I crunch the paper into a ball (good short TPR session). Now I tell them, “When you have the paper ball, you can talk. Only the person with the paper can talk. Exercise 1: I give them a two-word sentence stem to start with. Then they have to continue the sentences for as long as possible, each person only saying one word in turn, tossing the ball back and forth. So I tell them “Boys are...” and the first person with the paper ball says “Boys” and throws the paper ball to their partner who says “are”, and the partner throws it back to the first for another word that they must make up. This is improv. The teacher should demonstrate it with a student first to try it out (and try it out in the staff room to see how it works! Other teachers love it!) Exercise 2: tell them to start part of a sentence as a story and the other person finishes the sentences (e.g. Once upon a time, there was a ...). Exercise 3: they interview each other with questions saying three things they did last weekend, but they all must be lies (e.g. “I flew to Paris” and then they ask three questions about the trip). Students love using their imagination, reality is too restricted and may not be interesting. If you have them learning a vocabulary list, you can get them to try to use the vocab in a story or interview too. You can also do this in 3’s or 4’s. I am sure you will be able to improvise and do it in many more ways suitable to your students and their levels. Oh, and for low-level students, they can have mention conversations (see #1 above).

Q (5): I would like to know more about Imagined Social Capital and how it works in learning.

A: Me too! Capital is usually understood as money, or valuable material things. Social capital is your social networks (extended family, friends, business partners, etc.) that can provide you with possibilities in your life. Bourdieu used the term “social capital” to show how the rich naturally had better networks in which to progress in society. In more egalitarian societies, people are not limited (or promoted) by their ancestors’ positions and their financial conditions. Their motivation and abilities seem to account for more.

Jocey Quinn’s wonderful book [\(Learning Communities and Imagined Social Capital, 2010\)](#) researched groups of HS dropouts and part-time workers in the UK and



found that they often mentioned “imagined social capital”, i.e. people they had never actually met or who were dead, who they nevertheless seemed to get comfort, motivation, and inspiration from. These might have been musicians, actors, writers, or even politicians.

So, to get to your question, how does this work in learning? I can see this working on several levels: When I ask students what **motivated** you to learn English and they tell me Def Tec or Elle



Garden, I realize that they are communing with singers and their songs, but rarely, if ever, do they see these people in person. But their songs have been streaming often for hours at a time through their minds. The music and what little they understand of the lyrics allows for a certain kind of bonding.

At another level, small children actually imagine their stuffed animals to be alive and they talk to them and discuss things with them at times. At a more academic level, we do this with the people whose books we read. I actually like having imaginary conversations with [Lev Vygotsky](#) and imagining what he would say about this idea or that idea. Yes, he has been dead since 1934, and I don’t speak Russian, but some of his ideas (my interpretations of them) have become second nature to me and I feel like we can talk sometimes. (By the way, qualitative researchers actually say they need to “have a conversation with the data in order to understand it.”)

I had a student a few years back who told me she always imagined that she had an invisible Brad Pitt beside her and she would talk to him, sometimes out loud, but mostly in her head, but always in English, for Pitt’s Japanese was “terrible!” she said. She talked about her life, boyfriend, classes, and described things happening in the streets, people in the subways, etc.

Perhaps the best example I can give you is myself and my use of *imagined social capital* during my presentation. You saw me use references to two movies, that I had no hand in making and I certainly do not know the actors nor the characters they were playing, and yet still I could use them as my social capital to make my points about states of awe (Helen Hunt, *As Good As it Gets*) and individuality not being our own (John Quincy Adams and the black Sengue, *Amistad*). And I regularly think of them when I am conceptualizing my theories, papers, and doing presentations. My office is full or my imagined social capital and it is at times a zoo!

Q (6): Could you share your most incredible experience? What is your most incredible experience?

A: Ranking by order, although often done, is in my mind impossible in love, exciting, and awe. A lot of my own incredible experiences in teaching, I have sought to capture in my books ([Language Hungry!](#) [Group Dynamics](#), [Wow!](#), [The Tale that Wags](#), etc.) I hope I to have many more. A recent one was listening to you all shout out loud in the seminar, and later in the Thai restaurant, “I’m in Love!” Perhaps we might say that when we are IN love, love envelops us and everything starts looking a bit different and incredible in a wonderful way.

PS: During a Walk-Talk, you can stop them once in awhile and ask those on the inside circle to move one person forward and then repeat the activity, or continue the activity, with someone new. This can be done several times to add more variety to the mix. It makes it really easy to change partners.



(Part 2)

Date: June 8, 2013, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College

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

Abstract: Monthly report on action research

The number of participants: 19



Workshop in July (Scheduled)

Date: July 13, 2013, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: NSC College, Building Minami, Room A31

Presenter: Keiko Takahashi (Motosu-shoyo High School)

Title: "How do students become good readers in an extensive reading classroom?"

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