

## NUFS Workshop 2013

*Newsletter No. 3***Workshop in July****<Part 1 >****Date:** July 13, 2013, 10:30-14:00**Venue:** NSC College**Presenter:** Keiko Takahashi (Motosu-shoyo High School)**Title:** How do students become good readers in an extensive reading classroom?"**Abstract:**

Although extensive reading (ER) has been gaining popularity, little research has been done to document its effect on reading skills and overall language ability for junior and senior high school students. This workshop will show you how students made progress in their ER performance through classroom interactions and how students became independent readers in a reading community. You will participate in some of the interactive ER activities and examine the alternative assessments introduced in an ER class. Then the following questions will be discussed: 1) what did students learn from interactive ER activities? 2) how did students build a reading community through interactive ER activities? 3) how did ER help students improve their reading skills and overall English ability?

**The number of participants: 34****1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**

- Literature Circles – They can share one book and the content deeply. Class can be more interactive. Since students know they have their own role, they feel they have to read a book seriously.
- I want to try sentence treasure hunt. I think it was so interesting to find the sentences with group members. I'm teaching elementary students and they can't read but I could also use picture hunt as an alternative. My students love story boards so after I read them the story I try to involve the in retelling it. And I want to do more role playing activities.
- The idea of 'My favorite book poster' is wonderful. We have an extensive reading class for first year students once a week, but they take long time to choose which book to read next. The 'book poster' surely helps students a lot to choose next book, and also they want to read deeply to make a better poster.
- Class reader – the abilities of the students in my HS are very low. I think the CD reading and visual effects of the book might be work for them. Making groups and playing games (sentence treasure hunt) was really fun. They will definitely enjoy.
- Interactive book talk was very interesting and I want to try with my students. Also, class reader



can be definitely suitable with junior high students. I am always impressed with Keiko's creativity such as 'sentence treasure hunt'.

- I have never tried extensive reading because I didn't know what it is like. But after I joined today's lecture, I now want to do this in my class or ESS. Especially, I'd like to try book talk and literature circles. I think we can do 'sentence treasure hunt' activity even in usual reading class.

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

- ER can be very dynamic and interactive. I've been doing ER in my class for a couple of months and I was wondering if this really helps my students' English abilities. But when I learned many interesting activities, I found ER can improve students' four English abilities, not only the reading skill.
- I learned that it is important for us teachers to introduce reading strategies to students. They may not know that unconsciously they are using it in reading Japanese books. They may find it very interesting that they could apply it too in English. I also learned that students learn well if the topics are related to their lives.
- I was amazed to see how Ms. Takahashi successfully evaluates her students without doing term exams. I admire her effort and passion to change English teaching environment.
- We can make extensive reading class communicative. In my high school, students just continue reading alone all the time. It is good to read a lot, but they sometimes feel bored and fall asleep. To do book talk at the end of the lesson can change the air, I guess.
- I don't teach my students English with activities. But I learned how important it is for them to use English in a class. I thought that I have to make efforts preparing a class more.
- Different from speaking skills, it's also necessary for them to read a lot of books and they can share their ideas and explain them to others, which can improve their communication skills (either English or Japanese). When they read a lot, they will probably find good or favorite sentences or phrases in the book, and they might think they want to say that. So eventually it improves not only reading skills but also communication skills in English skill itself.
- A textbook used in 'Reading' class is usually too complicated and logical to understand for high school students. Most of them have no interests in the textbook. However in ER, they are able to choose their favorite book, which is great to give them options and broaden their views.



## 3. Questions and Answers

**Q (1): How can we get ER books? How many books do we need at least if we do ER class for 20-40 students? What kind of books are good for high school boys? / Where can I get easy step reading materials for beginners?**

**A:** We can purchase ER books at many bookstores dealing with English textbooks and materials. First, we can ask the publishers for samples or catalogues of ER books. Then we can order books from bookstores. For example, JBF (Japan Business Forum) is the bookstore located in Tokyo. They can arrange almost all kinds of ER books and give us a good discount, so I order books from them. Other bookstores such as SEG bookshop, Englishbooks, Nellies and Maruzen also sell many kinds of ER books. You can order books from the local bookstores, but it may take longer time.

When you have 40 students in class, you can prepare at least 60-70 books in each class for the first few months. Throughout the year, you can prepare 300 to 400 books for beginner students. But it all depends on how many books students read a year. You can refer to the following equation:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{number of} & & \text{number of} & & \text{number of} & & \text{the number of} \\ \text{ER classes} & \times & \text{students per class} & \times & \text{books per student} & = & \text{books needed} \end{array}$$

In my case, students start to read short, easy books from the same series, such as Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) series and Foundation Reading Library (FRL) series. Thus, I prepare 2-3 sets of these series and let students read as many books as possible. After they read more than 100 books from ORT or FRL series, I introduce other kinds of graded readers to them.



I prepare ORT and FRL series for both boys and girls if they are first-year students. However, if they are third-year students, I prepare FRL series because some boys don't like to read ORT. In case of my students, the beginners of both boys and girls like to read stories, and they tend to be hooked in reading the series of books. Almost all boys like to read FRL series, so this series is a "must." After reading FRL series, they like to read the starter level of Oxford Book Worm(OBW), Cambridge English Readers (CER) and Page Turners. I also introduce non-fiction books, such as Info Trail and Footprint Reading Library, which they like to read for a change. Except the classic tales and fairy tales, which not all boys like to read, I cannot see a big difference between boys and girls.

**Q (2): What is an ideal class size for ER? What is the teacher's role?**

**A:** A smaller class (for example, 20 students) is better. This is because advice and encouragements from a teacher are important for beginner students until they are hooked in reading and can give advice to one another in their reading. It is easier to monitor students reading and understand their preferences and interests in reading. More importantly, it is easier to build a learning community in a classroom if we have a smaller size of the class. However, I can also be happy to manage 30 to 40 students if I have two ER classes a week. Not only class size but also class time matters.

Teacher's role is an advisor and a facilitator in the learning community. Teacher is also a role model and a member of a reading community who can share the joy of reading experience with students. In the beginning, it is important to give advice what book to read as well as how to read. Thus, I mainly play a part of an advisor. Then, I think about what ER activities are helpful to becoming eager readers as a facilitator. Finally, I always enjoy reading ER materials and I always try to be a role model and a member of a reading community.



**Q (3): How do you make sure the students are reading properly at the beginning and not just saying they have read 10,000 words?**

**A:** This is a problem I also face. At the beginning, students read picture books, which have only one or two

short sentences on each page. Good readers can read those easy, short sentences and enjoy reading. However, weak readers tend to pay little or no attention to English sentences, and they try to keep reading by looking at the pictures only. This is a pitfall of using picture books. Thus, for the first one month, I keep saying how important it is to read both sentences and pictures when they read picture books. I tell them that they cannot keep reading when they get to the stage 5 of ORT series or the level 3 of FRL series if they just follow pictures of the pages. Then I observe how students turn pages during in-class reading time. I hear that listening to CD of the book helps a lot when they read, but unfortunately I never tried it out in my classes.

How to make sure students are really reading is a big concern for teachers. Especially when students read books outside of the class, we want to know whether students really read or they try to cheat. So I ask students what are your favorite books of this week, or of this month, or of this term in many ways. Students have to write about their favorite books in their class diaries, semester reports and my favorite book posters. I often casually ask students brief comments of the book when they return the book. These activities and communication work well and I can monitor students' reading.



At the same time, students often have a chance to write problems with their reading on their class diary or reflection report. I always tell them that they don't have to cheat at all and that they can write down reasons or problems when they cannot read well. I always stress that the goal is not to read 10,000 words but to do "Happy reading" and to become autonomous readers in the end. I think these approaches work well if we don't give grade according to the amount of reading only. Reading with pleasure is more important than reading a lot with pain. Students seem to understand this so far.

#### **Q (4): Are there any students who feel ER is a burden because they evaluate their own result?**

**A:** You may have this question after looking at the questions in the semester report. It is true that students evaluate their ER performance and give the grade to their ER performance, but I don't give grades according to their report and they know it. Of course, it is true that some of them are not comfortable to give any grades to their performance, but almost all students like to give a special prize to their performance. They enjoy celebrating their reading performance by giving an original prize to themselves.

I tell students that it is important to write the reasons why they give such a grade because it is important to reflect their reading and notice what effort they made and how they improved.

#### **Q (5): How often do they have Literature Circles, and other follow up activities?**

**A:** As for Literature Circles (LCs), they have LCs once or twice for short non-fiction stories and once or twice for graded readers if they have ER classes twice a week. If they have ER classes only once a week, they don't have LCs or just once. Instead, they have pair-discussion of one or two roles.

As for other follow-up activities, I introduce them according to their reading amount and their reading performance outside of the class. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), in-class



reading, is vital and the base in ER classes. Thus, during the first one or two months, I don't introduce any ER activities except Book Talk in order for them to be engaged in SSR. Then gradually, I introduce the follow-up activities and class reader activities once or twice a month. When I introduce ER activities, the time of SSR reduces. If students don't have a habit of reading outside of the class, ER activities are not helpful. On the other hand, doing SSR only are not helpful for many students because they cannot have chances to learn how to read and what to read from one another by sharing their reading experiences. Eventually students lose interest in reading ER books. We have to be careful to get a good balance of SSR and ER activities. I believe both are needed in ER classes.

**Q (6): How do you set the goal of one lesson of literature circle? Debate has a goal of 'winning', and TBLT has a goal to accomplish. It's difficult to understand the goal of literature circles for one lesson or one unit of lesson.**

**A:** The goal for Literature Circles (LCs) is to deepen their reading of a book by sharing their reading experiences. In LCs, students have different roles and they share their reading based on their roles in a group. By sharing their reading and by asking and answering discussion questions, they can discover something new or they can think about something they didn't notice when they read alone. This process deepens their reading of the book. In order to achieve this goal, I set several objectives in each class. These are some examples. 1) Let's make good discussion questions. 2) Let's connect the story to your personal experiences and share your personal experiences.

**Q (7): What team building activities do you do for them to have good relationship in their group? If they don't have a good relationship, does it affect their conversation? Doesn't it produce genuine conversation?**

**A:** In addition to group competition games (Sentence Treasure Hunting, Blub-title Mach, Scanning from the book list, etc.) and pair works (Interactive Book Talk, Pair Discussion, Small Talk), I give them as many opportunities as possible to find some good points of the classmates, which works well to build good relationship among them. For example, after making "My Favorite Book Posters," we exchange them in a group and write comments on the back of the paper. Then we choose the best work of the class. Another example is that I often ask what they learned from their friends from some activities. Students find out good points from one another and we share their comments in a newsletter. In either case, good comments from their friends can help build good relationship in the classroom. They're so happy to read positive comments from their friends, and they strongly feel that they are accepted by their friends.

Building a good relationship is very important in ER classes. If they don't have a good relationship, they hesitate to share their personal experiences and to speak out different opinions and ideas in a group. In addition, they don't show much interest in what their friends say.



**Q (8): I tried out literature circles and found that students just read out their note that they prepared at home. They didn't have an active discussion. What should I do to have them discuss more actively?**

**A:** It is difficult for students to make comments on what their friends say in a discussion. Thus, at first, I have all students prepare discussion questions about their own reading based on their roles. (You can find the space for Questions on the role sheet.) I also ask students to prepare answers of the discussion questions they make. This is because the questions they ask in LCs are discussion questions which they want to share their opinions, ideas and personal experiences with other members. In this way, all students not only share their reading based on their roles but also ask questions based on their reading and give answers to those questions. Thus, discussions at this stage are formed by many questions and answers, which look like conversations rather than discussions. Once students get used to asking and answering questions, they finally feel free to make comments and asking questions in LCs.



## <Part 2>

**Date:** July 13, 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 August (Scheduled)**

**Date:** August 3-4, 2013

**Venue:** Green Hotel Sangane

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

**Title:** "Mid-term presentation on Action Research"

August workshop is limited to AR group members only.

## **Workshop in September (Scheduled)**

**Date:** September 14, 2013, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

**Venue:** NSC College, Building Minami, Room A31

**Presenter:** Tom Kenny (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

**Title:** "The iPad in the Classroom"

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