

Newsletter No. 9

Workshop in February

“Practical approaches to learner autonomy in the English classroom”

Date: February 26th, 2022 10:30-12:00, 12:30-14:00 (Zoom Meeting)

Presenter: Ann Mayeda (Konan Women’s University)

Bio:

Ann Mayeda is an associate professor and teacher educator at Konan Women’s University in Kobe, Japan. In addition to her teaching duties, she conducts workshops and runs teacher-training programs for pre- and in-service primary and secondary school teachers. She has a keen interest in learner development and issues autonomy as it applies to young learners and young adult language learners. In addition to her teaching duties, she is on the learning advising team and oversees the management of e-space, the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC).



Abstract:

Learner autonomy, independence, and self-directed learning are terms often used in the language learning environment. These are goals and attitudes that we want to develop in our learners... right? But what do these terms mean in actual practice? We will take a look at the secondary school context where the aims are often content-focused, i.e., on what needs to be taught, rather than what needs to be learned in order to be successful users of English. This presentation will suggest ways in which teachers can support their learners toward autonomy. The workshops will be practical and interactive, inviting the participants to explore and experiment with activities that can be incorporated into lessons that might help motivate learners and promote a bit more autonomy.

The number of participants: 36

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

- Praising the effort or the action, not the result nor the person is true of raising children. I will put it into practice both at school and at home.
- To enhance autonomous learning, I will have students:
 - 1) set a long-term goal, (maybe a yearly goal for my high school students)
 - 2) break it into short-term goals, (maybe a goal for each term)
 - 3) make a self-evaluation at the end of each term, and
 - 4) reflect their performance and reset the goal.

I will try this cycle for the next school year!

- The student profile sheet looks very useful, especially when we start having a new class. In order to fill in the expectation gap between teachers and students, it is important for teachers to know what students expect to begin with and, whether students are making progress, and what assistance teachers should provide for their further progress.



- I enjoyed talking in group, and especially, I loved how Professor Mayeda made it a little group competition. I thought that the hot-seat activity was great and suitable for my college online classes besides that I learned it was a great way to promote the learners' autonomy. In Zoom, I have been struggling to monitor and support each group of students in break-out rooms, but this activity could help students work together cooperatively without much supervision. It was very simple and fun and we can support students build rapport naturally through easy questions. I would love to implement the idea even in my face-to-face classes next year.
- This is what I'm focusing on for my research! I especially like the "English Learning Passport", as I'm intending to implement something similar, so I'll definitely be comparing them to make the best resource for my students!
- When I introduce new key sentences to the students, I'll try to consider which version is more effective for them, stir version or settle version. I should have the students adapt the activities according to their learning conditions.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

- I realized "Don't translate" is not just a motto, but it has a practical and beneficial meaning, which is promoting students' negotiation of meaning. I find the importance of letting students discover the meaning. Also, the concept of attitude goal and content goal, and the concept of stir and settle help me organize my situation at the current school. These should go hand in hand. I think one of the roles of a teacher is to get them balanced and to facilitate the class effectively.

- Characteristics of successful language users includes:

- 1) high tolerance for ambiguity,
- 2) willingness to take risks,
- 3) being selective in learning and mastery,
- 4) being imaginative, and
- 5) being interactive.

As a high school English teacher, I think #1 and #2 are difficult to expect from students, because Japanese learners are often afraid of making mistakes. (Well, I relate to that though....)

- I learned the cycle of reflection, self-evaluation, and goal-setting. Both students and teachers go through the cycle during a semester to achieve the goal.

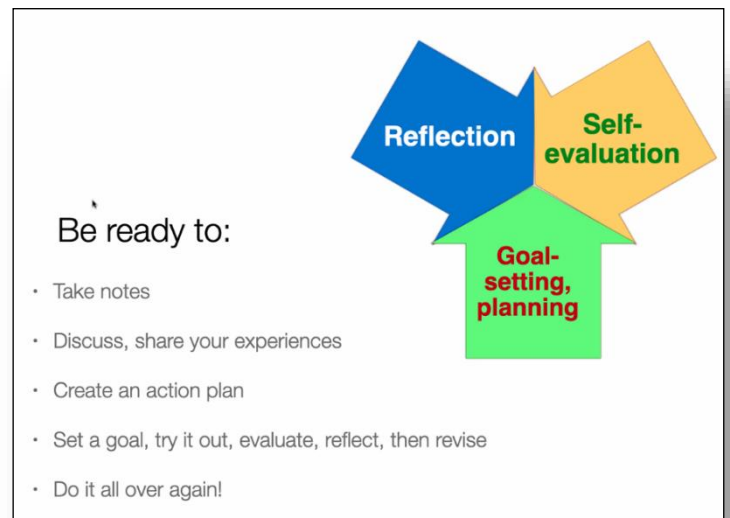
- I am glad that we could have an opportunity to think about different kinds of class goals, and their balance. Sometimes, it is easy to be occupied with the content goals which often leads us to just follow the textbook pages. On the other hand, we try to include some fun games in class for improving students' attitudes, but the content goal of the activity is not always clear. Through the lecture, I was thinking about how I could revise the goals of classes/tasks so that they are more purposeful and well-balanced. I am more aware of the

importance of goal-setting, and I would like to introduce this clear goal idea to my students as well for their English learning. Also, I am planning to share the "successful language user" traits with my students. I found the descriptions very motivating for a lot of learners including myself.

- Thank you very much for the wonderful workshop! I learned so much. I will be using English for instruction and preparing some "stir" activities for my classes. Using English for instruction will encourage students' speaking in English in the class. I would also like to plan many "stir" activities, such as pair work, role play, group work, and games. I would like to stock them ready in my back pocket. Because my classes have been full of "settle activities" and students are sometimes sleepy. I hope I can change the class atmosphere.

- The effects of praise were another eye opener for me. We should praise efforts and action not the person. Skills in praising each other will facilitate communication and give motivation. One of my group members was telling us that he will be teaching his students how to praise others. I am also thinking to teach my students to be a good listener. They should give positive comments to the speakers in pair work or group activities. I will be including this point of praising efforts and actions for them to make positive comments.

- It never occurred to me to implement "settle" activities with intention before. As a high school teacher,



I generally aim for “stir” activities whenever possible (they do a lot of “settle” activities throughout the day already), but after reflecting I can think of a few instances an intentional “settle” activity would definitely have been beneficial.

- I thought I would be able to improve “learner autonomy” in my classroom through simply using the interesting and exciting activities presented. However, today I learned that it’s important to think about “the balancing act – stir and settle” when I make activities for the class.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): If I have a chance to visit your university, I would like to see the e-space and see the tips booklets.

I wish my school could create such an environment!

Ann’s comments: Absolutely! You are welcome to visit our self-access center, e-space, anytime. Please contact me at: amayeda@konan-wu.ac.jp. We can decide on a date and time. I look forward to sharing more about what we do.

Q (2): In addition to my current work, I will be teaching a class at a high school next year, which is a big challenge for me. I would like to incorporate attitude goals in addition to content goals into my syllabus. To meet attitude goals, I think we need to plan activities for each step. What points should we consider in planning and conducting those activities?

Ann’s comments: As I mentioned in my workshop, content goals are clearly defined via the syllabus and what you need your students to learn throughout the term. This translates further down to the specific ‘content’ you need to cover for each class and how you present it. Attitude goals are, however, are not so concrete. So, I tried to give you specific activities and attitudes you can develop in your teaching practice in order to help you think about them when planning your lessons. How are your learners feeling before you start your lesson? Is it wise to present the content in a ‘stir’ way (when learners are sleepy, unengaged, or somehow distracted), or in a ‘settle’ way (e.g., lesson after PE or other stimulating activity) to get them to focus? One of the best ways to plan a lesson is to have both stir and settle ways for approaching the lesson or task. That way, you are prepared to do either.

There are of course, many other ways to promote language learner autonomy in the classroom, not only those I mentioned, but I think an awareness of the necessity of attitude goals is a good place to start. I also talk with learners about why they do certain activities. For example, why do we do extensive reading? I explain to them specifically (pedagogically) how it helps them to become better English users (and not for passing a test or reaching word counts – those goals are for the teacher for grading purposes). I think this helps them to see the bigger picture of why they learn English and assumes they all want to be users of English.

You can also share the information on the slide, ‘Characteristics of successful language users’ with your learners. While this information is easy to share, how it is encouraged in the classroom is up to you and how you approach it your teaching/learning environment. The question to ask yourself is always, ‘Am I promoting these characteristics every day in the ways that I teach and interact with my learners?’

My answer to your question is a little long-winded but I hope it helps. Happy teaching!

Q (3): One big difference I noticed between the “English Learning Passport” and what I do in my own classroom is the approach taken to goal setting. It seems like students set a goal or two to focus on daily/weekly, with an occasional self-check, and modify the goals about once a semester. With my students, they set a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goal once per week, and we evaluate their progress the next class where they then set a new SMART goal (with the option of repeating the goal from before or setting a new/different one), depending on their success and also considering things like how busy they are that week.

Is it better for HS students to keep the same goals throughout the semester so they can track their progress more clearly, or to be updating them/changing them constantly throughout the year? I’d love to hear your opinion, and any other advice on implementing goal-setting within the classroom! Thank you!

Ann’s comments: Good question! I’ve used SMART goals in classes before. I think they work well for specific classes as you seem to be doing. Learners can see and track their progress, or lack thereof. For learners who appear to not make progress, I think it is important to sit down with them to figure out why. Is it the method being used? Teaching different learning strategies for the same goal is always a good approach for learners to try a different way rather than repeating what doesn’t work for them. I think the option of updating and changing goals and their frequency can be left to the individual learner based on how they can best achieve them based on your advice and recommendations.

The English Learning Passport is used with all English majors for overall goal setting throughout their four years of study. Some of the initial goals that I showed on my slide change through the years as they become more familiar with themselves and why they are studying as English majors. So, we do ask learners to write their overall goals in pencil and that it is normal to change them. ‘I want to speak to foreigners,’ ‘I want to speak English fluently,’ ‘I want to watch movies without subtitles,’ are not necessarily true nor realistic but that is their starting point as 1st year university students without knowing who they are as language learners. But they need to come to that realization on their own and update those goals a bit more honestly and upon reflection. This is a bit different from high school where learner goals might be more exam focused, particularly for gaining university entrance.

I hope this helps! Happy teaching.

AR Discussion

Date: February 26th, 2022, 14:30-17:00

Title: Group discussion on action research

Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato (NUFS), Juanita Heigham,
Kevin Ottoson (Nagoya Women's University)

The number of participants: 14



Next Workshop will be held on May 14th, 2022. Detailed information is here:

<https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/>