

NUFS Workshop 2024

Newsletter No. 3

Workshop in July

Date: July 13th, 2024 10:30-14:30**Venue:** Room ME12, NUFs Meieki Campus (BIZrium Nagoya)**Title:** "Neuroscience Reveals How the Brain Does Language"**Presenter:** Curtis Kelly (Professor Emeritus of Kansai University)

Abstract:

For centuries we have tiptoed around this critically important topic because we could only speculate. But in the 1990s, when fMRI was invented, we could see inside the brain for the first time, and move away from "Black Box" theories. We now have enough information to see how the brain processes and stores language that involve embodied cognition, prediction, simulation, and "neurons wiring together that fire together" in a surprising way. After exploring these theories, participants will discuss what they mean in terms of language teaching and how to shape our teaching to take advantage of this processing model.

**The number of participants: 35**

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

- I want to show the Youtube 'allegro' to my students. I think it is a good chance for them to think about the reason why they are learning English.
- I would like my students do more activities which involve emotional learning.
- I want to adapt information gap activities for young learners.
- I think TBLT is interesting. When I teach new words in my class, I always let the students repeat them. I should change that way.
- In pairs, students can share their imaginal stories and interact to talk more or to exchange their views.
- Show a picture to a partner and let her/him to give questions such as who, when, where.



2. What you learned from today's workshop

- Brain is a prediction machine. Subconsciously, people put template to thing they think they already know. Then, the key to get beyond on to avoid prejudice and learn is emotion.
- Stories can activate both affective and cognitive learning engagement. Multisensory teaching/learning approach (and possible multi-dimensional approach) can also facilitate student's learning emotionally and cognitively.
- I learned that TBLT is really good so our brain can process the linguistics and meanings.
- Stories are very effective to acquire foreign languages.
- Students have different compresences so teachers must adjust these variety of skills.
- For humans to understand a movement or to make sense of what they're seeing, the neuros in our body do exactly the same thing and this proves that language learning is embodied.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): You mentioned about 'no meaning, no learning.' For young learners, games or crafts are used to 'learn the language', but just make English fun. I love crafts and games, but how could crafts or games turn into something with 'no meaning, no learning'?

A: "No meaning" really means "meaningfulness to the student". Crafts and games are usually meaningful, so it is rare learning will not occur. The key is to make sure what is learned is a good language target.

Q (2): Some of English teachers insist that teaching grammar in Japanese without considering neuroscience aspect is what we, as teachers, do in class. How would you refute such argument?

A: Grammar can be taught in Japanese, but since grammar is predictive processing tool, what is taught has to be coupled with many examples. I believe a "[noticing](#)" approach (giving examples of the grammar that allow students to notice the underlying pattern) might be more effective for teaching most grammar, because it uses the brain's built-in prediction-error machinery. Research supports this idea. Another method for teaching grammar that fits the brain is [sentence combining](#), also shown to be effective by extensive research. Sentence combining, having students combine short sentence kernels into longer ones, is the "L2 internship" *cognitive control* I mentioned.

Q (3): To teach abstract things, making use of visual or auditory aids is one of the good ways, but it'd take too much time to do so in each class. How can I incorporate it?

A: This is hard for me to answer without knowing your learners, classroom situation, and what you are teaching. But Hey! Don't ask me. Your study group is the smartest set of people I've talked to in a long time, so I think you can answer that on your own.

Q (4): What are some recommended extensive reading series/readers for junior and senior high school students?

A: The main publishers have huge libraries of readers at all levels. Talk to the publishers, especially Oxford, Cambridge, Penguin, and Cengage National Geographic. Cengage and Seed Learning have some very low-level readers written or edited by Rob Waring, one of us, in Japan.

Q (5): Since I recently read Kelly’s article about emotions, it was pretty meaningful to learn how emotions work in the classroom. The process, on the other hand, reminds me of sociocultural theory such as being on an intermental plane to intramental plane. What do you think of this?

A: Good question. I don’t know much about this Vygotskian idea: “Thinking occurs first on the social plane (*between* people engaged in joint sociocultural activity), and later on the individual plane (that is, *within* the child).” Therefore, I can’t answer, but this idea is intriguing. It brings in the social brain (mentalizing network). I’ll try to learn more.

Q (6): I want to know TBLT activities that can be done in Junior high school. Please give us the examples.

A: There are some easy ones [here](#).

Q (7): Any recommendations for teaching young beginner learners?

A: All I can say is make it fun! You have to, to keep them engaged.



Q (8): I think TBLT is not implemented into many Japanese EFL settings effectively due to the fact that teachers just try to follow Willis’s TBL model (pre-task, while-task, post task) without considering the importance of affective cognitive engagement. Could you possibly share your perspectives with us, please?

A: Whoa. This is good, especially since I attended a presentation hailing Willis’ Cobuild book at the TBLT Asia conference in July. I too noticed their info gaps were not very interesting, even though they were well organized. But then I realized their book was written in the eighties, long before we had any notion of how important emotion and problem-solving are. We can do better now.

Q (9): What are some references for TBLT assessment that you recommend.

A: Ouch. This is a tough question that even the pundits are wrestling with. Rod Ellis et al have a chapter on it in their [book](#). One technique that seems interesting is to have students do an information gap on one situation and then another that uses the same kind of situation and task, but with different components, measuring how fluently they can do it. In that regard, people like Shintani are working on new tools to assess TBLT. Before and after fluency (rate of speech, pauses, self-repair) looks promising, but hard to measure.

Thank you for all your great ideas, and here is my [folder of touching videos](#) you might play in class.



AR Discussion

Date: July 13th, 2024, 14:30-17:00 (Room MW10, 11, 12)

Title: Action Research Discussion

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Duane Kindt, Kevin Ottoson (NUFS)

The number of participants: 16



Next Workshop will be held on September 14th, 2024. Detailed information is here:

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

NUFS Workshop

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