

論文：

More than Vocabulary: Combining Literature Conversations with Extensive Reading in the ESL Classroom

Jim Rebstock

Abstract:

Combining Extensive Reading and Literary Discussions in an EFL classroom at a small university in Japan, 25 students prepared to write a basic essay in English. The students used various activities such as written conversations, group discussions, and some assigned Reading Circle roles. Students were taught a basic structure and the class culminated in the students writing an essay in English during class time without the use of dictionaries.

Key words : literature conversations, reading circles, extensive reading, literature, culture, foreign language acquisition, written conversations

In his 1973 book, "Literary Transcendentalism," Lawrence Buell describes the American educator and philosopher, Amos Bronson Alcott:

"He was first of all a teacher by vocation, a teacher who believed in the value of dialogue with the student. The basis of his pedagogy was the idea of education in its root sense, a 'drawing out' of the pupil by a combination of induction and response..."

In the field of Foreign Language Acquisition methods have changed substantially since Alcott was teaching in the mid-nineteenth century. Then rote memorization and verb conjugation played a major part of language learning. Foreign language literature was also an important part of the curriculum. In fact it was often the goal of foreign language studies, rather than oral proficiency. Times and methods and goals changed. Sandra Harper noted in 1988 that most foreign literature students would not go on to become foreign language or literature specialists. The students just want to "...enjoy and learn" (Harper, 1988).

Oral proficiency remains a firm goal in foreign language acquisition (FLA) worldwide, at the expense of literary studies. This does not appear to be changing anytime soon. The problem with having oral proficiency (OP) as an end goal is that there is a great deal of evidence which indicates that effective communicative competence contains more than just the mechanical skills sets which comprise oral proficiency in a foreign language. In addition, traditional literary studies do not include much, if any at all, focus on oral proficiency even now. There has been an international trend toward combining oral communication classes with literary studies classes, but both teachers and school administrators still seem reluctant to commit to this approach. This article will discuss the approach used to combine both methodologies in a first year English class which helps prepare first-year Japanese university students to become foreign exchange students at North American universities.

Even with teachers of different languages worldwide working to combine OP and literary studies, there is resistance to moving away from straight forward OP methodology toward a

combination of methodologies. In fact, much as literary studies have come to be seen as rigid and unresponsive, as well as ineffectual, ways to study a target language (TL), OP pedagogies have also become fossilized and deprived of analytical content (Tucker, 2006). There can be no question that the world has become a more utilitarian, faster paced place, and that knowledge bases have become more streamlined and shallower (Shanahan, 1997). The cultural knowledge contained in literature is complex, thus administrators and even students question the time investment necessary to master the material. But using literature in class enhances students' communicative competence and critical thinking skills (Al Alami, 2011).

Programs that have moved to include OP and literary studies have shown great promise (Kramersch, 1985; Kern, 2002; Rifkin, 2006; Moore, et al, 2012; Salvatori and Donahue, 2012). Literature is one aspect of culture among many others. Literature helps L2 learners develop cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity (Shanahan, 1997). Researchers in the 1990's indicated that "FL reading and grammar proficiency were strong predictors of improvement in speaking and listening, as well as reading" (Taillefer, 2005). Reading as a means of gathering information is a vital FL skill, but reading is also important for communicative competence (Taillefer, 2005).

To prepare my students for writing, I prepared them for conversation, but conversation about what we were studying in class. I looked at the following studies to prepare for this. Lee and Schallert (2015) worked with South Korean junior high school students for one year using ER and extensive writing (EW) to improve the students' English. Jacobs (2015) used age appropriate multicultural literature and discussion groups. The teacher improved her students' reading skills, motivation, decision making skills, empathy and morale. Students need to be taught how to interact with books, how to interact with peers, and how to enjoy reading (Jacobs, 2015). Most students are not linguistically prepared to discuss literature. Teach the students how to express themselves by studying literary texts. Teachers

should stop lecturing and encourage students to express their own opinions and interpretations. Literary texts can be used to facilitate classroom discussion (Darhower, 2014).

Literary discussions, also known as Reading Circles (RC), were recommended for facilitating class discussions, but my experiences with these have been mixed at best. Daniels, who developed reading circle roles, states that RC role sheets were recommended only for temporary use by the students. They were designed to show young readers how intelligent readers think, visualizing, inferring, connecting, etc. The author used four words to explain why literature circles remain popular; engagement, choice, responsibility, and research. Daniels recommended using written conversations in class. Students write notes to each other about the reading, passing them back and forth in class. Or they write letters to each other to be answered when the partner has time. Everyone is potentially engaged, no one monopolizes the discussion, including the teacher (Daniels, 2006).

Most lower division FLA classes focus on communicative activities that involve personal information. Students are not prepared to write academic papers or read authentic literary texts (Dimitriou, 2007). Students have not written many papers, if any, in basic L2 classes. Students were given roles to perform in group discussions of authentic L2 literary texts: investigator, summarizer, word expert, interpreter, and moderator. Through discussions of biographical and historical information, language use, and students' perceptions of the text, student groups were able to generate topics of interest to the students for discussion and writing assignments in class about the L2 text (Dimitriou, 2007). In Sambolin and Carroll's study, literature circles helped student comprehension and ESL acquisition. Instructors allowed students to use their L1 in discussions to be comfortable and check comprehension (Sambolin and Carroll, 2015). Literature circles worked well for Su and Wu in 2016. Rizzo used RCs for science textbooks and other non-fiction books (2011).

Method

The first place I started was with student interest. GRs the students did not seem particularly interested in, I asked them to write what it was they either liked or did not like about the book. Students said this about “The Phantom of the Opera.”

“No, I don’t. Because this story is very scared.”
“Yes, because this story is interesting.”
“Yes. Because it’s regrettable, painful and love story.”

Questions like this led into discussions.

Student 1: “I dislike this story. Because Erik can’t be happy and he died.”
Student 2: “I think so too!! Erik is a poor man because he did not loved any woman because of his ugly face. His life is so sad.”
Student 1: “You say “he did not” but I think “he can’t”. Why Erik decided that Christine can be free?”
Student 2: “Because he loves Christine so much, and he wants to be happy her.”
Student 1: “I think so too.”

One question I started with was “What is important to you about this story?”

After reading “White Death,” a story about heroin trafficking with the possibility of the death penalty, students answered variously:

“The love from mother is great.”
“I think love is important in this story. Such as, family love.”
“Love. Because Sarah loves Hassan and her mother. Stephen loves Sarah.”
“I think that it is important to love people because Stephen loves Sarah but this love is dangerous for everyone.”

This led to discussions like this.

Student 1: “A lie definitely becomes clear. A truth definitely becomes clear too.”
Student 2: “I agree with this opinion. Tell a lie

is bad thing. And this is sometimes obvious.”
(Responds to another student’s comment.)
“I agree. But, lie is not always bad. Truth is sometimes cruelty.”

Three other students had this to say:

Student 1: “I think that important thing is love. You can get many kinds of love. Sarah loves Hassan. And Hassan loves Sarah. Stephen loves Sarah. Ann loves Sarah. Each other (other?) person loves.”
Student 2: “Stephen’s love is bad.”
Student 3: “I agree, love makes people become monsters and can make them do anything.”

Reading “The Five Orange Pips” and learning a little about American history produced exchanges like this one:

Student 1: “What is important in the story?”
Student 2: “Equality for black people’ is most important in the story.”
Student 1: “I agree with your idea. Because “Equality for black people” will make us happy and peace. We can reduce murder. I have next question to you. Why did K.K.K. kill black people?”
Student 2: “I think black people didn’t agree with them. So, k.k.k. killed black people. (k.k.k. killed anyone who didn’t agree with them.)”

Practicing these written conversations then led to oral group discussions. The students held their written conversation transcripts and discussed as much in English in their groups as they were able. The students were very conscientious about using English as much as possible before switching over to Japanese.

To prepare for the final exam, I had the students read Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.” I also downloaded background information from educational sites online for children. I included biographical information on Mark Twain, historical information on the United States, such as the history of Missouri, Native Americans, and the Trail of Tears, and geographical information about the Mississippi River. These sheets were distributed among

group members so the amount of information and reading would not be overwhelming. The students were already used to working in groups on the RCs, so this was a continuation.

Students discussed the book and the background information in groups and then were asked to fill out an essay outline form.

Student thesis: "I like the character of Tom because he is clever and brave."

Student thesis: "I don't like the character of Tom because he is selfish."

The students were asked to provide three examples from the book with page numbers to support their claims. Then the students wrote a concluding sentence.

Next, the students read "the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Again, background information was downloaded from primary school-level education sites and broken up and distributed among group members. This time background information included historical information on slavery and the slave trade in the U.S., and Mississippi river boats. The students met in groups and discussed the book, characters and background information, this time mostly in Japanese. Then they wrote essay outlines for "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn."

Student thesis: "I like the character of the Finn because he is gentle."

Student thesis: "I don't like the character of Huckleberry Finn because he is a liar."

Students provided three examples to support their theses with page numbers and quotes from the book. Finally students wrote a concluding sentence.

In final preparation for the final exam, students were given the question "Who is a better person, Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn?" They were given an essay outline form to begin writing in class, and then asked to do the rest at home themselves. For the final exam, they were allowed to use both books, their outlines for "Tom Sawyer" and their outlines for "Huck Finn" as well as their

completed outlines for the previous assignment. They could discuss the topic amongst themselves. They could ask the teacher questions. They were not allowed to use a dictionary. Pulling all of their information together, the students wrote a 300-350 word A4 page essay in English during class time, answering the question posed in the previous class.

Student sample #1: "I think Huckleberry Finn is a better person than Tom Sawyer because Huckleberry Finn is brave pure and clever. Huckleberry Finn is a brave character. He helped a slave, though slave states banned to help slaves. He escaped from his father to use a small hole. He told lies to many people. ... Huckleberry Finn is a better person than Tom Sawyer because Huckleberry Finn is brave, pure and clever. Huck helped Jim from slave states. However he is bad person in USA at that time because slaves were not allowed to escape from owner and people were not allowed to help runaway slaves. But I think Huck to do right actions because people should be equal. And I like Huckleberry Finn because he is the bravest person in USA at that time."

Student sample #2: "I think Huckleberry Finn is a better person than Tom Sawyer because Huck is a kind, brave boy and he doesn't use people to work for him. ... Huckleberry always kind to Jim who is a slave. He protected Jim from two white people who were chasing Jim. He didn't treat Jim as a slave. I think Huckleberry Finn is a better person. The biggest reason is that he doesn't use people. He and Tom both are very kind and brave. But the biggest difference between them is that Tom likes to use people to work for him. Maybe they call this clever, but I don't like that. I like Huckleberry Finn as a character or person, so I think Huckleberry Finn is a better person than Tom Sawyer."

Student sample #3: "I think Tom Sawyer is a better person than Huckleberry Finn because Tom is clever, kind and brave. ...Tom Sawyer is a better person than Huckleberry Finn because Tom is clever, kind and brave. Tom prompted his friend to paint the fence. He

supported Becky when they lost in the cave. He told true story of a murder. I think Tom is a perfect person because he has intelligence, kindness and bravery. He does (is?) not like me because I don't have intelligence, kindness and bravery."

Student sample #4: "I think Tom Sawyer is a better person than Huckleberry Finn because Tom Sawyer is a brave, kind and smart person. ... In conclusion, Tom Sawyer is a better person than Huckleberry Finn because Tom is brave, kind and smart. Tom helped Muff Potter to become innocent. He thinks Huck is a good friend. He found the money that Injun Joe was hidden. I think Tom is good boy, and I like this character because he rescued Muff Potter and Becky though he got a dangerous."

Conclusion

In the past when I have used RCs I noticed that the students quickly grew bored with the roles, even though the roles were rotated. In this class I quickly moved away from RC roles and into what aspects of the stories the students liked or did not like. The students were always told that they did not have to enjoy a story, but they had to give a detailed reason why they had not enjoyed it.

One interesting thing that happened during the group discussions of "Huckleberry Finn" was that one student expressed the opinion that Huck was a bad person. I was surprised. All of the other students had been expressing admiration for Huck for having helped a fellow human being. This student, though, strongly condemned Huck as a bad person for breaking the Runaway Slave Law, which was included in the background information. He had broken the law; therefore he was in the wrong. I told her she was absolutely right, that he had broken the law. Other students from her group joined the conversation and in Japanese disagreed with her. I reassured her that her opinion was okay. Every other student in the class said that Huck had done the right thing in breaking the law by helping Jim run away, and protecting him. The student was stunned by her classmates' opinions. By the next class she had changed her opinion to match her classmates'

opinions. I have to admit I was disappointed by this. I was really anticipating reading her essay. It was not to be.

Throughout the semester, the students were encouraged to read and re-read. They were encouraged to express opinions and likes and dislikes. The only requirement that I had was that the student must give a detailed reason for her or his opinion. Much like Alcott drawing out his students, the students were given the tools to express themselves and then asked to do so, first in pairs on paper, then in groups, on paper and then orally, then individually on paper. The students stopped thinking of what they were writing as "reports" and came to think of them as simple discussions of what we studied in class.

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