

INNOVATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING



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ASIA-PACIFIC ASSOCIATION FOR COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

APACALL Newsletter Series No. 9, June 2006

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear APACALL members,

Two months ago, all members were asked to renew their membership and re-subscribe to the APACALL E-list for the first time. It was carried out to respond to some concerns about insufficient contributions from members and lack of communication between members. As a result of the membership renewal, we now have smaller but more devoted members who are genuinely interested in the development of APACALL. This implies that we will have more constructive ideas and dynamic actions as we go along.

Sooner or later, there will be some meaningful initiatives that will invite you to engage in certain activities. I hope that you can take part in the history of the association by actively participating in the activities. You can certainly make your presence known in the world of CALL.

Best wishes,

Jeong-Bae Son
President

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S NOTES

This is the first issue of 2006. In order to encourage participation and contributions from members, a new newsletter format will be introduced and used next time. With the new format, a team of editorial board members will undertake the collection and editing of news items and articles for the newsletter. Members who are interested in being a member of the editorial team are encouraged to write in to express their interest. If needed, selection will be made by the Executive Committee. Regarding this initiative, an invitation message will be posted to the APACALL E-list soon. I look forward to more participation and involvement of members in the publication of our newsletters.

Siew Ming Thang
Editor

NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS (January – June 2006)

► **Publications**

- Son, J.-B. (2006). Using online discussion groups in a CALL teacher training course. *RELC Journal*, 37, 123-135.

- Thang, S.M. & Bidmeshki, L. (2006). Evaluating Malaysian Science and Technology undergraduates' reactions towards an online ESP course. *CALL-EJ Online*, 7(2). <http://www.tell.is.ritsumei.ac.jp/callejonline/>

- Thang, S.M. (2006). Learning English in Multicultural Malaysia: Are Learners Motivated. In Shanta Venogopal et al. (Eds.), *Writing the Past into the Present: Reflections of 35 years of Scholarship in Language and Literary Studies*. Bangi, Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

- ◆ Applied Linguistics Association of Korea 2006 International Conference: Seoul, Korea. 27-28 October 2006. <http://www.alak.or.kr/>

- ◆ Educational Technology Convention: Awana Porto Malai, Langkawi, Malaysia. 9-11 September 2006. <http://pppjj.usm.my/meta/konv2006/pengenalan.html>

- ◆ Multimedia Adventure in Languages Seminar: Selangor, Malaysia. 21-22 August 2006. <http://cmlc.mmu.edu.my/MAFL/>

CALL FOR PAPERS

- ◆ The School of Language Studies and Linguistics, UKM is holding an international conference from 15 to 17 May 2007. The theme of the conference is 'Language and Nationhood: Discourses across Cultures and Disciplines'. Information is now available online at:
<http://www.fpbahasa.ukm.my/SoLLsINTEC07/index.htm>

- ◆ Pacific Association for CALL (PacCALL) is holding the 3rd PacCALL Conference in Nanjing, China, from 16 to 19 November 2006. The theme of the conference is 'Globalization and Localization of CALL'. Information is now available at:
<http://www.paccall.org/2006/CFP2006.php>

FEATURED ARTICLE

Designing a reciprocal reading environment supporting the interaction between books and readers

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Abstract

An extensive reading project named ‘Reading for Pleasure’ has been implemented since 1999 at both Keio University and Sophia University¹. Students read and talk about books they have read in reciprocal relationships between peers in the classroom and online using the Interactive Reading Community (IRC) homepage. This paper describes the underlying idea and methods of the project which will make each and every student into an autonomous reader. First, problems of the reading classes in junior and senior high schools and cram schools are pointed out. As a solution to these problems, the educational value of an extensive reading project in the university English education is discussed in detail. The IRC is presented as an example of the implementation of this philosophy and examined in terms of cultural and educational values in the Japanese educational system.

1. Introduction: The Two Basic Problems of the English Education in Japan

The English language is a foreign language which is not used in everyday life by the Japanese people. The fact that they are only exposed to small amount of English and not required to absorb English as input plus having few opportunities to use English as a communication tool contributes heavily to the low English competence of Japanese people. In order to overcome these two basic problems, computers have been used as tools in many teaching practices. Mizuno (2000, 2004) found solutions to the problem of having few opportunities to use English by creating the website named ‘Interactive Writing Community (IWC)’ http://www.sfc.keio.ac.jp/iwc/IWC/real_index.html where students all over the world can use English as a communication tool to discuss global and controversial issues

On the other hand, in order to provide an opportunity to absorb a substantial amount of English from reading large quantities of books, an extensive reading project named ‘Reading for Pleasure’ has been implemented since 1999 at both Keio University and Sophia University. A website named ‘Interactive Reading Community (IRC)’ <http://www.sfc.keio.ac.jp/iwc/IRC/> was created and has been developed over the last six years by adding new features to meet the needs of the students, so they can find books to read more easily and can feel motivated to read more and more by referencing the successful online book store ‘Amazon.com’. The IRC has realized reciprocal relationships among students in different classes and universities who share and reflect about what they read and made a community of readers. This paper describes the underlying ideas and methods of the project which make each and every student into an autonomous reader.

2. The Problem of Reading Classes in Japanese Schools

2.1. The small amount of English provided in school textbooks of junior and senior high schools

The amount of English provided in the school textbooks from junior high school to senior high school is very small. The following table illustrates the details (Editorial department of *Modern English Education*, 1996; Okamura, 1999):

Table 1: The number of words used in the Japanese school textbooks for six years

Junior high school		Senior high school	
New Horizon 1	1177 words	Unicorn	11968 words
New Horizon 2	2511 words	Unicorn	23009 words
New Horizon 3	3068 words	My English Readers B	16089 words
Total	6756 words	Total	51066 words

If we print those words on a paperback book, the English words read by junior high school students for three years are equivalent to 20 pages and by high school students for three years are equivalent to 140 pages in a paperback. Since a paperback has usually 300 pages, Japanese students read about one half of a paperback during the six years from junior high school to high school graduation. It means that they read an average of 26 pages every year and they read less than 2 pages per month. This shows that the amount of English read at school by Japanese students are very small.

To be worse, these small amounts of English have been deciphered and translated sentence by sentence into Japanese by a teacher solely guided by grammatical knowledge. Therefore, students have hardly been given an opportunity to read large quantities of easy English to enhance their vocabulary and grammar.

2.2. The banking concept of education

Traditionally, teaching is based on the banking concept of education (Freire, 2000). In English class, the textbook has been considered by teachers and students as the main means of learning vocabulary and grammar. Teachers present new vocabulary and grammatical points step by step while going through the textbook, and students are required to memorize the information depositing it in their brain as savings to be withdrawn in the future for the examination. Under such an educational banking concept framework, teachers are like bank tellers of knowledge therefore classes have only unilateral transactions. This philosophy makes creative learning through dialogue impossible.

2.3. The ‘authenticity’ and ‘washback’ of the English examination for entering a universityⁱⁱ

Many Japanese junior and senior high school students have to practice answering the questions for reading comprehension tests over and over again, so they can pass the university entrance examinations. The process of answering those questions is far from the act of reading in our daily life and cause an undesirable effect on their learning in the following way:

First, students have to read the text followed by various types of questions such as ‘cloze’, ‘multiple choice’, and ‘true or false’. The process of how to answer those types of test questions within a limited amount of time is far from a realistic reading activity in our daily life, so the ‘authenticity’ of this type of reading is low or zero. Also, students do nothing but practice answering the questions on the reading test, so the information-handling ability is narrowly focused. They do not have any activity after reading, such as discussion about the content of the passage. Thus, reading is a rote mental activity bound inside the individual's head if there is no communication with others.

Moreover, the texts students are given for the entrance exams are only fragments of books and have no information about the authors and titles. Needless to say, such texts are not chosen by the student to be read but are forced on them. It is unnatural and more difficult for us to read something we cannot find relevant and does not satisfy our curiosity. Considering those aspects of the reading comprehension tests in the entrance exams for students, how can they learn to enjoy and appreciate reading when it is far from the act of reading in the real world?

The very reason why students have patience with answering reading comprehension tests questions whose authenticity is low and which give undesirable backwash effect is that they want to earn high marks on the exams. The ‘value of exchange’ which is directed toward passing the entrance exams has been the motivation for Japanese students to study English at junior and senior high school for a long time.

This ‘value of exchange’ motivation, however, still exists at the university. They have to earn credit for graduations and get higher marks on the TOEIC test which they have to show while searching for a job. It is essential that we should design English classes in Japan based on ‘cultural and educational value’ as well as the ‘value of exchange’. In this paper I will use an extensive reading project at the university level to explore the meaning of learning English in a school setting.

3. The Importance of an Existence of the Extensive Reading Project at the University Level

3.1. To foster autonomous readers

We normally choose reading material from among a great variety of sources. The right to choose a book using our own free will is, therefore, essential for us to make our act of reading meaningful and satisfying. If there are 30 students in a class, there should be at least 30 books which can be chosen by them according to their own interests. Now that the students are released from studying English for university entrance examinations, we can foster autonomous readers who are able to wisely choose books to read which are relevant to their own lives and to satisfy their curiosity. This is where we find the significance of the existence of an extensive reading project at the university level. In this section, we are going to shed light on the nature of ‘autonomous learning’ summarizing the ideas of Aoki (1996) presented in her paper, and consider the educational values of an extensive reading project to make Japanese students into autonomous learners (readers).

‘Autonomous learning’ is an educational philosophy in which students learn on their own constructing their knowledge through interaction and collaboration with peers and

teachers using various tools and independently manage their learning. I will elaborate on the idea by dividing the explanation into several elements.

First of all, 'learning on their own' means each and every one of the students is motivated and believes they can improve the quality of their life through what they are learning. Thus, they read books not because they have to pass the test or get a credit but because they can realize the act of reading helps them improve the quality of their own life.

Second, 'constructing their knowledge' implies that they critically examine new information and relate it to their existing knowledge and experience. This way, it is emphasized that independent-minded reading, which makes sense of the text from his or her points of view and creates the world in their mind, is highly respected.

Third, 'learning through interaction and collaboration with peers and teachers using various tools' represents that 'autonomous learning' is not learning alone nor following the instructions and programs step by step planned by teachers or installed in a computer. 'Autonomous learning' is not based on the idea of individualistic learning but the idea of social constructionism where our understanding and cognition is socially constructed and deepened through communication with others. Therefore, it is argued that the cognition of reading should not be considered as bounded inside individual heads but shared and socially distributed among tools and other readers.

Lastly, 'independently managing their learning' means that each and every one of the students can choose their goals, content, pace of learning, learning style, place of learning, and way of assessment. Applying the same idea to the act of reading, the teacher's most important job is to guarantee the students' right to select what books they want to read, to read whatever pages they want, at their preferred time, at their favorite place, and at their comfortable reading pace. Creating such a reading environment will stimulate their desire to read and support their continued act of reading.

3.2. The challenge of reading large quantities of books: Reading Marathonⁱⁱⁱ

Another reason why an extensive reading project should be incorporated into the English curriculum at the university level is to have them absorb a substantial amount of English from reading large quantities of books. Especially for those who do not major in English, the English classes are the only ones where they can be exposed to English. However, the average English classes meet only twice a week. To be worse, the number of students in a class is large. Under such difficult circumstances, an idea of a reading marathon where they can compete with each other to read the most books by the end of the semester as though it was a game will supplement the small amount of English given during the class.

For the Reading Marathon, each book has its own distance attached to the cover (400 words/km), and the students compete with each other to 'run' the farthest distance by the end of the semester. Students read a book per week, but if the distance of the book is more than 30 km, they are allowed to spend two weeks. They can pass this class if they have completed more than 130 km or read more than 13 books. They can get a grade A if they have either reached 180 km or read 18 books. These specific numbers are given as a goal at the beginning of the semester.

4. Transformation of Style of Teaching: From Teacher-Centered Class to Student-Centered Class

Now that students can read their favorite books in their favorite places at their own pace, it is extremely important for a teacher to redesign the class activities to meaningfully support the students' continuous act of reading. In order to make the classroom a place of learning, Sato (1999) would argue that the teacher should incorporate three concepts into the classroom design: interaction with the world (e.g., learning materials or content), interaction with others, and interaction with oneself. In this section, I would like to explore how a teacher can create the three dimensions of learning and point out its educational values in an extensive reading project.

4.1. Interaction with the world

Interaction with the world comes through books that students encounter in an extensive reading class. They become familiar with the different genres of books, meet many characters, and experience events in the story. They also learn expressions and ways of thinking which are unique to the English language.

4.2. Interaction with others

Students interact with others through book talk and build relationships with each other in the classroom. In groups of five (each week the members of the group are changed), they introduce the book they have read to their classmates for 25 minutes using their native language - Japanese^{iv}. While they read outside of the classroom, they are aware that they will be introducing the book to their classmates and hoping to interest others in the book. With this in mind, each student will seriously read and interpret the books. Book talk allows students to develop a deeper appreciation of books.

Active listening is a fundamental basis for learning. Participating in the IRC project throughout the semester encourages the growth of a responsive classroom environment where students sincerely listen and respond to each other which creates a reciprocal relationship that cultivates their desire for learning. Furthermore, by talking in a group about their reaction to the books, they express their own ideas about the world, society, and humanity. As their unique ideas are exchanged, they begin to discover the differences in personality and an atmosphere of learning from each other will develop.

4.3. Interaction with oneself

Students reflect on their way of thinking while reading books and through interaction with others. This self-discovery is enhanced by writing in Japanese a reaction report about each book that includes quotations^v. The process of expressing their interpretation of a book will help them reflect on what they have read, shape their ideas and is indispensable preparation before they come to class for interacting with their classmates^{vi}.

The reaction report is not only written for the teacher but also posted on the IRC web site and read by students in other classes and other universities who are deciding on the next books to read. Knowing that their reaction reports play an important role in the choice of books others will read, highly motivates students to write quality reports.

Their strong desire to fully convey the essence of the book to entice others to read it will bring out a deep appreciation of the book and enrich its interpretation.

The three concepts of learning explained above cultivate reverberant interactions in the design of an extensive reading project. The pleasure of being able to choose what to read according to their own taste and value judgment and being able to express their feelings about a favorite book to their classmates enables the classroom to be an active, collaborative and reflective community of learning.

The most powerful testament to the benefits of this design for an extensive reading project comes from the students themselves. When asked about the impact of choosing what to read according to their own taste and value judgment on their reading activity, this is one student's response:

“Being guaranteed to be able to select what books we wanted to read, I could have a strong desire to read books more and more. Owing to the Reading Library which has a great variety of books, I did not read books from a sense of duty. On the other hand, the traditional reading class where the content and the level of a book were selected by a teacher and only translated sentence by sentence during the class gave me psychological suffering rather than giving me a pleasure from reading. I cannot remember the story and what I learned from the book even if I deciphered it very hard for the test. However, I can clearly remember each and every book I read in this class. I can even remember how I interpreted and felt about the story of the books. The act of reading broadened my mind and I could spend quality time. It was an ideal reading environment.”

It is obvious that the books they read offered mental and spiritual sustenance and made them into autonomous readers.

Furthermore, when asked about the drastic change in the style of teaching, from teacher-centered to student-centered, this is another student's response:

“It is great fun and intellectually stimulating to talk about books we have read with our classmates. I enjoyed being in a small group whose members changed every week. Since I had difficulty choosing books to read each week, I found it very helpful exchanging frank opinions about the various books. In addition, what made me feel fulfilled in the class was that we could discuss and expand on the ideas of the book in our small groups and at the same time get to know each other through our personal opinions about various topics. It made me reflect on my own ideas about the world, society, and human beings.”

We can clearly see that their reading experiences were expressed and shared with their classmates in a reciprocal community of readers. Through book talk they could get a glimpse of new books, make new friends, and even gain a deeper insight of their friends. Indeed, books created the ties that bound students together in the community of readers.

5. Interactive Reading Community

5.1. Deepen the understanding about books through dialogue on the internet

Book talk among groups in the classroom is limited in number and time, so the Interactive Reading Community on the BBS Web Site was set up in 1999 where students joining the IRC in other classes and other universities can share their appreciation of books and reflect on what they have read. Every book has its own BBS where students' reaction reports are posted, and they can read others' reports and compare their interpretations. They can also write comments for other participants, which will activate their interaction with the content of the book and their peers without the restrictions of time or location.

Here is an example of the BBS of the book *'The Fall of Freddie the Leaf'*:

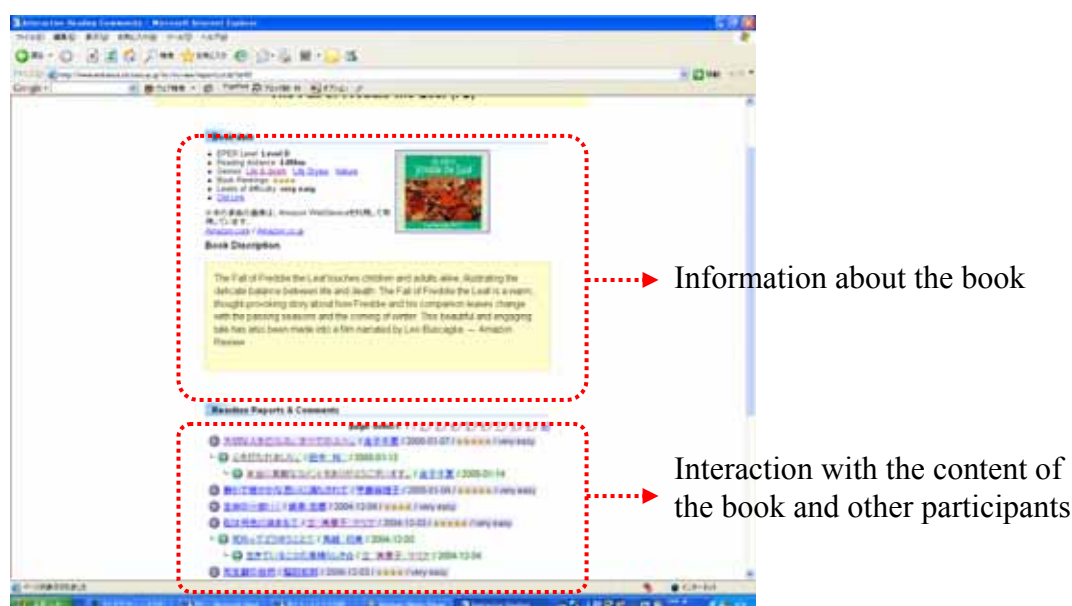


Figure 1: An example of a BBS of a book

There was a reaction report entitled “living with someone forever” that was contributed on the BBS and the author received a comment from a student at a different university. They communicated with each other about the book several times:

- living with someone forever . . . R.T (Keio University, SFC)
 - └ living beyond the years of someone's life on earth . . . T. K. (Sophia University)
 - └ I realize how enjoyable the IRC is! . . . R.T (Keio University, SFC)

On this thread, they discuss the theme of the book ‘Life and death’ in the following way (the original sentences in the reaction report were shown by italics)

We are like leaves who are awakened by the warm sunshine in the spring and fall to the ground in the winter, but our life will not come to nothing after death. Our words, our acts, and our will stay alive in the memory of people or art work and literature. They will remain and cultivate new life.

I understand your idea that our life stays alive after death. It remains the fact that he lived on earth in the memory of people who were involved with him in close and intimate ways. Death ends a life but not a relationship. I think that this idea is illustrated in the *'The Fall of Freddie the Leaf'* like fallen leaves which still exist as soil nutrient in the ground. Since I major in nursing science, let me share with you my personal experience as a student nurse in the hospital. I was taking care of a patient who was in the terminal stage of cancer. She took a sudden turn for the worse and died two days after I had finished taking care of her. This is the first time for me to experience a people's death, so when I heard the news, I had dreadful uneasiness about death.

There has been extensive interactive communication on the IRC among students at four universities for the last eight years. Every semester there are more than 1000 postings on the IRC. All the reaction reports and comments posted are accumulated, so the students who are currently taking the IRC can independently utilize them as 'scaffolding' to deepen their understanding of the books. They can also enjoy appreciating a particular book from the many points of view posted on the BBS.

Differing from the traditional view that human cognition is bound inside individual heads, the IRC shows that human cognition is constructed socially through collaborative learning and it is distributed among tools and people. Participating in such a reciprocal community of readers which express and share reading experiences and develop a sense of being a member of the IRC highly cultivates their desire to read more and more books.

5.2. Pedagogical devices of the IRC system which facilitate the encounters and communication with others

The most important point to support and stimulate students in becoming 'autonomous readers' is to have them learn to select books to read. Since they were given a textbook chosen by the teacher through high school and were rarely given an opportunity to choose one they wanted to read from a great variety of books, it is essential for an extensive reading teacher to offer various information about books to enhance their process of finding books to read and reflect on their choices. Thus, we made a hypothesis as to how we could practically support their reading. Referencing the successful online book store 'Amazon.com' and taking advantage of hypertext technology, we implemented several enjoyable incentive functions as a 'pedagogical device' on the IRC. Here are the explanations of each function:

5.2.1 Nine incentives implemented on the IRC to facilitate reading a variety of books

(1) Book search function

Each book has its own BBS where there is information about the book as follows:

Genres: There are 13 genres such as animals, autobiography and biography, literature, and so on. Each genre has approximately 10 sub-genres (i.e., animals have bears, cats, dogs, etc.).

EPER (Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading) Level: Edinburgh University classified all the graded readers published by Penguin, Oxford, Cambridge, and

Macmillan into eight levels of ‘readability’ (X, A, B, ... G). Following the EPER classification, all the books listed on the IRC has a designated EPER level.

Reading Distance: Each book has its own distance calculated by the number of words (400 words/km) displayed.

Book Ranking: The book is given stars (from one to five) by readers to show their enjoyment of the book, and the average number of stars is shown.

Levels of difficulty: Apart from the EPER level, the average level of difficulty of the book (very easy, easy, slightly difficult, very difficult) is calculated by readers.

Combining the various categories explained above on the ‘Book Search Function’ page, readers can easily find the books they want to read from the more than 2000 books listed on the IRC.

(2) Favorite genres

You can find books according to the genres listed on the top page. If you choose a genre, you will immediately get the list of all the appropriate books. Moreover, if you register your ‘Favorite Genres’ on your page, the IRC will introduce three books randomly from all the books which belong to the genres whenever you log on.

(3) IRC dictionary of quotations

Students not only write reaction reports about the books they have read, but also choose some sentences as their ‘Favorite Quotation’ from the texts and translate them into Japanese putting their interpretation and a lot of feelings into them. These are listed on the ‘IRC Dictionary of Quotations’ page.

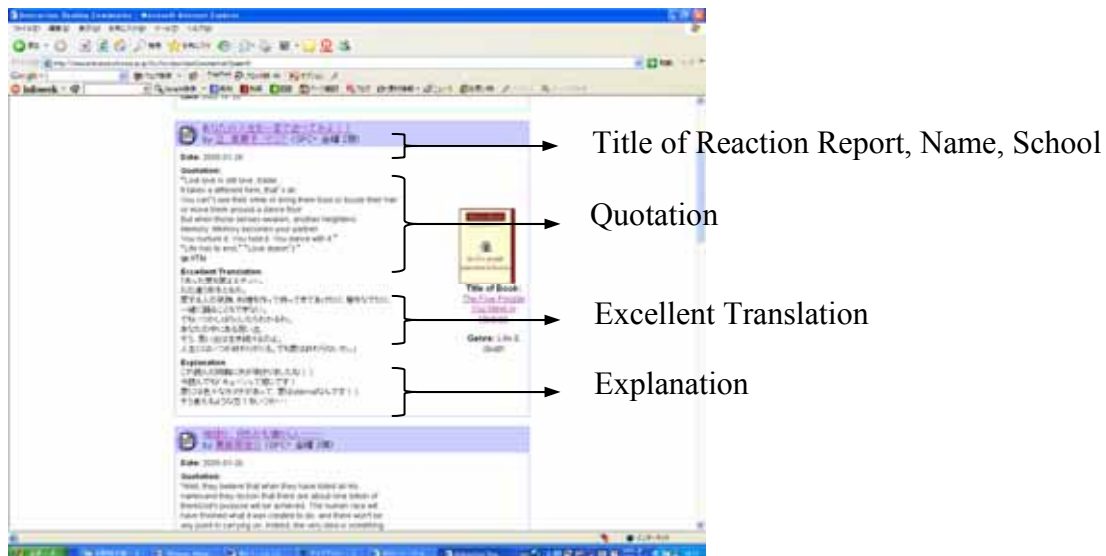


Figure 2: The page of IRC Dictionary of Quotations

On this page, the following information was displayed as a set and linked on the time series plot: the title of his Reaction Report, his name, his school, the image of the book cover, his favorite quotations and translation. Furthermore, the title of comments are also linked and listed in chronological order, so all the participants in the IRC beyond

the classrooms and universities can utilize this page to become familiar with a great variety of books through quotations chosen by others.

(4) Top picks of the week

Every week an excellent reaction report of each of the five classes was chosen from among those of the same class. Those five reaction reports appear in the special page named 'Top Picks of the Week' and are read by all the participants. They vote for two of their favorite reports, and one student wins the best reaction report award every week. Reading the five nominated reports will give them a glimpse of an eclectic book collection and provide models to help them write a better report.

(5) People who read this book also enjoyed reading the following books:

On every page of each book's BBS, three books which were also read by those students are displayed.

(6) Book wish list

Every participant can make a list of books they want to read on their own page. They just click the title of the book they find interesting on the IRC, and then its title and book image is listed on the book wish list of their page. This feature is like the cart of the Amazon.com and is considered their personal bookshelf. Looking at someone's book wish list provides insight into their interests and personality and exposes us to new books.



Figure 3: Book Wish List on 'My Page'

(7) Recommended Books

The teacher selects three recommended books every week and gives comments on each of them which appear on the top page. Recommended books are chosen to allow students to reflect on their world of knowledge and experience and to become a better human being.

(8) Top 10

There is a section on the top page where the 10 books that have been read the most and received the most comments in the history of the IRC are posted.

(9) Reading fan club

As students participate in the community of readers on the IRC by reading each other's reaction reports and comments, they will share common interests and similar values, and find some of them have the same taste for books. If they register such special members as their favorite peers in the 'Reading Fan Club', the reaction reports and comments posted by those members during the last week are linked to their own pages, so those postings can be immediately checked after they log in. They can also find who has registered their names as favorite peers on their pages and enjoy seeing the numbers of peers who are interested in their postings. This way they can expand their interests and be exposed to new books through special people. Keeping those members in mind and wanting to meet their expectations, they will make more efforts to write quality reaction reports and comments.

5.2.2 Visualization of the quantity of how much they have read so far

(1) Reading marathon

After they post on the BBS their reaction report of the book they have read, the reading distance of the book is automatically added to their name on the "Reading Marathon" page using stars (one star equals 10 km).

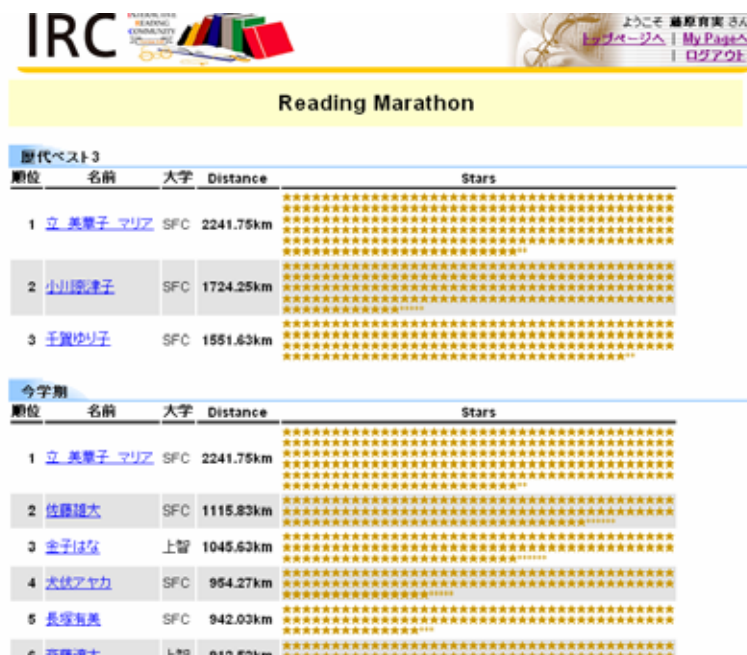


Figure 4: The page of Reading Marathon

(2) Reading stars

The number of books they have read so far is shown by stars on the 'Reading Stars' page. One star is automatically added to their name on the page when they post their reaction reports of a book on the BBS.

5.3. Externalization of what each student has been learning on the IRC

Every student has a unique 'My Page' where they can see their ongoing achievements and reflect on their whole learning experience: the amount of reading can be recognized at a glance by the number displayed for the reading distance and the amount of reading stars. Their contribution to the IRC is recorded, such as posted reaction reports and comments, received comments, and peer comment evaluation which is given by the original book reviewer^{vii}. Furthermore, 'My Page' lists all the services such as 'Favorite Genres', 'Reading Fan Club' and 'Book Wish List' which can be edited as needed according to their interests.

This way, their participation in the IRC is externalized from every possible angle on 'My Page' and they can get a sense of accomplishment as they post their reaction reports and comments. 'My Page' produces an 'achievement motive' making them want to read more, write more comments, and set reading goals as an autonomous reader.

I have demonstrated what pedagogical contrivances the IRC has to trigger and support the participants' interactions with books, others, and themselves. The IRC has unique features taking advantage of hyperlinks which can recommend one book after another instantaneously and introduce them to the magic of the world of books and help them read books autonomously. The following is the result of a questionnaire survey on the IRC in the fall semester of 2004.

6. The Results of a Questionnaire about the Services of the IRC

The 165 students who took the IRC in the fall semester of 2004 answered 50 questions about the services the IRC provided. More than two-thirds of the students felt that the IRC system actively supported their extensive reading. There was none who felt dissatisfied with the IRC services. Almost all the students answered that they made the best use of the 'Book Wish List' on 'My Page' listing whatever books they came across and wanted to read on the IRC, and found them in either the classroom or the library and enjoyed reading them. The 'Favorite Genres' (FG) was also widely used to see the different categories of books in the Reading Library of the IRC. About 40 % of the students answered that they actually tried finding the books introduced by the FG and read them. It turned out that the FG was being used as one of the effective tools for them to discover new books.

On the other hand, we found that more than two thirds of the students did not actively utilize the service of the 'Reading Fan Club' (RFC). The following were the reasons: they had trouble selecting who they wanted to be their favorite peers, and they did not like the idea of having specific peers' reaction reports and comments posted during the last week linked to their own pages, which limited their choices of whose postings they would read. However, those who were registered as special peers in the RFC commented that they were happy to be chosen and motivated to make more efforts to write quality reaction reports and comments.

It also turned out that more than half of the students clicked the 'Recommended Books' link on the top page of the IRC where the teacher suggested three books every week. Although there were only about 20% who actually read those books, the 'Recommended Books' area gave the students a brief glimpse of great books.

According to the results of the questionnaire about the services of the IRC, we found that the evaluations and services were mixed because of the great variety of ways to explore and encounter books on the IRC. On the other hand, there were comments that some of them could not fully utilize the features of the IRC because they were confusing. It is essential to make the components more user-friendly, so they can take full advantage of the IRC system to enjoy participating in the IRC.

7. The Result of the IRC Project

In the fall semester of 2004, about 90% of the students ran more than 130 km or read more than 13 books and reached their goal. The average number of reading distance was 336km, which is equivalent to reading one paperback book. Figure 5 illustrates the details:

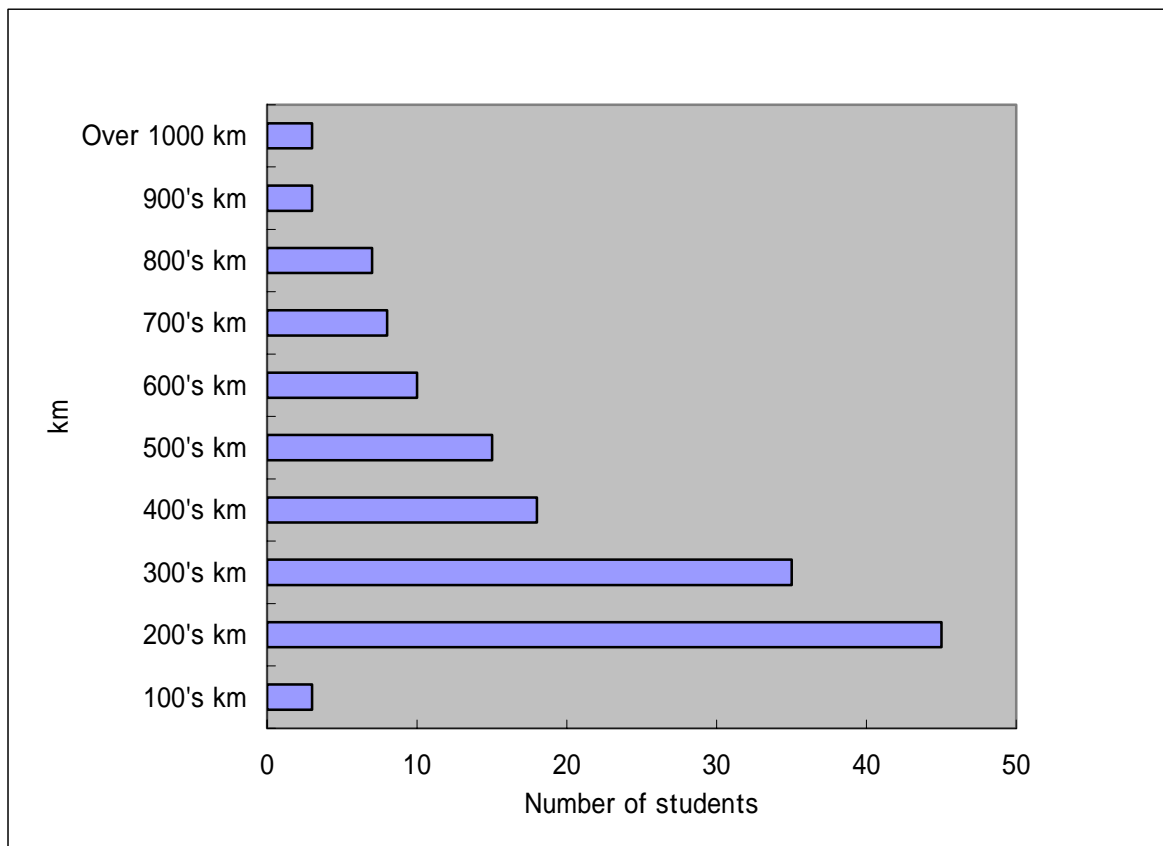


Figure 5: The result of reading distance

All students read an average of 12 books, which meant they each read one book a week. The following table illustrates the details:

Table 1: The number of books read by students in the fall semester of 2004

Number of books	21	19	18	17	16	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5
Number of students	2	2	3	2	1	7	15	10	15	20	14	21	14	10	8

In today's society, we have a tendency not to read. According to a Mainich newspaper poll, 42.6 % of high school students do not read one book a month (Mainich newspaper, 2005). Furthermore, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) run by OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) showed that Japan was 14th among the 41 countries ranked below the average.

Despite this fact, why could the students participating in the IRC project get accustomed to reading books and become 'autonomous readers'? To answer the question, I would like to consider what makes the IRC special compared to the conventional style of a college level reading class from the perspective of 'Learner Autonomy' and argue the 'cultural and educational values' of the IRC for English education in the Japanese educational system.

8. Learner Autonomy in the Extensive Reading Project

Conventional reading classes in college English education ignore learner autonomy and the social character of the act of reading. Concerning with learner autonomy when students do not have the right to choose what books they want to read, how many students find the book chosen by the teacher intriguing and satisfying their own needs? In real life, we can choose books using our own free will which are relevant to our jobs or way of living. Besides, the book the teacher chooses is difficult for most students, so they cannot appreciate the story or experience 'reading for pleasure'. As a result, the students' quantity of reading is small. Furthermore, the textbook includes lesson by lesson quizzes, so the students read the assigned book simply to pass the final exam and get a credit.

Moreover, the class size is large which creates a teacher-centered teaching style. The teacher explains the meaning of the text, deciphering sentence by sentence, and students listen to the lecture while writing notes. Thus, each student does not have a feeling that they are participating in the class relating their own knowledge and experience to the text and each other. In other words, the classroom is not considered a place where each student has the opportunity to develop into a better human being through interacting with books and other members of the class.

On the contrary, this reading class is named 'Reading for Pleasure'. By definition, 'pleasure' means one's wish, will, or choice as well as delight and satisfaction, which implies that it is when we can choose books using our own free will that we can get satisfaction from the act of reading. Therefore, a Reading Library was set up for the students. It has the following genres: 300 picture books, 1000 graded readers, 600 supplementary books which are written for Japanese high school and college students, and 100 popular manga books which are translated into English. From such a great variety of books, they can choose as many books as possible which are relevant to their own lives and to satisfy their curiosity

More than half of the books are called as 'Learner's Literature'. Therefore, there is a controversial issue that the quality of the text written for the learners is not 'authentic' and is worthless material for learning English. However, from the perspective of 'learner autonomy' which has been valued among language teachers and applied linguists, the idea of 'authenticity' which puts emphasis on only the quality of the text

and does not consider the ‘relationship between the reader and the text’ is not valid. Widdowson (1979) redefines the idea of ‘authenticity’ as follows:

I think it is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker. We do not recognize authenticity as something there waiting to be noticed, we realize it in the act of interpretation (p.165).

Widdowson’s idea of authenticity is not a quality residing in the language itself but a quality of the reader’s process of interpretation of the text. In other words, the authenticity is the quality of how meaningfully learners can relate it to their own world knowledge and experience through the interaction of the text. Thus, if we want to make the reading class student-centered, we need to recognize the educational value of learner’s literature as an ‘educational medium’.

By placing emphasis on the idea of authenticity in learner autonomy, it is the teacher's important role to create a reading environment in which students will be able to move step by step toward becoming a member of the community of proficient readers who appreciate original and genuine text while using learner's literature as ‘scaffolding’. Based on such educational philosophy of learning, it was the interaction with books, others, and oneself in the classroom and on the IRC that enabled them to become autonomous readers, read more than one book a week, to read 336km on the average which is equivalent to reading one paperback book, and to realize the value of reading books.

As a prospect for the future, I would like to invite junior and senior high school students as well as university students throughout Japan to join the IRC project. To participate in a reciprocal community of readers will change their attitude toward learning English from the ‘value of exchange’ which is directed toward getting higher scores on the tests to the ‘value of learning’ which is directed toward ‘appreciation’ of English books and the experience of ‘Reading for Pleasure’. The IRC project will continually improve in order to make the act of reading enjoyable and educationally valuable, and create an abundance of student interactions.

Notes

ⁱThere were 25 students in each of the three classes at Keio University and 50 students in each of the two classes at Sophia University. The students were freshmen through seniors representing all departments with TOEIC scores ranging from 350 to 860

ⁱⁱ The concept of authenticity and washback are explained in the following way (Jack C. Richards & Richard W. Schmidt, 2003): authenticity is the extent to which test tasks correspond to language use in a non-test (i.e. target language use) situation(p.42). washback is the positive or negative impact of a test on classroom teaching or learning(p.586).

ⁱⁱⁱ Minai (1993) explains the details of how to implement a “Reading Marathon”

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- iv After the book talk in a small group, three students chosen by the teacher stand in front of all the classmates and talk for three minutes about the books they have read while showing the book. After they finish, the classmates choose one student from the three and write comments on his presentation. Then all the students spend the rest of the class time returning the books they borrowed the previous week and borrowing new books from among the more than 300 books carried into the classroom.
- v Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford (1998) discusses how writing a reaction report is useful as a post-reading activity
- vi Students are allowed to join a classroom small group book talk if they can hand in a reaction report before the class gets started. A reaction report also functions as a medium for a teacher to monitor their reading and to find ‘the right book’, ‘for the right person’ and ‘at the right time’.
- vii In order to recognize the quantities of comments received from others and their quality, there is a page named ‘Comment Olympics’ where the number of stars are given in the following way: if a reaction report receives one comment, the original reviewer receives one star. Moreover, reading a given comment, he evaluates the quality of the comment in terms of how deeply he could develop his understanding of the book by giving stars (up to three stars) to the commentator.

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ADDITIONAL NOTES

- Members are invited to send APACALL Webmaster their names and personal homepage addresses to be listed on the 'Resources' page of the APACALL Web site.
- Your contributions to this newsletter are always welcome. Please send your news items to Webmaster@apacall.org.

