

Broadening English Perspectives through an Authentic Reading Experience

Junko Chujo

Abstract

The action research project was conducted through the implementation of a reading project in a Japanese national university elective reading course offered for medical freshman for the purpose of examining ways to remotivate non-English major freshmen for further English learning. The selected reading material for the instruction was a 311 page novel, *Flowers for Algernon*, written by Daniel Keys in 1959. There were three pedagogical goals for this project. First, that learners realize how they can utilize their current English ability for one of the true purposes of language learning (not just for gaining high test scores), the communication of ideas. Second, that learners gain the confidence to realize that by utilizing their current English capability in combination with structured activity, they can become autonomous readers of English. Third, that these realizations motivate students for further English learning. This project is centered on developing reading skills; however, multiple skill development activities were tailored for scaffolding learners' engagement with the text.

Key words: Reading, autonomous reader development, single theme reading, authentic reading materials, motivation, action research, literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Immediately after passing the tertiary level education entrance examination, the extreme motivation which has heretofore been the driving force for Japanese learners studying English tends to die down, especially for non-English majors. Hamada's (2011) study on demotivation followed the learners' motivation flow in terms of their English learning for each grade from junior high school to the university level. His report outlines the quantitative question results of 66 Japanese university freshmen taking English. The results show that the highest motivation levels occurred in the third year of both junior high and high school, and the lowest occurred during the second year of high school. Not surprisingly, a drastic drop occurred after the third year of high school, following the university entrance exam. From this point on, learners' motivation appeared to stabilize. Miura (2010) states that the increase in learners' motivation during those times is the result of a desire to pass the entrance

examinations. As a result, the motivation is categorized as extrinsic motivation.

Re-kindling students' intrinsic motivation is a key requirement for students' continued study of English at the tertiary education level in Japan. Therefore, as an individual involved in the tertiary level of education, one of the educator's roles is to provide opportunities for learners to learn and become interested in learning English through a broader range of instructional opportunities which can motivate the learners intrinsically, thereby helping students to realize that their English ability can be fully utilized not only for examination tools but also for true communication.

This article details action research for a reading project which was undertaken in a Japanese national university for undergraduate freshmen majoring in medicine. The project took place in two semester classes in two consecutive years, 2009 and 2010. The class size for the first year was 26 and for the second year, it was 44. This research examined whether carefully chosen authentic single-themed material combined with proper scaffolding could engage the interest of non-English major freshman English learners, motivate them to complete challenging assignments and further their interest in English when assigned to a type and amount of reading material they have never before experienced: over 300 hundreds of pages of an authentic English novel. There were three pedagogical goals for this project. First, that learners realize how they can utilize their current English ability for one of the true purposes of language learning (not just for gaining high test scores), the communication of ideas. Second, that learners gain the confidence to realize that by utilizing their current English capability in combination with structured activity, they can become autonomous readers of English. Third, that these realizations motivate students for further English learning.

2. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND HYPOTHESES

Among the four English skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking, reading is probably the most comfortable for many Japanese English learners. They have been exposed to written English more than any other form beginning in their first English classes. Reading given materials using word-for-word translation from English to Japanese begins in their initial stage of learning. Grammar translation and intensive reading has been their customary English learning strategy and as a result, tends to be their most comfortable. Students are required to repeatedly practice reading short passages and answering questions, mostly grammar and comprehension questions, in a limited timeframe in order to prepare for English examinations. They are trained to solve questions mechanically and systematically, which leads them to give answers in

the shortest time possible. The content of the passages does not necessarily need to be informative or influential for the learners; therefore, students typically do not retain the content itself. Their experience with learning English has been viewed as training to score high on the tests. Therefore, under Japanese examination-centered English education, English is perceived merely as another academic subject for most of the students. As a result, learners' motivation dies down after the entrance examination and many students fail to realize the true usefulness and power of using a foreign language.

Prior to the development of the project, the instructor had two semesters of experience teaching in the same institution to students with this same major. Commercial textbooks at an intermediate to high level were used. These earlier classes followed the directions of the textbook, checked the new vocabulary, read four to five pages of passages from autobiographies of well known persons, worked on the exercises, and solved the comprehension questions. The students' engagement and test results were satisfactory. However, the instructor kept sensing that there was something lacking in these reading classes. The content of the materials was not stimulating enough to engage the students' intellectual interest. There was also little emotion involved in the reading process. There was no climax to the series of learning experiences except at examination times. Furthermore, there was little connection, not only with the instructor but also among the learners. The instructor felt that something more should be incorporated in order to better reinforce the learning goals for each member of the class, something that uses classroom dynamics.

To solve this problem, the instructor turned to her own experience learning English under the Japanese English education system. In doing so, she realized that there was a single reading experience that made a tremendous impact on her English learning. She was assigned to read an English novel while studying abroad in the United States. It was a difficult task and she struggled through it; however, the experience gave her a sense of accomplishment, and it followed that she read several novels on her own, thus broadening her English perspective and motivating her to further her English learning. She decided that if she could help the target learners to have a similar stimulating experience, their English perspective could also be broadened.

With this in mind, a syllabus was developed with the following theme: a semester long reading project that enables students to broaden their reading experience in English by providing their first experience completing a large amount of reading material that is authentic and single themed. What the instructor had in mind utilizes individual

activity but also takes advantage of classroom dynamics. She envisioned having the same challenging goal with classmates cooperating, encouraging, competing, and being inspired by each other.

The instructor's first hypothesis was that since this is an elective English class, there would be some students who were interested in taking on the challenge of reading an authentic novel in English. Second, was that all who decided to take this class, in order to complete the course, would need a lot of scaffolding to keep up with the reading assignments. From personal contact and personal experience, the assignment was foreseen to be a difficult task. Therefore, their reading material was carefully designed over the year prior to implementation in order to address the learners' motivation, scheduling the amount of reading material, instructional approaches, and material for scaffolding.

3. MATERIAL SELECTION CRITERIA

Choosing the novel was the most important developmental piece of the process for this reading project. Since one piece of literature was selected for the entire semester, a well-balanced vocabulary level, page size, and content were crucial for the project's success. Content was an especially crucial element for maintaining the learners' interest and keeping them motivated to continue reading. In order for learning to take place, Krashen (1984) claims in his Input Hypothesis that "comprehensible input" is essential for promoting the target learners' language acquisition. The actual level of language ability the learners possess is presented by i and $(i+1)$ represents input just a little above the current possessed level. Krashen suggests that in addition to being relevant and/or interesting, the input must approximate the student's $i+1$. It must be comprehensible in that it is near the student's actual level of development (i), but then it must stretch beyond that to include concepts and structures that the student has not yet acquired ($i+1$).

Vygotsky (1978) presents a similar notion in his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He also suggests that there are two levels of cognitive development. He labels one level as the "actual developmental level" (what children can do without assistance) and the second level as the "potential developmental level" (what children can do with assistance). The difference in these two levels is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). When children are beyond the first level and under the guidance of adults, teachers and capable peers, it is considered that the learner is within the ZPD.

Drawing on these notions for second language learning in the EFL classroom, the role of the material developers and instructors is to provide tasks that are either (*i+1*) or in the ZPD. Working on tasks within that level is crucial for effective acquisition. For this project, the instructor considered numerous questions as important prior to selecting the material: How much and how difficult a level of English reading can students handle for their work outside of class every week? Which material is interesting for medical students to motivate them to continue reading? What kind of authentic materials have the power to emotionally influence this age level of reader and make them think? After considering all these questions, *Flowers for Algernon*, by Daniel Keys (1959), the winner of the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award, was selected for the following reasons: 1) it is related to the medical and university research field, 2) it is easy to follow the main plot development, 3) there is no required background knowledge, 4) it is a classic novel but it relates to current everyday life, 5) it engages readers' emotions--it is a touching story that moves the heart and mind, 6) it encourages readers to think about medical ethics, social acceptance, morals, development of the human and happiness.

The main story line of the book is that Charlie, a man of 36 who was born with a low IQ of 68, has been chosen as the subject of an experimental brain surgery that researchers hope will increase his intelligence. A mouse, the eponymous Algernon, receives the same operation prior to Charlie. After the operation, Charlie's intelligence expands to an IQ of 185 and surpasses that of the doctors who performed his operation. As the book progresses, he has flashbacks to moments when he was still mentally disabled and to the painful relationships with his family and surrounding people. When he becomes a genius, he is seen as arrogant and is, ironically, once again estranged by his peers. Just like Algernon the mouse, Charlie's intelligence peaks and then deteriorates to worse than his pre-operation level.

4. TEACHABILITY AND LEARNABILITY: PROVIDING INSTRUCTIONAL SCAFFOLDINGS

The content of the selected novel fit well with this target group of students but whether students would remain motivated when faced with the amount of reading was a concern. Because this reading course was an elective and the students registered as their first choice, their motivation was expected to be relatively high. Even so, it was a concern that tasks really be an (*i+1*) level or within the ZPD. Covering the length of the book and reading unfamiliar vocabulary in one semester was expected to be quite a

challenge. They were a group that for the most part had never experienced completing such a large amount of authentic material in English within such a tight and limited time span.

To support the students in completing the reading, input needed to be adjusted by the instruction with a variety of in-class activities for achieving the goals of the project. If the tasks were beyond their $(i+1)/ZDP$, then the tasks were supported by appropriate scaffoldings. These scaffoldings would help lower the psychological obstacle filter [termed “the affective filter” by Krashen (1984)]. Krashen’s theory states that the filter is high when the learners have anxiety, lack confidence in learning, or lose confidence. When this happens, even the comprehensible input provided becomes an obstacle for the process of language learning. On the other hand, if the learners’ affordance toward the target language is high, the students are strongly motivated and the students have high self confidence, more comprehensive input can be taken in. This situation is ideal and promotes language acquisition. Therefore, in order for learners to take in more comprehensive input, two major types of scaffoldings were designed to provide student support.

The first was in the form of a workbook that included key questions to lead and assist their reading comprehension, medical related vocabulary and selected vocabulary check sections for key words from the story (see Figure 1). The assignment sheets were made to be detachable from the workbook for submission.



Figure 1. The novel cover of *Flowers for Algernon*, the Workbook (total 67 pages) and the vocabulary check and key question section.

The second was in the form of a comfortable work environment to reduce anxiety and to provide plenty of time to review, check, discuss the content of story and share feelings and answers to key questions with their peers. To encourage this, a cooperative learning style was implemented.

5. INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

The fifteen classes were roughly divided into initial, medial, and final parts (see Figure 2). The initial part began with an introduction in the first session. The medial part covered sessions 2-13, with a reading requirement averaging 26 pages per week. The final part covered the closing of the project in session 14, a mini pair skit and a final summary of the story via viewing the movie version of *Flowers for Algernon* during session 15. The dark double line in Figure 2 shows the due dates for each assignment.

Because students had a number of other classes to take and social activities in which they were engaged, students were given flexibility in their reading pace. The questions for the key question check were listed in chronological order of occurrence in the story and were constructed mainly of true or false questions and WH-questions, with answer choices provided. They were questions that were designed to help lead students to better understand the main story line. The monthly assignment sheets were returned to the students the following week and included encouraging comments. This was one of the opportunities the instructor had to connect directly with students.

Session Number	Workbook Unit	Reading Assignment Section					Workbook Page
1	Unit 1	Introduction					p. 3
2	Unit 2	p.1	l.1	~	p.26	l.14	p.11
3	Unit 3	p.26	l.16	~	p.59	l.8	p.15
4	Unit 4	p.59	l.10	~	p.82	l.21	p.19
5	Unit 5	p.82	l.23	~	p.113	l.12	p.23
6	Unit 6	p.113	l.13	~	p.132	l.20	p.27
7	Unit 7	p.132	l.22	~	p.154	l.16	p.31
8	Unit 8	p.154	l.18	~	p.180	l.25	p.35
9	Unit 9	p.180	l.27	~	p.210	l.25	p.39
10	Unit 10	p.210	l.27	~	p.236	l.23	p.41
11	Unit 11	p.236	l.25	~	p.259	l.4	p.45
12	Unit 12	p.259	l.6	~	p.289	l.8	p.49
13	Unit 13	p.289	l.10	~	p.311	l.14	p.53
14	Unit 14	Mini Presentations and Final Examination					p.57
15	Unit 15	View the Movie					p.59

Figure 2. The course plan.

The details of the instructional procedures are as follows: The initial part included an introduction of the author, the novel and the main characters of the story followed by the political correctness of expressions that reflect the novel's era. It was crucial to capture the learners' interest at the beginning of the reading process. However, since the book was written as a series of Charlie's progress reports and the protagonist,

Charlie, has a mental disability, the first forty pages or so of the story use incorrect grammar, misspelled words and vague ideas. For EFL readers inexperienced with authentic materials, this was a challenge. Therefore, the following activity was designed for the first in-class warm-up exercise (see Figure 3).

< Warm-up Practice! >

Here are two early examples of progress reports that Charlie wrote. Read his reports and make suggestions for him to be a better writer. (Check points: spelling, punctuation, grammar and capitalization, etc.)

~~progris- riport 1 martch 3~~
Progress report March 3

Dr. Strauss says I ~~shoud~~ ^{should write} sit down what I think and ~~re-~~ ^{remember} member and ~~every thing~~ ^{everything} that happins to me from now on. I dont no why but he says its importint so they will see if they can use me. I hope they use me becaus Miss Kinnian says mabye they can make me smart. I want to be smart.

Figure 3. Activity sheet created based on page six of *Flowers for Algernon* (1961).

This activity worked well since grammatical mistakes are something Japanese learners of English might also make and Charlie’s spelling is based on sounds. Providing students with the opportunity to correct Charlie’s grammar helped them see types and patterns of mistakes. Since audio CDs were available for the story, after working on the activity, the answers were checked using the auditory CDs as listening activities.

The instructional procedures for each class (sessions 2-13) were held in the same pattern (see Figure 4). Except for forty minutes of quiet reading time, all activities were based on cooperative learning.

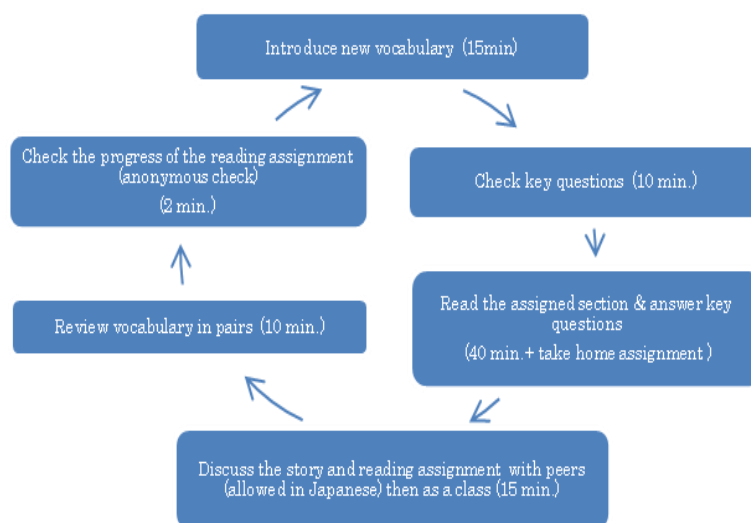


Figure 4. Instructional procedures for each lesson (sessions 2-13)

The students' progress was tracked in two ways. The first progress check took place each week in the classroom and consisted of three components. The first was an anonymous page counting check held at the beginning of the class. Each student reported by writing the page numbers he or she finished reading in the past week. The instructor then announced the highest number of pages read and the average page amount to motivate the students (see Figure 5). The second component consisted of an open style peer discussion of the story and their feelings toward the content. This discussion was allowed to take place in Japanese. The second progress check was held every four weeks. Students submitted three pieces of writing: their progress reports, a summary of the required reading section and the answers for the key question check. The reports were allowed to be written in Japanese and enabled the instructor to follow their learning process, attitudes, feelings and motivation. The answers for the key question checks (see Figure 5) were also turned in every four weeks. Assignment 1 covered units 2-4, assignment 2 covered units 5-7, assignment 3 covered units 8-10 and assignment 4 covered units 11-13.

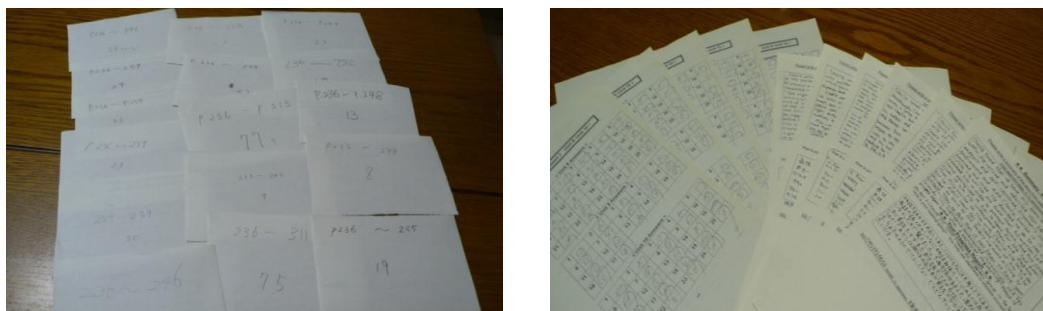


Figure 5. Anonymous page counting cards and students' progress report, summary of the reading section and answer sheet for the key questions.

The final process for the summary instruction consisted of three activities. The first part took place during session 14. The second was a written final examination based on vocabulary selected from the key vocabulary sections from each unit. The third part was the video viewing in session 15. There were two movies available based on this story. The first is *CHARLY* (1968) by American Broadcasting Companies INC, starring Cliff Robertson as Charlie, which won an Oscar in 1969. The second is *Flowers for Algernon* (1999) by Citadel Entertainment, LLC, starring Matthew Modine as Charlie. Since the former was produced closer to the time the story was written, *CHARLY* was selected.

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND THE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT

This reading project was implemented as described in the above section in two consecutive elective mandatory classes for freshmen medical students in a national university. The first year, 26 students chose to take the class as their first choice; the following year 45 students were selected through a draw. The action research evaluated the lessons based on the instructor's observations, comments from a pre-instructional questionnaire and the students' progress reports.

6.1 Session 1

In the orientation, the following questions were given in a questionnaire to examine the learners' attitude toward and experiences in English. It was conducted in Japanese. Figure 6 presents the results.

	Yes	A little	Neither	Not much	Not at all
Number of students	9	25	18	11	7
Percentile (%)	12.9	35.7	25.7	15.7	10.0

6-1. Do you like English? (n=70)

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	No answer
Number of students	38	17	5	8	2
Percentile (%)	54.3	24.3	7.1	11.4	2.9

6-2. Among the four English skills, which do you think you are good at? (n=70)

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Number of students	39	14	9	8
Percentile (%)	55.7	20.0	12.9	11.4

6-3. Among the four English skills, which do you like? (n=70)

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Number of students	21	4	32	13
Percentile (%)	30.0	5.7	45.7	18.6

6-4. Among the four English skills, which do you want to improve the most? (n=70)

	Yes	No
Number of students	6	64
Percentile (%)	8.6	91.4

6-5. Have you ever read a complete novel in English? (n=70)

	Know well	Have heard of it	Not at all familiar
Number of students	1	13	56
Percentile (%)	1.4	18.6	80.0

6-6. How familiar are you with the story of "Flowers for Algernon"? (n=70)

Figure 6. The learners' attitude toward and experiences in English learning. (n=70)

The results showed that close to half of the participants like English at least a little, over half of the students mentioned reading as their strongest skill, and although they signed up for a reading class, the majority are more interested in improving

speaking skills. Regarding reading experience, only 8.6 percent of students had completed a novel in English. A follow up interview revealed that these students had read one of the following: *King Lear*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Ann of Green Gables*, or *Twelfth Night*. Regarding familiarity with the story of *Flowers for Algernon*, 20 percent of the students were either familiar with the story or had heard of it. The end of the questionnaire had an open ended comment section. Here are some of students' comments: "I really wanted to take this class and read a novel in English, so I am very happy." "I tried to read a novel before but I gave up. I want to complete it in English this time." "I am not good at English, but I will try my best to complete this novel in English." "I want to empower my decreasing English ability since the entrance exam." "I do not have much chance to study English anymore, so I want to maintain my English ability in this class." "I hope I become interested in English through this class." "Please keep speaking in English throughout the class." Student comments showed that the learners had mixed feelings and different goals, but overall, they had a very positive attitude toward the course.

6.2 Sessions 2-4 (Reading assignments pp.1-82)

During this part in the book Charlie attended an adult literacy class and was recommended by the teacher to have a brain operation. He agreed to the operation and gradually he began to recall his past. The writing has many mistakes throughout the chapters covered. It was amazing to see the students stay focused on reading the story during individual reading time. They were so focused that the instructor felt reluctant to interrupt their reading when the class ended. Student comments represented well what was happening in their mind during this section of the project. The first assignment was due during the fifth class. Two types of comments were received in the progress report. One focused on their reading challenges and the other focused on the story line. Some of their comments were as follows: "It is extremely difficult to read. If not for the class, I would have given up. But the story is very interesting and makes me eager to find out what happens next." "I am very poor at English, but I feel very happy when I understand." "Once I am into the story, I read every day, but sometimes I lose the habit. I try to keep my pace consistent." "I feel like I lost a lot of vocabulary after the university entrance examination." "I feel my reading speed is slow, so I try to find time to catch up with everyone." "It was difficult to read the incorrect English, but it was interesting to see the authors' intention that the reader understand the gradual change of intelligence of the main character." "It was very difficult to read, but the key questions are helping me to understand the content." "Charlie's strong will to be

smart is very impressive. I feel more appreciation for what we do naturally every day.” “I did not expect Charlie to start falling in love with the teacher. It was an unexpected plot development.” “It was very painful to see Charlie being teased and experiencing violence in his surroundings.” Most of the students commented that it was difficult to read because of both the writing style and the large amount in English itself. However, although they were struggling, it was observed that they were trying hard.

6.3 Sessions 5-7 (Reading assignments pp.82-154)

In this section of the book, Charlie’s intelligence increased and he began having difficulty in his relations with people. He recalled more memories from his childhood. He began to get sick of being the professors’ research specimen and was frustrated to find that the professors did not know all the answers. He also fell in love with his teacher, Alice.

Every session’s anonymous reading page report showed that most of them read at the pace that was tentatively assigned every week, while others caught up right before the assignment was due. The progress reports and summaries of the reading section showed students’ positive and earnest engagement in the work. Even though only five to ten sentences were required for the summary, most of their work contained more and was written in tiny, neat words in the limited space. By this time, comments about the story being “difficult to read” were rare and students seemed to be enjoying the story.

6.4 Sessions 8-10 (Reading assignments pp.154-236)

In this section, Charlie’s intelligence came to a peak as did the quality of the vocabulary and sentence structures. The level of English was much higher than in the beginning. In this section of the novel, Charlie’s intelligence exceeded that of the professors. Charlie went with the professors for the presentation on his operation. He identified himself with the research mouse, Algernon, released him during the presentation and returned to New York. Based on Algernon’s decaying behavior, he discovered what his own fate will be.

The anonymous page counting cards showed that several students were reading much faster than the required pace and a few started the second reading. There was a big difference in the comments in this section. The learners’ emotions had been strongly engaged and came to a peak. Students were eager to express their feelings about the story. However, comments about the difficult content again emerged. Here are some comments from the students’ second progress reports: “It was very painful to read the section where Charlie visited his father.” “It was very painful to see the relation

with his father when he visited. I had tears while I was reading.” “I am so sorry for Charlie.” “I am looking forward to finding out what comes next.”

In addition, many students were already feeling some sense of completion when looking back at their reading as well and showed their strong desire to complete the book. “It is already more than half way through!” “I was very happy to take a look at the thickness of the book pages that I have finished reading.” “I have never read this long in English, so I am hoping this experience will lead to the future.” “My reading speed has been quite faster. I try to read without noticing the little details, then it becomes easier to grasp the main story line.” “I have almost completed the whole book! From my experience what I had able to read was a thin picture book in English, so I keep trying my best!” “Unit 8 was extremely difficult, but in unit 9, my emotions were totally into the book and I was able to read really focused and fast. It was very enjoyable. Before reading this book, I never had this experience before. I was moved to experience even written English; I can purely enjoy the content of the story.” “Difficult section, but the story’s development is very fast and so interesting.” “The story is at the climax. I would like to enjoy completing it!”

6.5 Sessions 11-13 (Reading assignments pp. 236-311)

This was the last section of the reading. The writing style gradually regressed as Charlie’s intelligence decreased. At the end, students’ comments focused on the story and how they personally related to the novel, beyond the story. “Should Charlie take the operation or not...” “I wonder if making an effect on intelligence via brain surgery is ethical or not. This story made me think a lot from this piece of work.” “Becoming smart does not always make the person happy.” “I think it was good for Charlie to be able to see the outside world and experience a lot of things.” “I was about to give up in the beginning, but later I found myself wanting to know what happened next. This book contains many elements of human life and it was a very good book.” “I am so glad to encounter this book in English.”

The following comments indicate the influence this project had on the learners. “I did it! I have a tremendous sense of completion!!” I want the challenge of reading other books, too.” “After finishing the project; I cannot believe that I completed reading this thick English novel. There were times I felt it was difficult, but when I noticed, I could not stop reading!” “Even though I am not sure if I read the details right or not, I am very happy to read my first English book.” “It was difficult in the beginning, but when I noticed, I could not stop reading.” “I was very nervous about reading a whole novel in English, but as I read I was absorbed in the story and I enjoyed reading it.” “I

feel a great achievement in finishing the book and it gave me confidence. From now on, even when I encounter books written in English, I would like to take the challenge of reading them.”

6.6 Session 14 (Skit Type Presentation and Final Examination)

As a summary activity, each student was assigned to do a pair presentation to “explain the story to his/her college friend.” This was done as a skit-type pair presentation (see Figure 6) in English with visual aids (see Figure 7).

Unit 14 Mini Presentation
(Conversation Style)

Pair up with a classmate. Use assignment sheets 1~4 and the summary sections and tell the story of Flowers for Algernon to your partner. You must include more than 8 characters when you present. You may look at the script; however, try to make eye contact with your partners during your presentation. The person who takes the role of audience needs to use role “B”.

A: Hi _____. **(Partner’s name)** How have you been?
B: I am so relieved. I just took my last final exam. I am done for the semester.
A: Congratulations! I finished my final report the day before yesterday, and am enjoying doing some reading.
B: Oh, what have you been reading?
A: I’m reading *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keys. Have you ever read it?
B: I have heard of it, but no. How do you like it? What is the story like?
A: Sure. **(Your script starts here.)**

B: Wow! That is a very interesting story. It makes us think about a lot of things.
A: **(Your comments about the book.)**

B: Thank you so much for sharing. Makes me want to read it during vacation.
A: It’s my pleasure. I can lend it to you after I finish. I have only a few more pages to go.
B: Really? That’s very kind of you. Let’s see, I will be leaving for home for vacation the day after tomorrow. Will it be O.K to pick it up at your dorm room tomorrow night?
A: Sure. That’s fine with me.
B: All right, see you tomorrow then. Take care _____! **(Your name)**
A: Thanks. You, too.

Figure 6. Presentation script for the skit

To prepare, students first completed the script presented in Figure 6. Then, they created a colored correlation chart of the story as a visual aid for the purpose of helping the presenter to explain in English and helping the audience to follow the explanation better. The students’ visual aids (see Figure 7) were very detailed and very attractive. On the same day as the presentation, the final examination was held. The content of the story and the vocabulary were already in their head; therefore they were able to explain the story without stopping for about 5 minutes without fully reading their scripts. This showed a positive attitude toward the activity.



Figure 7. Correlation chart (student work).

6.7 Session 15 (Viewing the Video)

Some students mentioned in their progress report that they were looking forward to watching the video version of the story. Even though it was all in English, the learners watched earnestly. When one scene was played, a few students took out their workbook and started checking. It was because one of the main character's genders was different in the movie. It showed that the story and the characters' images were set in their mind already. The movie ending was unexpected for them; at the moment it finished, they showed their surprise and conversation was heard in the classroom. The post-viewing questionnaire showed that all of them answered that it was good to have a chance to watch the video.

7. RESULTS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

An examination of the learners' progress reports and their committed engagement in the project suggested that project enabled students to broaden their reading experience in English. Many students commented that they would like to further their reading in English. Even though at the Japanese tertiary education level students' motivation drops in general, there are students who want to take challenge to improve their English skills. By providing a new type of learning strategy of English with Krashen's $i+1$ level of input, the learners take the initiative for further learning through the new activity and the confidence they build. Even if at a glance the course seemed way beyond their $i+1$ level, with the instructors' guidance and scaffolding, one class experience can provide the key to furthering their English learning.

As a curriculum developer, a great amount of scaffolding was required for implementation of this instruction. However, the project was still not an easy task for the learners. Out of 70 students, four did not make it to the fourth class. Most of the

learners mentioned in their first progress report that it was difficult and they were struggling. However, throughout this reading project those successful learners applied or established their own creative strategies to make this reading and learning experience more meaningful. Figure 8 presents some of the self built strategies: 8-1 shows post it bookmarks with self encouraging comments, 8-2 shows vocabulary cards from selected vocabulary lists on the handbook, 8-3 shows all the answers written in red for reviewing the vocabulary multiple times with a transparent red sheet, 8-4 shows underlining and taking notes in the text and 8-5 shows post it notes for checking unfamiliar vocabulary.



Figure 8-1



Figure 8-2

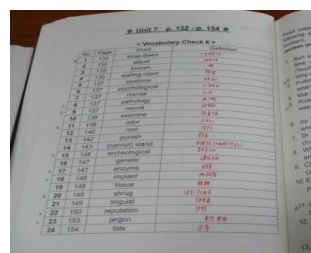


Figure 8-3



Figure 8-4

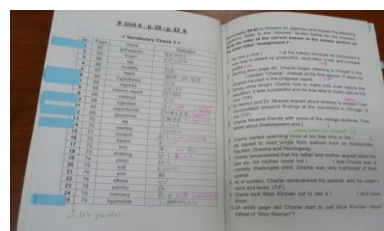


Figure 8-5

Figure 8. Samples of students' creative self built learning strategies

The following comments lead the instructor to the conclusion that the experience was very meaningful to the students. “In summary, improving my English skills came from reading extensively.” “Once I learned that I don’t have to worry about reading details, it became fun.” This is what the instructor had hoped for and more importantly, those are the main benefits of the extensive reading (ER) approach which is today’s main reading approach in the field of ESL/EFL.

Lastly, the following comments represent the power of the selected literature. “I was deeply into the story and missed the station to get off.” “I had tears in my eyes when I was reading.” “I was very surprised to feel myself getting into the story reading in English.” These students’ experiences are explained by Krashen’s (1984) Affective Filter Hypothesis. The learners’ affective filter is lowered by the power of the literature, by the scaffolding, by the learners’ creative strategies and by the learners’

strong will to complete the story in English, their second language. English did not prevent them from appreciating the content of the novel. Their mind was absorbed in the story.

8. CONCLUSION

In one semester, students devoted themselves to finishing the high amount of requirements for this class: reading an average of 26 pages every week, writing summaries and progress reports, answering around 20 comprehension questions, learning vocabulary, writing scripts for a presentation, preparing a colored correlation chart, doing a pair presentation, watching a movie and taking an examination. The success of the project was highly dependent on the students maintaining a high level of motivation and engagement throughout the semester. What kept their continued engagement was essentially the power of this novel and the instructional scaffolding that supported the learners' reading. In addition, the learners came up with and applied their way of pursuing reading, learning English and motivating themselves. Student comments showed that the learners built confidence toward the end and also suggested that based on this experience they want to further challenge themselves with more reading, which leads them to become autonomous readers of English.

It can be concluded, then, that the pedagogical goals of the project were met. Student comments referencing their emotional reaction to the story revealed that the communication of ideas was truly taking place through the novel. Ideas were communicated well enough that students were reacting emotionally to the story. Learners had also gained confidence in their English reading ability. Comments like "I cannot believe that I completed reading this thick English novel" illustrate that their English ability combined with the structured activity of the class had led them to finish the novel, thus becoming autonomous readers of English. Finally, these realizations motivated students for further English learning, as seen in comments such as "From now on, even when I encounter books written in English, I would like to take the challenge of reading them."

The third year using this instruction has now begun. More freshmen are signing up for this class each year and the 40 selected by this year's draw are again immersing themselves in the world of "Flowers for Algernon." It is the instructors' hope that this project will leave them with a positive life-long impression and will trigger in students a renewed interest not only for reading English but for overall English learning.

REFERENCES

- Bleckner, J. (Producer/Director). (1999). *Flowers for Algernon* [Motion picture]. United States: Citadel Entertainment.
- Hamada, Y. (2011). What demotivates and what prevents demotivation? *Akita University Annual Research Report on General Education*, 13, 59-67.
- Keys, D. (1959). *Flowers for Algernon*. Florida: Harcourt.
- Keys, D. (1996). *Flowers for Algernon* [CD]. Maryland: A Hights Cross Communications Company Recorded Books.
- Krashen, S. (1984). *The input hypotheses: issues and implications*. London: Longman.
- Miura, T. (2010). A retrospective survey of L2 learning motivational changes. *JALT Journal*, 32(1), 29-54.
- Nelson, R. (Producer/Director) & Seligman, S. (Executive Producer). (1968). *Charly* [Motion Picture]. United States: American Broadcasting Companies.
- Richard-Amarto, P. (1996). *Making it happen*. New York: Longman.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.