Integrating Reading and Writing Tasks in an EFL Class : A Case Study

米　田　みたか

1．Introduction

It is quite common to teach the English four skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – as separate components.　After several decades of ESL curricula that handle only one skill at a time, excluding the other skills, a trend of integrating skills has been taking place recently (Brown, 2007, p. 284).　By integrating these skills in one class, Brown claims that students can acquire "real-life integration of language skills" (p. 285) and teachers can be given "flexibility in creating interesting, motivating lessons" (p. 285).　However, to date, not enough attention has been paid to the integration of English skills in one class.　In particular, empirical studies conducted on Japanese students seem to be lacking.

In some universities in Japan where English is provided to first and second year students as a foundation course, two skills are combined and taught in an English class.　For example, the universities where I teach provide courses such as English speaking and listening, English reading and listening, or English writing and speaking.　Although the pattern of the combinations differs depending upon the universities, it seems quite common to teach two skills in an English class in Japanese universities.

In one English course for first year university students I conducted an integrated class of reading and writing, and observed the effects of the integration.　As many researchers indicate, collaborative work has been used in teaching.　In this class as well, collaborative work was employed to create a student-centered environment.　In this paper, I will present how I connected two skills and taught them in an English class, with a detailed description of the collaborative work used.　I will also present the results of an end-of-course survey that asked students for their opinions of the approach.　By doing so, I show how I taught both English reading and writing skills in one class, and hope to present one idea of how to teach integrated skills with collaborative work to other English instructors who also wish to teach these skills.

2．Literature review

2.1　Linking reading and writing

Reading and writing were taught separately in school in the 1970s, but this began to change when research on the relationship between reading and writing was conducted in the 1980s

(Tierney, 1992). Reading and writing have a strong relationship with each other. Reading is connected to writing, and reading and writing work in synergy (Tierney, 1992). Tierney and Pearson (1983) argue that reading and writing are both "essentially similar processes of meaning construction. Both are acts of composing" (p. 568). For ESL learners, Krashen believes that reading materials are an important source for the development of writing (1982). Tierney and Shanahan (1991) also demonstrate from their research that good readers are good writers, and found a correlation between these two skills. Carson and Leki point out that "reading can be, and in academic settings nearly always is, the basis for writing (1993, p. 1). Bartholomae and Petrosky (2005) explain "there is no better place to work on reading than in a writing course" (vi). Flynn (1982) explains that "through writing, students gain a fuller understanding of their reading. In all forms, writing forces readers to define ideas clearly, and so results in fuller comprehension. Writing necessitates rereading and rethinking. Material is not simply ingested; it is digested" (p. 149). Numerous researchers have thus shown the merits of connecting reading and writing.

2.2 Merits of using literature

The notion of using literature in class has been explored in many ways. Farr and Daniels (1986, p. 60) recommend a "rich and continuous reading experience, including both published literature of acknowledged merit and the work of peers and instructors" (p. 60), because ESL learners need to be motivated to learn. Further, relating to the merits created by linking reading and writing through literature, Beach and Marshall (1991) state that "reading, discussing, and writing about literature helps students to better understand what texts mean and how texts mean" (p. 17).

Hirvela (2001) also writes that a benefit of using literature in class is that "literary texts promote reading-writing connections" (p. 117). One of the reasons he states is that students can perform reading and writing activities, particularly with fiction. He claims that stories as text

> have a universal appeal and cut across all kinds of boundaries in ways that other
> kinds of text might not. Furthermore, stories have a powerful effect on people.
> Because of their imaginative nature and narrative structure, they invite their
> audience into them, and audiences respond to them. They allow readers and writers
> to adopt both roles, spectator and participant, that are central to literate acts (p. 117).

Hirvela (2001) continues to explain the merit of using literature: "While reading and writing about literature, students move beyond being spectators to being participants as well, because literature encourages us to empathize with or react against the characters who attract our attention" (p. 117).

Another benefit that is raised by many researchers about using literature for reading and writing is that it enhances critical thinking skills for EFL students (Gajdusek 1988, Gajdusek & Dommelen 1993, Oster 1989, Spack 1985). In order to read critically, students are encouraged to read into the texts deeply, and analyze them.

Hirvela (2001) concludes that literature is recommended in the reading-writing syllabus or curriculum "because its imaginative properties make possible reading-writing experiences that enhance and enrich students' academic literacy skills and that cannot easily be generated with nonliterary texts" (p. 120).

Thus, the merits of combining reading and writing and the merits of using literature in reading-writing have been researched in various situations. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) suggest writing instruction that intends to motivate learners to write, which they name the Tapestry Approach (p. 123). They believe that writing is a "collaborative, social process" (p. 123) by which learners help each other to write their own paper. By creating a learner-centered situation, they explain that learners are encouraged to read and work in a group and discuss with classmates to obtain further information about their own writing topic (p. 124). Thus, learners are encouraged to work interactively with their classmates and are led into the writing process. By setting a learner-centered situation and conducting collaborative work, this paper reports how English reading and writing were taught through literature for EFL university students whose major was not English language or literature, and suggests the implications of creating synergetic effects by teaching the integration of reading and writing in class.

3．The Study

3.1　Course description

The university which the participants of this study attend is a comprehensive university with nine undergraduate departments. In the university, freshmen are required to choose one of the following English courses each semester: listening and speaking, reading, writing, and CALL, all of which meet twice a week. The content of the English classes was composed according to three themes. The first was academic information, which meant the class content had to be related to the students' major. The second was literature, meaning that the class content had to be conducted using works of literature. The last theme was international information. In these classes, the content had to be related to themes such as international news. So, overall, there were listening and speaking classes with these themes respectively, and also reading classes with these three themes. The class for this study was a reading class with the theme of using literature.

In many university writing classes in Japan, students learn how to write an academic paper across the whole semester, taking gradual steps from practice of many different types of paragraph writing, to an essay. However, the students for this study learned to write an academic paper without going through the steps of the paragraph writing process while completing the reading tasks.

3.2 Materials

Since this class was designed for reading literature for students who were majoring in Economics and Policy Studies, a textbook was considered from the viewpoint that it should not be too literary a work, but should be accessible and something familiar to the students. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) recommend using novels written in "common vocabulary words and simple sentence structures" (p. 104) for intermediate ESL students. They also state that students tend to enjoy reading books that come with films because "their familiarity with the plot increases their comprehension of the text" (p. 104). I selected *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997) in the hope that students would be involved in the perusal of the book and in the process of moving from reading to writing smoothly. In fact, all the students in this study had either read the Japanese version of the story or watched the movie. Therefore, the emphasis was placed not on understanding the story but reading it in English. On the first day of the class, I told the students that the assessment of this class would mainly include submission of a final paper, so they should try to find a topic for the paper while reading the story. Thus the students were explicitly informed that they would learn both reading and writing in this class.

3.3 Participants

The participants in this study were 34 first year students (36 initially enrolled but 2 dropped out during the course) of a university in Japan. They were all EFL students. Their majors are Economics and Policy Studies. The university has a high standard overall in Japan and the average TOEIC IP test score of undergraduate students for the academic years of 2003 to 2006 was 544 (newsletter distributed to the students from the relevant center, 2010). These students were enrolled in this English class in the second semester of the academic year of 2008. The class met twice a week, and so there were 30 classes held.

3.4 Teaching procedure

In this class, in order to promote both writing and reading, classes were allotted roughly into two parts for reading and writing. For the procedure of reading, everyone was assigned to read one chapter per week. Then since there are 17 chapters in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), I had the students make a group of two or three and made each group in charge of one chapter, and had them present the week's chapter to the class. In the presentation, each student was required to present a summary of the chapter in English, and explain the meanings of the vocabulary they had not known. Further, each group was also required to do a little research about something related to the novel and present it to the other students so that they could deepen their understanding of the background of the novel and the culture that it

is based on.　For example, topics that the students researched included the educational system, public school, and university dormitories in the UK.　So, the reading part progressed by one chapter in each class.　After the students' presentation, discussion and some tasks usually took place.

Because the students were first year students they had never learned how to write an academic paper in English.　Therefore, for the writing part, I started teaching about the elements of a paragraph in English.　Then, toward writing an essay, the following steps were employed. These steps were conducted after the reading part finished in a class, although in some cases a whole class was used for doing one step:

1．Explaining the roles and elements of a paragraph in English writing, and how to write an essay
2．Practicing writing a paragraph
3．Explaining how to move from a paragraph to an essay
4．Brainstorming with a group (Finding a character in the story that they wanted to discuss and analyze deeply)
5．Making a mind map about the character or event they had chosen with a group of 4 to 5
6．Making an outline of an essay individually
7．Writing a first draft of an essay individually (about 800 words)
8．Feedback from the instructor
9．Peer review (writing a feedback sheet)
10.　Peer review (discussion with a group)
11.　Revising the essay

As some steps needed more information, detailed instruction given to the students in class was as follows:

In step 1, the structure of writing in English, introductory paragraph, body, and concluding paragraph were explained.　It was the first time for these students to write an essay in English. They had had an English composition class in high school, but it was mainly to translate Japanese sentences into English.　I taught them how to write a strong paragraph.　The following points were explained:

・to write a main claim, or thesis statement, in the introductory paragraph
・to write a claim, or topic sentence, in the first sentence of each paragraph, and the claim should support the main claim
・to cite parts from the book to support the claim in each paragraph (this point would lead the students to go back to the book repeatedly)

In step 4, the students made a group of four or five and chose one character or event from the book and analyzed him or her or it in their own way. All the groups chose a character and none chose an event. This is probably because the students found elements of the characters that they could identify with, as if the characters were the people around them, and they thought they wanted to look into them more deeply. The students discussed in a group who in the book they were interested in and tried to think of what kind of personality that character has.

In step 5, the students made a mind map in a group to explore their ideas on the character. In doing so, I instructed the students to make sure to find evidence for why they analyzed the character's personality in that way. For example, as Appendix 1 shows, students in this particular group tried to analyze Hermione – what kind of girl she really was – by identifying her attitudes, behaviors, and remarks. (see Appendix 1). This task, later, would be an important part of writing the essay. At this stage, the students "vicariously experience what they [the characters] do as we identify with them, and speculate on those aspects of their lives that the authors have not described for us" (Hirvela, 2001, p. 117).

In step 6, based on the mind map they created in groups, each student was told to make an outline of an essay. The outline included a main claim, supporting claims, and citations from the book to support the claims. Based on this outline, in step 7 the students wrote a first draft. After finishing the first draft, three types of feedback (steps 8 to 10) were conducted.

In step 8, I wrote feedback on each student's paper, mainly on the structure of the paper that had been explained previously; for example, whether the paper had an introduction or if the thesis statement was stated. As the purpose of this class was for students to learn to write an academic paper, the focus of my feedback was the structure of the paper.

In steps 9 and 10, two types of peer review were conducted in groups. This group was composed of different members from the ones that had done the brainstorming and mind-mapping. One type of peer review was writing a feedback sheet (see Appendix 2) in which students wrote their feedback after they had read the papers of the group. The other type was a group discussion in which each member of the group gave his or her spoken feedback on each paper of the group. The students had written their feedback in advance, so most of them gave their opinion by looking at what they had written on the feedback sheet. After discussing the feedback, the written feedback sheets were given to the writer so that he or she could revise their paper, using the feedback from their peers.

4．Results and Discussion

This paper aimed to explore two aspects: one is the synergetic effectiveness of reading and writing, and the other is the effectiveness of a writing activity treated as collaborative work (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992, p. 123). Although I had had some concerns about classroom management before the class started,because the integration of two skills, reading and writing

was the first challenge for the instructor and the students, it turned out successfully, as the class atmosphere was lively and interactive. The opinions from the students regarding this class were overall positive. The following are some of the opinions from the students: (translation from Japanese to English was done by the author)

"This was the first time to learn to write a paper in English. It was a good experience and very educational." "I had never read literature so deeply before." "In order to write a paper in English, I had to go back to the English version repeatedly, and as a result I read the English book many times." "I had to go back to the Japanese version and English version alternatively to make citations. While I was doing so, I learned the English words and expressions that match the Japanese ones." "I had thought this class would be easy because I had read the story in Japanese and knew everything that happened in the story. But because I had to write an English paper, I was forced to read the English book." As these students commented, they did go back to the book in order to write a paper. Bartholomae and Petrosky (2005) explain that

> to write about a story or essay, you go back to what you have read to find phrases
> or passages that define what for you are the key moments, that help you interpret
> sections that seem difficult or troublesome or mysterious (p. 4).

The students experienced the same process of reading and writing.

According to the questionnaires about this class on the last day of the course, out of 31 students 22 replied that they were able to have active peer feedback among the group, while two students said they did not have an active discussion, and seven students were ambivalent (three students were absent that day). Students' free writing comments included the following: (translation from Japanese to English was done by the author)

"It was good that the members of the group remarked on the points which I was not aware of." and "It was the first time to have my classmates state their opinion about my writing, which was a fresh experience."

Regarding group feedback, the students were also asked to rank its helpfulness from 1 to 4. Four indicates the highest, meaning that the group discussion was very helpful when revising. Three indicates it was helpful, two means it was not very helpful, and one indicates it was not helpful at all. Out of 31 students, 15 marked four, 14 marked three, 2 marked 2, and none marked 1 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Students' comments about the group feedback

Scales	Very helpful	Helpful	Not very helpful	Not helpful at all
Number of students (31)	15	14	2	0

For the helpfulness of the written feedback on the feedback sheet, students were asked to mark according to the same scale. Out of 31 students, 17 students marked four, which indicates that

the sheet filled in by group members was very helpful when revising the paper, 9 replied three, while 5 marked two and thought it was not very helpful and none marked one (see Table 2). The results show that the students feel that they learned from each other through the two ways of giving feedback.

Table 2. Students' comments about the written feedback

Scales	Very helpful	Helpful	Not very helpful	Not helpful at all
Number of students (31)	17	9	5	0

5. Limitations of this study

There are limitations that should be addressed here. I taught only one class, and there were only 34 students in the class. Thus, the sample size is small. There is also a need to have hard qualitative and quantitative data on the improvements gained through both the synergetic approach and collaborative learning. Further research will be expected to search for the answers to these concerns.

6. Conclusion: Implications for teaching

As noted above, integrating reading and writing using literature in an English class in university created a positive interactive and synergetic effect, as the participants' comments showed. Instead of conducting just reading tasks in reading class, setting the writing task as a goal in the class deepened the quality of the students' reading. Several reasons can be highlighted that brought good results for this class.

First, collaborative work such as brainstorming and two types of peer feedback were successful. The results of the questionnaires mentioned above show that students learned from each other by these two methods of feedback. Although some research argues that Asian students such as Japanese tend to be reluctant to make remarks on their peers' work (Mangelsdorf, 1992), the students in this class had an overall favorable attitude as the data of the questionnaire proved.

Second, although it was not my original idea to use literature in this class (the theme was assigned according to the university curriculum), the positive responses of students in the surveys show that authentic materials attracted the students' interest.

Third, in my opinion, using materials that are familiar to all the students helped students read English. It might have been a little too difficult for students at this level to read a literature book which the students did not know. The goal of this class was a focus on language rather than

the story.

Fourth, having the students write a complete paper after teaching the structure of English writing style meant that students had to read the book deeply, especially when they needed to make an appropriate citation. Aside from the factors that brought good results to this class, I would say that reading an English book from beginning to end, which was the first time the students had done something like this, has given them confidence as well as a sense of achievement in English learning. This is something I hope the students will use to keep themselves motivated to read further in English.

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) state that "while the research indicates that reading can lead to improved writing skills, there is no evidence that this improvement is automatic" (p. 122). They continue by saying that "to improve their writing ability, students must *do* something with the reading" (p. 122). There is a lot of room for instructors to think of what they can do for students to improve their skills for future work, but it is certain that synergetic effects can be expected with the integration of reading and writing skills.

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Appendix
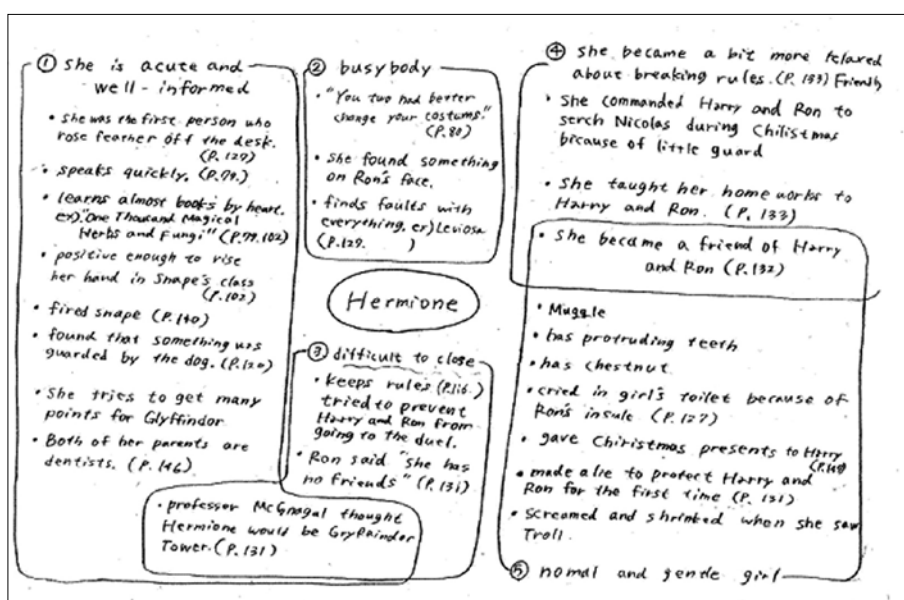
Appendix 1

Peer Feedback

Checklist

Title **Hermione's Change**

1. Introduction（導入部）、Body（本論）、Conclusion（結論部）の3つのパートがありますか。

   6段落構成で Introduction, Body, conclusion に
   きちんと分かれていると思います。

2. Introduction について

   A 自分の意見（Topic statement/Thesis statement/Main claim/Main point）が書かれていますか。
   最後にきちんと書かれていると思います。
   B これからどんなことを書くのか紹介されていますか。全体の流れを予告していますか。
   順序よくまとめてあって BODY で詳しく説明しようとすることが
   わかるのでとても良いと思います

3. Body について

   A 各パラグラフに topic sentence が書かれていますか。

   全てのパラグラフの一番初めに書かれている。

   B 各パラグラフに topic sentence をサポートする例や分析・解釈が書かれていますか。
   各パラグラフに 1〜2 の topic sentence にそった例を用いて
   いる。
   C topic sentence をサポートする例として他に挙げられる箇所があれば、教えてあげてください。
   全てのパラグラフにしっかりと例が書かれていて他に特には
   必要はないと思う。

4. Conclusion について

   A Body で書いたことをまとめて、結論を出していますか。

   簡単にかつ簡潔にまとめている。

5. 全体として、書き手の意見は説得力があったと感じましたか。
   うまくまとめてあってとても説得力があったと思う。

6. その他、何でも気がついたことがあれば、書いてください。
   細かいことはわかりませんが、文章の構成や読みやすさといった点では
   すばらしくとても参考になった。そのままでも十分良いと思う。

Appendix 2