

## Inside English Workshop : the Integration of Four Language Skills

Joyce M. Taniguchi

In English Workshop classes all four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing were taught in an integrated way so that students might have the opportunity to use English meaningfully. This course afforded students the opportunity to really put into practice what they have been studying. As Sharwood-Smith (1981) said,

In the course of actually performing in the target language, the learner gains the necessary control over its structures such that he or she can use them quickly without reflection (1981 : 166).

With this purpose in mind, a thematic approach was taken to enlist students actively so that they would be using English as a tool rather than as the object of study.

The teacher's main goal in such a class was to help students gain communicative competence which means that students can use the language effectively and appropriately. Secondary goals were "...to introduce concepts and terminology relevant to a given subject area, to reinforce content-area information learned elsewhere, and to teach specific learning strategies for writing, reading or general study via the means of interesting content..."(Scarcella, 1992, 89). The theme

chosen was the choices women make in their everyday lives. This theme was the predominant area of study for EWS 1 and for the first term of EWS 2. The range of topics included self-awareness of attitudes and values, career interests with attention given to job hunting, marriage and family life within Japan and in other cultures. Issues relevant to each area were explored.

In the latter part of EWS 2 students began to explore their roles as citizens of the larger world by looking at issues such as the environment and world peace.

First year students began by exploring the choices they found a character, Belle, to have made in the popular film "Beauty and the Beast." As they watched they were to keep track of at least 6 important decisions Belle made within the film story. They were also to take note of at least 4 unimportant decisions and decide how these seemingly unimportant things, such as deciding to go to dinner or not to go to dinner also played a part in the over-all outcome of Belle's life-story. Watching the film, taking notes, having discussions about these decisions with classmates and finally writing a report ensured that all of the language skills were used by everyone in the class.

Students were then encouraged to make connections between the film and this kind of decision making in their own lives. A part of my feedback to them after viewing the film included the following :

For example, at age almost 20, you are mainly working as students. Still, this is not all of your life. You decide whether or not to join a club or circle here at this school or even at another campus. You decide whether to take other kinds of lessons, such as piano or English conversation or learn to

drive. Perhaps you are thinking about a part-time job or you already have one. Perhaps you see yourself as not getting enough exercise and decide to play tennis or go jogging several times a week. Even deciding to walk to the station or not can have an influence in your overall life. After all good health is important and doesn't just influence this life stage, but your future as well....realize that even the small things a person does each day adds up to become a life.

As homework students were reading and answering questionnaires about their own attitudes and values. These questionnaires, a part of their text, Choices: A Teen Woman's Journal for Self-Awareness and Personal Planning, provided students an opportunity to gain further knowledge about their own life choices as well as help them realize the variety of possibilities open to all as they live and learn. Students would discuss their choices with others and gain further awareness that not all think in the same way nor do they make the same choices.

Language study was of secondary importance, a kind of minor motif, but was still an important aspect of EWS class work. Teacher feedback on spoken and written work was vital, vocabulary study aided the film watching and reading, and different strategies were explored for reading improvement especially. Students worked hard to find the main points of reading materials, learned how to make a simple outline for writing purposes in particular, and learned how to express their opinions clearly and concisely for spoken and written purposes.

In the second term students were asked to interview persons who

took care of them as babies and/or young children so as to learn more about the role of parenting. A partial example of one student's history is given to demonstrate the kinds of information students learned about themselves. This student's material came from her mother's diary kept from her babyhood :

three months : Sometimes I let out a laugh.

five months : I often get up early, and I shouted briskly,  
for example, "Ah" and "Ki".

six months : I crawl around the room.  
I am cutting my teeth.

... one year 1 month : I play by myself.

... : I try to eat everything by myself, and I eat  
with my fingers.

... : I can walk. (I take twelve steps forward)

... My parents couldn't play much with me because they had to take care of their four children. My grandmother and grandfather helped to take care of us. My father gave children a bath two by two.... (from "My History" by Ayano Kanbara, Nov. 1996).

After students compiled a brief history of their babyhood, they were to answer questions about what parents were to teach their children and how parents should discipline their children at different life stages ranging from babyhood to adolescence. The following excerpt is from a report written by another first year student :

"Basically, I want to bring up my children like my parents. To begin with, I will bring up my children by using common sense as I discipline them. I want to bring up by children so that they will have self-confidence. For that purpose, I'd let my children do as they like

with lessons, and I'd let them do or have what they need in order to let them do well. I'd praise children when they do good work. I want to bring up by children so that they have their own opinions and say what they want to say. For that purpose, I'll listen to my children. I want to bring up my children so that they have tender hearts. For that purpose, I hope they can have brothers and sisters. I also want them to keep a pet. I want to bring up my children so that they are full of vitality. For that purpose, I won't let my children go to cram school while they are children. I won't let them only study, but have them go outside. School might become the center of their lives, but I want them to know their family is their greatest support when they have painful experiences." (Taken from Rumi Yokoyama's report, Nov. 1996).

Students in EWS 2 were concerned with their immediate futures. Students considered job choices, more schooling either of a vocational type or transferring to a university, or study abroad, and more about marriage. Role playing helped to explore these choices in practice job interviews, for example, as well as use of documentary films which showed examples of sexual harassment in both the U. S. and Japan. Students took notes and discussed what they saw in the films and wrote an essay about their reactions in which they expressed their opinions. Students gained awareness not only of their own choices but also the variety of possibilities which their classmates were exploring. The real world entered our classroom as students went out for actual job interviews and discussed what happened in these interviews. Plus, students heard a lecture from a young career woman who had studied abroad. She spoke to the students in English

but was quite willing to translate for them or to answer any of their questions in Japanese. Her experiences taught them about the difficulties they might expect to encounter as well as helped them to aspire towards their dreams.

In the latter part of the year, students turned their attention as to ways they might act in their roles as future citizens of the world. In class two films were shown, "A Man Who Planted Trees" and excerpts from the film "Ghandi". Students were asked to take notes and consider how the two films differed and how they were alike. Students came to see that problems evident in both films were complex and touched on issues related to economics (the poor and the rich, the environment (enough resources or inadequate ones and how to change that), politics, race and/or religion. At the same time, students could see via the films that one person's life can make an important difference in the world.

Students read materials which taught them about problems such as ethnocentrism which can blind people from clearly understanding one another. They read newspaper articles and analyzed the problems presented--What kinds of issues were involved in this problem? What kinds of solutions might be possible? One such issue explored was the situation of U.S. bases on Okinawa with students exploring the many factors involved in this complex issue. They brought in their own articles and explored other issues with their classmates. Finally, outside of class, students chose one trouble spot in the world and explored the issues involved historically as well as present day problems. They then were asked to write an imaginative and yet possible solution as a neutral peacemaker to the problems involved.

The following is from one student's report on the problem of The Northern Territories, disputed islands between Japan and the Soviets.

"We have to seek ways of solving the northern territorial issue so that the two nations can be satisfied. ...It is essential that the Kuril Islands should be demilitarized zones and they should have joint control of the islands between Japan and Russia. ...The Russians have been thrown into confusion because of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Republics, so Japan should not only claim rights to the four islands, but also seek ways of solving problems by giving economic aid to Russia. We need to understand each other and not only think about national sentiments. Perhaps if Japan carried out economic development there, the Russians could then bear giving up the Kuril Islands...we should not forget the fact that Russians live on the four islands. Both the Japanese and the Russians should be able to come and go as they like and live there impartially...

"There is something we can do one by one. It takes a long time to settle the issue politically because of each party's self interest, so we should not depend only on politics. How can peaceful coexistence come about?...These are only from my imagination :

"I think one idea is to have events and entertainment to promote interchange between Japan and Russia.

"At school teachers should teach both the Japanese and Russian languages, and of course, students learn the history of both, too.

"The Japanese and Russians should make an effort to maintain peaceful coexistence. Someday the constant endeavors will bear fruit." (An excerpt from Rie Imai's report which included five

references which she used to write her report).

EWS 2 students used a variety of language skills and critical thinking skills in order to complete their assignments. As students considered their reports on trouble spots, several wrote as follows: "...we don't have to follow other's opinions or thoughts without our own thinking... I think having courage is important. I learned this." (Yukako Kohno.) "People can't live alone, for we all need each other. As we live, we need to recognize the strong and weak points of each other." (Yoshiko Kimura, Dec. 1996.)

The results of the EWS classes cannot easily be delineated, for a range of topics were explored with many different kinds of learning taking place, including the study of English as a language. Hopefully learning went on which was of a kind to promote real development as a second language learner as suggested by Ellis :

How then do learners achieve control (over language)? The answer lies in meaning-focused instruction. This provides the conditions the learner needs to activate those procedures that are responsible for both automatizing knowledge and for compensating for lack of it. In order to develop control the learner needs to practise in 'real operating conditions'. Only in this way will the learner develop the strategic abilities needed to perform her competence accurately and fluently (Ellis, 1990, pg. 192)

English Workshop was the place for putting it all together and using English.



**References**

- Ellis, Rod (1990). *Instructed second language acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scarcella, R.C. & Oxford, R. L. (1992). *The tapestry of language learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Sharwood-Smith, M. (1981). "Consciousness-raising and the second language learner." *Applied linguistics* II. 159-69.