

Reading to Learn in a Content-Based EFL Program

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【Abstract】

In 2021, a new CUBE Accelerated Language and Academics (CALA) elective program of study for ambitious and highly motivated language learners was instituted in the Hirao School of Management, Konan University. As part of the CALA Academic Foundations I (AF-I) course for incoming freshmen, part of the materials designed for the course adopted some Reading to Learn (R2L) strategies (Rose, 2011). This paper gives an overview of developments in using R2L in the program so far and considers expanding its use further.

【Keywords】

Content-Based Instruction (CBI), CUBE Accelerated Language and Academics (CALA), Genre Pedagogy, Reading to Learn (R2L)

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1. What is Reading to Learn (R2L)?

R2L (Rose, 2020) is based on Halliday's (1993) work on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and the teaching of written genres (Rothery, 1994). According to Rose (2020), "R2L is a set of strategies that enable teachers to support all students in their classes to read and write at the levels they need to succeed." Expanding on genre-based pedagogy, with its emphasis on the close connection between reading and writing and familiarization with text types, R2L pays particular attention to reading in preparation for other study and so can be said to provide a greater level of support for those learners for whom reading is a struggle (Rose, 2011). The CUBE English program as a whole already features a model of content-based instruction (CBI) (Jones & Palmer, 2012) supported by genre-based pedagogy and systemic functional grammar. The new CALA course leans more towards a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) version of CBI, with explicit instruction in the vocabulary of both the New General Service List (NGSL) and New Academic Word List (NAWL) as well as close alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the '4 Cs' of content, communication, cognition and culture (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). R2L is characterized by its concentration on classroom interactions and the models it provides for reading across subjects.

2. Why is it proposed?

Students who are preparing for overseas academic study are held back by their critical reading and writing skills in their first language (L1) and not only by their second language (L2) proficiency. Despite a common belief that listening and speaking (more than reading and writing) are a weak link for Japanese students, there is little evidence to support that position (Mulvey, 2016). Whereas popular constructivist methodologies (e.g. the Communicative Approach) tend to support individual creativity, they downplay the role of explicit language instruction, and this is of critical importance when literacy skills are weak. The knock-on effect for students in foreign language environments, who require more scaffolding than that offered by process writing from personal experience or reading comprehension tasks, is that they are not receiving the support they so badly need. R2L's focus on reading is a remedy for this. A further common belief (or myth), and compelling reason for proposing R2L, is the notion that EFL learners have to go overseas to attain mastery of the target language. It is as if gaps in the educational intervention cannot be filled:

Contrary to popular judgements of classrooms as severely impoverished environments for any language learning, the instructed setting may in fact be a particularly beneficial, even necessary environment for the attainment of advanced capacities. This stands on its head long-standing beliefs about immersion or study abroad settings being nearly the only way to reach advancedness... the operative factor may not so much be location, i.e., study abroad versus continued study in the home country, as the nature and breadth of learning opportunities. Such opportunities would include a carefully considered range of texts that would make certain situated textual demands on the learners...

Byrnes (2006: pp.2-3)

Ultimately, it is the exposure to and reading of whole texts (Byrnes, 2006) that is key here, since L2 learners are only likely to be accepted into the L1 English-speaking community when judged by their ability to produce a written text themselves, such as a biography (recount genre) or a set of instructions (procedure genre) or an original story (narrative genre). An instructional program can and should fill in the gaps in language proficiency. A needs analysis and proficiency check can reveal which areas of English require work for each individual, and students can be directed to appropriate areas to work on as identified by the CEFR descriptors and can-do statements. Students need the resources of spoken English and, furthermore, they need to be able to apply those resources. Process writing does not teach them what they need to know (Rose and Martin, 2012).

R2L is proposed as the explicit teaching of literacy, as found in genre-based reading and writing, applied to the teaching of language in all areas of study in the curriculum.

3. What is it replacing?

For most instructors, effective teaching means using what is available among the various approaches to language teaching, to find the best possible way to help all students have a meaningful experience as a learner and achieve desired outcomes. Thus an approach that takes the best of the syllabus models is extremely helpful. A basic overview of the kinds of syllabuses which exist is to be found in Feez (1998). It can be summarized in the following table:

Syllabus	Common Features
structural	A belief that by constructing the language from building blocks of grammar and vocabulary, language learners can attain mastery of a language as a whole
situational	A belief that learners should focus primarily on the survival English needed for travel, practicing simple exchanges in common settings using formulaic language
topic-based	A belief that discussion of a topic may lead learners into new areas of language while recycling what they already know in each new context
functional-notional	A belief that functions and notions are useful for learners (while not so controversial, it should be noted that the sheer number of them may make decisions on which to include and exclude and how to sequence them challenging for the instructor)
process	A belief in an activity-focused approach in which the direction of the course is negotiated with the learners themselves, the process of language learning foregrounded and the outcomes backgrounded (due to its assumptions, it may work best with highly-motivated students who are extremely proficient in their L1 and comfortable with open-ended tasks typical of learning in the Western world)
task-based or procedural	Another belief (see process syllabus, above) in activities and tasks, focusing on the process more than the outcomes, communication and interaction being highly valued, and generally setting aside the building of content knowledge
mixed	A belief in making a needs analysis the basis for integrating elements of grammar, vocabulary, topics, notions, activities and tasks

Table 1: Some Common Syllabuses (adapted from Feez, 1998)

R2L broadly fits into the definition of a text-based syllabus, which would place it in the mixed syllabus category in the above chart. A text-based syllabus (Feez, 1998) involves an explicit teaching approach to language, whether spoken or written; makes overt reference to the place of language within society, with an awareness of purpose and audience; and, especially in R2L, since expressing meaning satisfies a social requirement for the learner, a focus on guided practice (such as reading in preparation for study to which Rose (2011) refers) is key.

4. How was R2L guided instruction piloted?

The design of materials for the new CALA AF-I course took place as a collaborative effort by three instructors prior to the spring semester of 2021. Following a guided instruction practice led by the instructor, one of the culminating activities was for four teams of students to lead their own guided practice activity for their classmates. Student struggles in completing the assignment were anticipated but overall the idea of guided instruction was to make the task achievable. Post-task, the ‘washback effect’ would ideally identify areas the students did not know or understand about language and text structure, gaps in the instructional cycle that may not have been adequately explained or covered in class (especially given the fact that the instructor was new to R2L), or else potential flaws in the design of the materials or teaching approach. One factor exacerbating the challenges of implementing guided instruction was a lockdown necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning that the AF-I class in the study was taught online.

The pilot study was set up using materials designed by Rose (2018). There were several adjustments that had to be made to the materials, with one being the need to create a downloadable worksheet appropriate to the online environment of emergency remote teaching (ERT). One more change was to flesh out the instructions to make them easy and comprehensible for the students and teachers in the program. The teacher notes with the worksheet are included (below) as Appendix 1. For the reading passage, the instructors tried to stay faithful to those provided in the study materials dealing with the Water Cycle. The booklet itself, described as Teacher Resource Book 1: Preparing for Reading and Writing (Rose, 2018) looked at first sight to be fairly comprehensive, but even so the format (similar to a photocopiable resource book) had some printing mistakes, meaning that certain important parts of the lesson planning steps and teacher notes were abbreviated or missing. For an instructor fully cognizant of R2L, it is likely that those gaps would be easy to fill in, but on this occasion none of the instructors had any experience in teaching this kind of lesson. The text below (provided by Rose, 2018) was used for guided instruction:

The Water Cycle

Water is found in many different forms on Earth and is constantly moving from one place to another. As it moves it changes state in cycles, from liquid water, to water vapour, sometimes to ice, and back to liquid again.

The Sun evaporates from the surface of rivers, lakes and streams, and from the soil. This change from liquid water to vapour is called evaporation. Other water vapour comes from trees and other plants through the process of transpiration.

Winds may carry this water vapour high into the atmosphere where it can become so cold that it forms clouds, which consist of tiny droplets of liquid water. The change from vapour to liquid is known as condensation.

When clouds become saturated, the water falls as rain or even hail or snow. This is known as precipitation. Precipitation returns water to the land where it can seep into groundwater, or flow into streams and rivers.

Some water may have travelled thousands of kilometres, or some may have returned straight back to an ocean or lake where the Sun's heat once more causes evaporation. In this way the cycle starts again and the pattern can be repeated. These changes are known as the water cycle.

Source: Rose (2018) Teacher Resource Book 1: Preparing for Reading and Writing

This kind of genre is an explanation of a natural phenomenon. A basic explanation like this involves the elements of a report containing factual information together with pointers towards how and/or why natural processes occur. The role of the instructor was to go through a worked example with the class. Students were then asked to find their own related articles of about 200 words in length after class, and in later classes they would present some of these in their groups. An analysis of the text using a word profiler (see Appendix 1) reveals that 90% of the words are in the CEFR levels A1 to B2, with the majority of those words at the easier (A1) end of the spectrum. Just under 10% of the words looked to be new or extremely challenging for the students, being either C2 or off list. Those words were highlighted at the lesson planning stage and formed part of the focus of the five instructional stages in the lesson: (i) background and overview; (ii) paragraph-by-paragraph reading; (iii) rewriting from notes; (iv) using notes; and (v) extension. The following paraphrases some of the key points provided in Book 1 (Rose, 2018). Before the text is read aloud, the instructor provides (i) the background knowledge which students need to understand the text and the task. The teacher also uses an additional strategy, namely, giving a step-by-step summary of the reading. This means that students are subsequently able to grasp the meaning of the text when it is read aloud, without being overloaded by new words or complex ideas. Students are given a diagram of the water cycle which they are directed to label with the words ocean, lakes, rivers, sun, evaporation, condensation, precipitation groundwater, while repeating key terms. Next, the instructor breaks the text up into (ii) paragraphs. The reading of each paragraph is preceded by a preview of it, students follow along as it is read aloud, and then key words and ideas are highlighted and discussed in class. The discussion is initiated by using concept questions that check understanding, such as asking what the word for 'solid water' is in order to elicit the response 'ice' in the first paragraph. Highlighted words are written on the board (iii) while students take it in turns to dictate from the board and to write their notes. (This stage became particularly challenging to teach online.) During this collaborative process, attention is drawn to chunks of language, such as 'constantly moving' in paragraph 1, as well as individual items like 'vapour.' The notes are labeled with the help of the instructor, to make it clear that this text is an explanation: it has a phenomenon stage, which is telling the reader that the subject to be discussed is the water cycle; and an explanation stage, which outlines the events of the water cycle in sequence. In the joint construction (iv), the notes on the board are used by students to organize the information from the text into new sentences. As an extension activity (v), students can be asked to write a new text of their own which must differ from the text they wrote jointly (Rose, 2018).

Following the guided reading, in the next class students sourced their own texts of a similar length and difficulty, and were assigned to groups. They were directed to websites which contained materials of a similar type and were not too intimidating for them. Each of the four groups examined the texts in detail and chose one each to use for their own presentation of a guided reading. The subjects they selected were rainbows, photosynthesis, storms, and pollination. The particular student example here is a reading taken from a popular website:

Flowers are an important part of many plants. Plants use flowers to make other plants – to reproduce. Flowers have special parts, called stamens and pistils. When pollen from the

stamen finds its way down through the pistil, the flower is pollinated, and seeds start to grow. The seeds eventually find their way to the ground, the seeds sprout, and more plants are born.

Plants have all different styles of flowers. Some flowers have patterns on them that guide bees and other insects to the pollen. Wheat flowers are long and stringy, so when the wind blows, pollen can float easily from stamen to pistil. Some flowers even smell like rotting meat to attract flies. The flies land, pick up pollen on their legs, and dust some of it onto the flowers' pistils. Although flowers have different shapes, colors, and smells, all flowers make seeds to keep the plant population growing.

<https://www.billnye.com/the-science-guy/flowers>

5. Discussion

Regarding the background and overview, student groups were able to design accurate and helpful diagrams to facilitate understanding. Instructors to a certain extent and students to a larger extent struggled with setting the context and providing sufficient background. It is hard to determine exactly how much background information is enough, but more questions to generate interest in the topic and make connections between the learners' prior knowledge and the reading would not go amiss. Significantly, all students found the previewing strategy challenging, and failed to provide an adequate step-by-step summary prior to reading that was comprehensive enough. This would indicate that instructors need to prepare their learners to preview and summarize much more carefully. Concerning the paragraph-by-paragraph reading, students were able to generate several appropriate questions, though they sometimes failed to check the accuracy of the language they used in them. Not all of the main points, such as new items of vocabulary and unfamiliar subject matter in the reading, were comprehensively covered. This could be easily rectified if students prepared their materials in a timely fashion, worked effectively as a group to check understanding of the passage, and submitted the materials to the instructor for checking before class. As for rewriting from notes, student groups were unable to lead a discussion on the board due to being online and in remote locations. As a way to work around this, instructors proposed that each member of the group leading the presentation that day should host a Breakout Room session within Zoom. However, Breakout Rooms were no substitute for face-to-face joint construction with the whole class working in consort. Once everyone came back together into the main Zoom meeting, it was necessary for the instructor to take the lead in checking that students had made effective notes, but due to the practical difficulties of being online there was a great variance in the notes. Furthermore, precisely how to take notes revealed itself as an impediment, and for this reason using notes ended up as a controlled activity led by the instructor rather than by the students. Looking more closely at the student notes, unfamiliar words were correctly identified, but little or no use had been made of a vocabulary profiler to identify chunks of language which gave cohesion to the text as a whole. It was clear that students needed more training in using a profiler as well as the grammatical function of words in chunks. This was to be expected, as it was new to them and demanded more attention to the function of grammar in the text than they were used to. Hence for both stages of note taking, rewriting from notes and using notes, it would appear that in L2 environments greater note-taking preparation is necessary and face-to-face instruction is desirable. Reading more texts of a similar type and identifying the function of words in each genre before the task would also help to build knowledge of the field. In the pilot study, the extension activity was set aside until the next round of instruction, and will form part of the recommendations. Early results are encouraging: learners in this preliminary study were not overwhelmed by selecting texts, providing background and an overview, or paragraph-by paragraph reading, and found the stages to be useful in building their knowledge of the L2. However, instructors will need to put more thought into planning for online instruction, and preparing students to succeed in using notes effectively.

6. Limitations of the study

Learners who took part in the study were generally of a higher proficiency than average within the CUBE English program, and had opted into the CALA program. It can be assumed therefore that the students who participated are of a high motivation and able to cope with the demands of sourcing and digesting English language materials, identifying key terms, and working individually and as a group to present that material in a comprehensible way to their classmates. Although the initial teacher-led task involved guided instruction, when students were asked to find their own readings and present them to their classmates it became a more open-ended and less guided task. This is by no means a straightforward challenge and not one to subject lower proficiency learners in the program to. In addition, the program could not expect part-time instructors to handle such a course given the demands on teacher time and the amount of training required. That being said, it is evident that with the right materials, the right instruction, and the right students, guided instruction inherent in R2L is a promising path to pursue.

7. Concluding Remarks and Next Steps/Recommendations

The study set out to consider whether R2L and its guided reading instruction is an appropriate instructional aim for the CALA course, and early indications are that it is a step in the right direction; yet it is evident that a much greater level of guided instruction than offered in this study is necessary to bring out the best in the students. The R2L materials (Rose, 2018) contain seven books, and this study limited itself to the use of materials from the first book. Instructors require more training and experience in developing the materials and handling these kinds of lessons. Learners require greater training in previewing strategies as well as summarizing and note taking. Teaching online puts an additional strain on instructors and students, and it makes carrying out joint construction as a whole class extremely hard, limiting the effectiveness of note taking strategies and constraining the ability to complete the extension stage. Going forward, the aim is to familiarize more instructors in the program with R2L, while developing in-house reading materials and lesson plans. A move back to face-to-face instruction is also proposed to improve the effectiveness of the teaching.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Teacher Notes and Worksheet

CALA AF-I Module 4

Water Cycle Worksheet

Step 1: Background and Overview

Open file 25.1

Listen and follow the instructions as you look at the diagram.

“This text is about the water cycle. Water moves through the environment, and changes from liquid to gas and back to liquid again. The diagram shows how water moves through the environment.”

Label the ocean, lake, river, Sun.

“In oceans, lakes and rivers, water is liquid. When the Sun heats this water, it becomes a gas. When water becomes a gas it is called vapour. Turning liquid water into vapour is called evaporation.”

Above the ocean, write the word evaporation. Can everyone pronounce it?

“As the water vapour rises, it becomes cold. Then it turns into liquid water again. This is called condensation. Clouds are made of tiny drops of water that is condensed into liquid.”

On the cloud, write the word condensation. Can everyone pronounce it?

“When the water drops in clouds become too heavy, they fall as rain, hail or snow. This is called precipitation.”

Label the rain and snow. Can everyone say precipitation?

“When water falls on the ground, it runs down rivers, or under the ground as groundwater.”

Label the groundwater.

Now read through the whole text by yourself.

Step 2: Paragraph-by-paragraph reading

First, listen as the teacher (or classmate) gives a preview of paragraph 1.

The first paragraph tells us that water does two things on the Earth. It moves from place to place and it changes its state, from liquid to vapour and back to liquid.

Water is found in many different forms on Earth and is constantly moving from one place to another. As it moves it changes state in cycles, from liquid water, to water vapour, sometimes to ice, and back to liquid again.

Discussion

What are the 3 states of matter? _____

What is water gas called? _____

What is solid water called? _____

Preview of paragraph 2

This paragraph tells us how water is evaporated and where it comes from.

The Sun evaporates from the surface of rivers, lakes and streams, and from the soil. This change from liquid water to vapour is called evaporation. Other water vapour comes from trees and other plants through the process of transpiration.

Discussion

Besides water surfaces, where does the Sun evaporate from? _____

How does the writer explain evaporation? _____

What is water vapour from trees and plants called? _____

Preview of paragraph 3

This paragraph tells us how water vapour is condensed when it rises high in the air.

Winds may carry this water vapour high into the atmosphere where it can become so cold that it forms clouds, which consist of tiny droplets of liquid water. The change from vapour to liquid is known as condensation.

Discussion

How do winds help to form clouds? _____

What are clouds made of? _____

What is the word that describes vapour becoming liquid? _____

Preview of paragraph 4

This paragraph tells us how water falls when the clouds become too full.

When clouds become saturated, the water falls as rain or even hail or snow. This is known as precipitation. Precipitation returns water to the land where it can seep into groundwater, or flow into streams and rivers.

Discussion

Why does water fall as rain? _____

What is the technical word for rain, hail and snow? _____

What happens as a result of precipitation? _____

Preview of paragraph 5

This paragraph tells us what happens after water falls.

Some water may have travelled thousands of kilometres, or some may have returned straight back to an ocean or lake where the Sun's heat once more causes evaporation. In this way the cycle starts again and the pattern can be repeated. These changes are known as the water cycle.

Discussion

Does all water travel a long way?

What happens to water in an ocean or lake?

Why do we call all these changes a cycle?

Step 3: Rewriting from notes

Rewrite the following in your own words. Then compare in Breakout Rooms.

different forms	_____
constantly moving	_____
one place to another	_____
changes state	_____
evaporation	_____
through the process of	_____
transpiration	_____
high into the atmosphere	_____
which consist of	_____
tiny droplets	_____
condensation	_____
saturated	_____
precipitation	_____
seep into	_____
groundwater	_____
flow into	_____
returned straight back to	_____
in this way	_____
the cycle starts again	_____
the pattern can be repeated	_____

Step 4: Using notes. Explain the water cycle to your partners using your own notes on this page. Then rewrite the water cycle in sentences using your notes and those of your partners.

Step 5: Extension. Now write a complete new text on the water cycle, using the sentences above. Try to improve on the original water cycle text!Activity 4 and

Assignment: Group Task for Student-Generated Topics and Themes

Today’s text was only about 200 words long. Your task this week is to find a factual text of about the same length on a natural phenomenon that interests you. The text should *explain the facts* as today’s class text did. Your text should contain some technical words that you will be able to teach your classmates. The subject matter should be something that interests you.

If you think back to the module on education, poverty and health, there was a text explaining **the relationship between education and poverty** (Module 1, 06.2). That reading was about 800 words long: you need to find something shorter than that for this activity. In the module on societal change, the article explaining **automation** (Module 2, 2.02a) was about 200 words long. That kind of text length would be ideal for this activity.

Next time, you will be working on your own text in class, so please be sure to bring a text to class to share. In this module, you will be helping your classmates to understand the texts deeply.

Full text

The Water Cycle

Water is found in many different forms on Earth and is constantly moving from one place to another. As it moves it changes state in cycles, from liquid water, to water vapour, sometimes to ice, and back to liquid again.

The Sun evaporates from the surface of rivers, lakes and streams, and from the soil. This change from liquid water to vapour is called evaporation. Other water vapour comes from trees and other plants through the process of transpiration.

Winds may carry this water vapour high into the atmosphere where it can become so cold that it forms clouds, which consist of tiny droplets of liquid water. The change from vapour to liquid is known as condensation.

When clouds become saturated, the water falls as rain or even hail or snow. This is known as precipitation. Precipitation returns water to the land where it can seep into groundwater, or flow into streams and rivers.

Some water may have travelled thousands of kilometres, or some may have returned straight back to an ocean or lake where the Sun's heat once more causes evaporation. In this way the cycle starts again and the pattern can be repeated. These changes are known as the water cycle.

Vocabulary profiler

Water is found in many different forms on Earth and is constantly moving from one place to another. As it moves it changes state in cycles, from liquid water, to water vapour, sometimes to ice, and back to liquid again.

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A1	67%
A2	10%
B1	9%
B2	4%
C1	0%
C2	1%
Off list	8%