

## A new approach to reading/ discussion focused language learning

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### The problem of English language tertiary education in Japan

On hearing that Japanese students entering tertiary education have completed more than 1000 hours of formal English language study an outsider to Japan might conclude that these students would be able to process and understand all manner of English language material from everyday speech to newspapers and novels. However, despite lengthy and comprehensive studies of grammar, vocabulary and *yakudoku* translation, the evidence suggests most students in Japan lack the skills fundamental to effective language production (Gorsuch, 1998).

To make language skills operational assumes a strong grasp of lower order lexis. This should include a strong foundation in vocabulary (Nation, 2006), a working knowledge of grammar, as well as associated cultural knowledge and other paralinguistic skills (Elley, 1991). However, students in Japan have not been afforded much opportunity to practice language at secondary school level, and have had little exposure to language in its wider cultural context. Instead, the majority of students acquire a skewed language knowledge profile that highlights details and passive skills over active and global aspects of the language reducing the likelihood of building a strong basis for language communication. Part of this problem may be explained by the university entrance exams – which require advanced translation skills but lack practical application – ensuring that secondary school students rarely consolidate lower order language skills, or develop a pleasure reading habit (Guest, 2008). Furthermore, free discussion, debate and critical thought are rarely tested in such examinations and thus students enter university with few of the skills considered to be important for the world beyond academia. This set of circumstances has created a well understood problem in language teaching; university students with high order grammar and translation skills but poorly developed discussion and thinking skills.

In a bid to rectify this situation and make English more communicative and relevant to the real world, the adoption of simplified language text books in Japanese universities has been widespread over the past 20 years. Many argue however that this has been unsuccessful in making English more practical. This is because simplification – or perhaps more critically, ‘dumbing down’ – has tended to dilute content and lower the bar of language complexity rather than raise students’ discussion capabilities. The result has been *de facto* remedial lessons of secondary school standard in a university setting (Mori, 2002) which de-motivate students

(Agawa et al., 2011). Based on the fact that some 29 research papers presented at the 2010 Japan Association for Language Teachers Conference focused on motivation it is clear this problem is pervasive in L2 instruction throughout Japan (JALT, 2010).

### New approaches to second language acquisition in Japan

More recent approaches to address the overall problem of making English more practical have set up new SLA tools and methods, established curricular with a focus on choice, and offered content courses through an English medium (CLIL). These are often implemented through multimedia-based learning or CALL but given that, even today, many students exhibit inertia towards information technology it is not surprising that perhaps the strongest foothold amongst these new approaches has been made by a more traditional book-based idea known as extensive reading (ER). ER, as outlined by Day & Bamford (2002), is reading that is both “pleasurable” and “easy”. Within this, teachers “guide” students to “read as much as possible” while acting as students’ reading “role models” (see Table 1). In this sense ER goes against the central tenets of *yakudoku* as the former combines student autonomy, familiar lexis and comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982). Extensive reading’s adoption into the university curricular can thus be seen as a sea change in the conventional wisdom of SLA in Japan (Grabe, 2011; Mason, 2006).

**Table 1: Ten Principles of Extensive Reading (after Day & Bamford, 2002).**

|   |  |    |   |
|---|--|----|---|
| 1 | Reading material is easy   | 6  | Reading is its own reward                   |
| 2 | A variety of reading is available                                | 7  | Reading is individual & silent.             |
| 3 | Reading is selected by students                                  | 8  | Teachers orient and guide students.         |
| 4 | Learners read as much as possible                                | 9  | The teacher is a role model reader.         |
| 5 | The purpose of reading is related to pleasure and understanding. | 10 | Reading speed is faster rather than slower. |

Implementation of ER at tertiary level has developed from simply being something that ‘certain teachers do’, to being fully integrated into the curriculum. At Kyoto Sangyo University the university-wide ER program of 3000 students integrates the innovative Moodle TMS reader with ER, and as a result of collaboration amongst its staff ER is an official component of students’ grades (Robb, Kano & Claflin, 2011). This example notwithstanding it is more typical for ER to be smaller in scale and to be attached more generally to a university library, an individual teacher, used as an adjunct to classroom learning (such as through book reports), or as in-class silent

sustained reading (SSR). The uptake of ER has thus largely depended on teachers' enthusiasm, co-operation between administrators and educators, and the financial merits of investing in ER over other forms of L2 study. Thus in many ways, ER has had to validate its merits to tertiary language education by demonstrating that its inherent "ease", "pleasure", and "self-determinism" are the keys to L2 success (Day & Bamford, 2002). Despite skepticism about the efficiency of ER by some language professionals (Bruton, 2002; Macalister, 2008; Wells, 2011), the range of research supporting its efficacy (Bell, 2001; Constantino et al, 1997; Elley, 1991; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Janopoulos, 1986; Mason, 2006; Nation, 1997; Robb & Susser, 1989; Williams, 2009), and the number of universities where it can now be found make the ER approach a hard one to ignore.

### Extensive reading and literature circles: A personal journey

In 2003, against this background, and while searching for a new way to motivate students, I purchased my first set of graded readers (Penguin Reader series levels 2 and 3), and although I had included ER in my teaching repertoire for two years previously this was the first time to make it an integral part of a course and to have sourced it with my own budget.

I first used the ER titles as an adjunct to a general English course. The approach was very simple: students selected a book during class and were asked to read it over a two week period. At the end of the first week students wrote a book (summary) report based on the first 15-20 pages they had read, and made a prediction about the following 15-20 pages they were to read in the following week (each title consisted of 30~40 pages). In the second week students wrote a second summary and final comment report. This approach would, I thought, give me both a homework task to include as part of student assessment and - through the prediction activity - a 'warmer' task to ensure students had something of personal interest to discuss at the beginning of class. Surprisingly, the homework task was a big hit with students (Williams, 2005), but when it came to the 'discussion' as a prelude to classroom activities I came across a well known problem in SLA education: students did not know how to talk (Wollmann-Bonilla, 1994)!

At this same time I was introduced to an idea Mark Furr - a colleague at the time - was piloting with ER known as the 'EFL literature circle' (Furr, 2004). This circle, he told me, allowed students to think about, discuss, and analyze the books within a framework created by a series of role sheets (Kim, 2003). It sounded too good to be true but due to the relatively complex set of instructions on each role sheet (Furr suggests six roles for fiction), I was skeptical about how well it would work. Sensing this, Mark invited me to watch his 'literature circle' class in action and within just a few minutes I was asking him for copies of the role sheets! What I saw were students I had previously thought of as shy and reticent, presenting and arguing points, raising questions

and refuting others' ideas. By the following semester I had started my own literature circles, and my classroom had been transformed.

### *Developing literature circles for content: the CBRC*

One year after my introduction to literature circles, institutional reorganization meant I was transferred from teaching general English courses to instruction in advanced *content* based classes, classes for which *literature* circles seemed irrelevant. However, based on the success of the circle approach and the applicability of ER to content (Shang, 2006), I felt my new teaching duties presented an opportunity to adapt the fiction model and make *content* more communicative and engaging (Macalister, 2008; Poulshock, 2010). After a few adjustments to Furr's original six fiction reading circle roles, I created a four person content-based reading circle, the CBRC (Williams, 2011).

In brief the CBRC - like its fiction-based counterpart - gives students a chance to: lead the group (*group leader*); suggest and justify important vocabulary from the text (*word master*); provide a summary of the text (*summarizer*); and assess the similarities and dissimilarities between the culture represented by the text and that of the students (*culture connector*). The importance of each of these roles to SLA is highlighted by the research of Ward et al (2008), Nation (2006), Bell (2001) and Brown (2009) respectively. Moreover, as the material is graded, reading is manageable and students are able to express themselves individually in discussion. This latter point I felt was particularly pertinent to content-based materials for even though the courses I was teaching were labeled 'advanced' (a TOEFL score of 500 or more was required) students still lacked vocabulary and conceptual cultural knowledge to read and comprehend intensive content materials *and then* discuss them. However, by using an *extensive* content-based reading text I expected the CBRC would replicate the heightened level of interest and motivation (Rouault & Eidswick, 2011) as well as the "virtuous circles of learning" (Nuttall, 1982, p.168) I had seen in the fiction-based approach. I was not to be disappointed.

### *Towards an understanding of the content-based reading circle*

I first employed the CBRC in an advanced language class which examined contemporary aspects of British culture. The results in terms of student engagement during class were beyond expectation. Indeed it seemed the CBRC worked even better than the fiction-based approach! I had, however, no concrete proof of this, and despite the growing popularity of the reading circle among language instructors, I found little EFL research data relating to reading circle, its roles,

or students' perception of the approach. I thus decided in 2009 to undertake a survey of two groups of students who were using CBRC as their main mode of English language instruction. The results of this research have been published elsewhere (Williams, 2011), however its findings inform the current research and are of some value to review here.

Firstly, concerning the roles, students expressed a strong preference towards the culture connector and group leader roles; the summarizer role by contrast was seen as largely irrelevant with some students arguing extensive texts were *already* summarized. From this it seems clear students enjoy sharing the cultural elements of a text and to taking responsibility for learning. Secondly, the most widely reported benefit of the CBRC was as a means to improve overall text understanding and cross cultural issues. For the improvement of vocabulary however the CBRC was less highly evaluated. In agreement with previous research (Brown, 2009; Furr, 2007; Shang, 2006; Wiencek & O'Flahaven, 1994; Willis & Willis, 2009), the novel, fun and engaging aspects of reading circles were highlighted suggesting the CBRC approach is equal in popularity to the fiction-based one.

Despite student support for a reading circle approach in content-based instruction, I was disappointed at the relatively poor transference of the summary role from the fiction-based circle. I had anecdotal evidence to confirm this but felt it would be of some benefit to research it further in order to make the role more suited to non-fiction material. This idea took a stronger form at a workshop where a participant suggested a role that would summarize the group *discussion* rather than the text itself (Williams, 2010). My proposal was for a new role that could work both in tandem with the summarizer or as its replacement, thus opening up the possibility of a five person content-based circle. One function of the new role was to review the discussion, but it was also created with the aim of encouraging reflection and promoting critical thought. In this way the circle would have a mechanism to balance and check what had been said, and to further assess any contentious or controversial CBRC contributions. According to Rozzell (2010), such an approach is a key to maximizing the use of extensive reading materials and with this in mind I developed the role of *group secretary*.

#### *A new role for the CBRC – the group secretary*

In common with other members in the CBRC, the group secretary receives a copy of the text to read for homework together with a role sheet (see Appendix A) to fill out. However, unlike other CBRC roles, the group secretary only needs to write notes on the role sheet during the circle discussion itself with points he/she considers to be important, or that would benefit from further discussion or reflection. Once the CBRC discussion finishes, the group secretary uses these notes

to recap the main points, query individual speakers and offer his/her own perspective on the text. By doing so, students are able to revisit the text, develop deeper critical thought, or have the opportunity to reposition their stance on statements already made in the discussion stage of the CBRC. I expected the group secretary to be a great success.

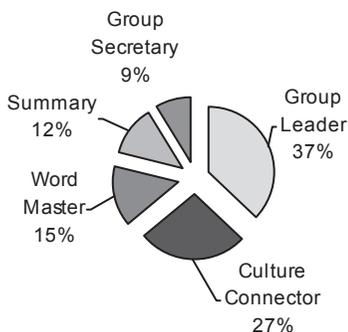
### Research rational/ methodology

In order to examine how well the group secretary was received by students and also to find out whether students preferred a 4 or 5 person reading circle (i.e. with group secretary) data was gathered from a group of students (n=33) studying at a national university who were using the CBRC as the mode of instruction. A 15 - item questionnaire (see Appendix B) which mirrored the author’s 2009 study (but that included items to elicit views of the group secretary) was developed and administered to all 33 students. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the questionnaire and were given 30 minutes to complete it. Numerical coding of items was made and analyzed using EXCEL. Responses made in Japanese were translated by the author.

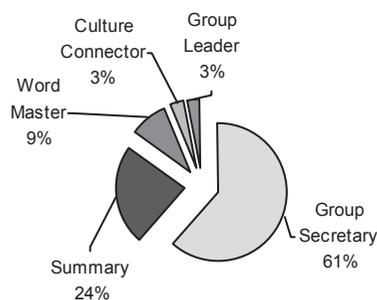
### Results

#### *The Roles*

As shown in figures 1 and 2 the most popular roles were the group leader and culture collector. Some 37% of students voted group leader as their favourite role, while culture collector received 27%. Meanwhile, word master, summarizer and group secretary were ranked top by 15%, 12% and 9% of students respectively. Roles ranked as least favourite were group secretary (61%) and summarizer (24%); just 3% of students voted either the culture collector or group leader as their least favourite role. The tendency to favour the culture connector and group leader roles over the summarizer replicates the findings of the author’s previous study (Williams, 2011).



**Figure 1: Popularity of roles ranked first.**



**Figure 2: Popularity of roles ranked last.**

One explanation for the discrepancy in role popularity is that certain roles were perceived as having more work attached to them. Highlighting this issue, one male student mentioned ‘depending on the role, the amount of preparation you have to put in varies quite a lot.’ Meanwhile, the low popularity of some roles may have been due to the value the role was perceived to give the discussion. In this case students felt unwilling to invest homework time in something they felt would not be given high priority in class. Relating this to the case of the word master one male student stated, ‘the words from the word master weren’t always picked up in discussion so it felt like a waste of time, also you cannot ask any questions in the discussion so the role isn’t very interesting.’ Similarly, the summarizer role was seen as ‘difficult’. These examples may indicate a weakness in using previously simplified ER materials as input for a discussion focused content-based course. In the case of the word master students often seem to feel they should be learning content (i.e. high order vocabulary) rather than using the text as a means to generate discussion. At the same time texts that are by their very nature simplified seem to pose some problems for students tasked with summarizing.

By contrast, such issues did not apply to the culture connector as students felt it was the role that energized the discussion. As one female student said, ‘Through the culture connector we can understand and rethink about our own culture. Also because we have to read the text carefully to find connections with our culture, we can make interesting cultural comparisons.’ Equally, students found the leader role attractive as one student remarked, ‘I could run the discussion as I wanted.’ This did not suit all students however, as one male mentioned, ‘When I was the group leader I wasn’t really sure how to keep the time between questions’, whilst another indicated it was hard to ‘manage’ the discussion as leader. These comments intimate that it is not simply the language or content students need to consider in the CBRC but also that they need to ‘manage’ other logistical and paralinguistic considerations.

### *The group secretary*

As the results in figures 1 and 2 show the 4 person reading circle was preferred to that which included a group secretary (54%). This preference was not unanimous however as some 33% voted for a circle which *included* the group secretary (11% stated no particular preference). The principal reasons given for these preferences are summarized in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Viewpoints about the 4 and 5 person circle.**

| Viewpoints supporting the 5 person circle  | Viewpoints supporting the 4 person circle  |
|--|--|
| <i>It is good to get <b>feedback</b> on your performance [from the group secretary]. Feedback [from the group secretary] raises <b>motivation</b>.</i> | <i>[As a group secretary] it was sometimes <b>hard to give a critical account</b>.</i>                                 |
| <i>The <b>discussion flows</b> better [with a group secretary]</i>   | <i>The group secretary <b>cannot participate</b> in the discussion so the role is too limited.</i>                     |
| <i>You get <b>nervous in a good way</b> when you know someone [i.e. the group secretary] is listening actively.</i>                                    | <i>If there is a group secretary we get nervous and <b>cannot speak freely</b>.</i>                                    |
| <i>A <b>new point of view</b> is introduced to the discussion [through the group secretary].</i>   | <i>Group secretaries didn't always catch the flow of discussion correctly and only <b>commented superficially</b>.</i> |

*Note:* words in **bold** are the author's emphasis.

The utterances shown in table 2 clearly demonstrate that while opinion about the utility of the two circle approaches is split, four central themes can be observed concerning the inclusion or absence of the group secretary role. These are: 'feedback'; 'discussion flow'; 'tension' and 'comments'.

'Feedback' relates not only to the individual feedback students could receive from their peers during the discussion, but also the *quality* of the feedback. In some cases it seems group secretaries lacked the necessary language and/or knowledge skills to provide the deep critical thought sought by some CBRC members and this led some students to doubt the rationale for a group secretary. In addition to feedback the group secretary also raised students' awareness of how the role could assist with the 'flow' in the discussion. As shown in table 2 the role can help fluency in the CBRC and may be effective in assisting weaker group leaders. Employing a 5 person circle also alerted students to issues related to consciously speaking in front of a group, particularly where one member (the group secretary) was not contributing to the discussion. This appears to have been motivating for some but unnerving for others. In the latter case this may have compromised the discussion circle's cohesion and reduced some of its effectiveness as a means to illicit frank comment and ideas. Allowing the group secretary to comment during the discussion may be one way to overcome this. Finally, inclusion of a 5<sup>th</sup> member critically reviewing and analyzing the discussion highlighted the importance of having multiple viewpoints or 'comments' in a CBRC.

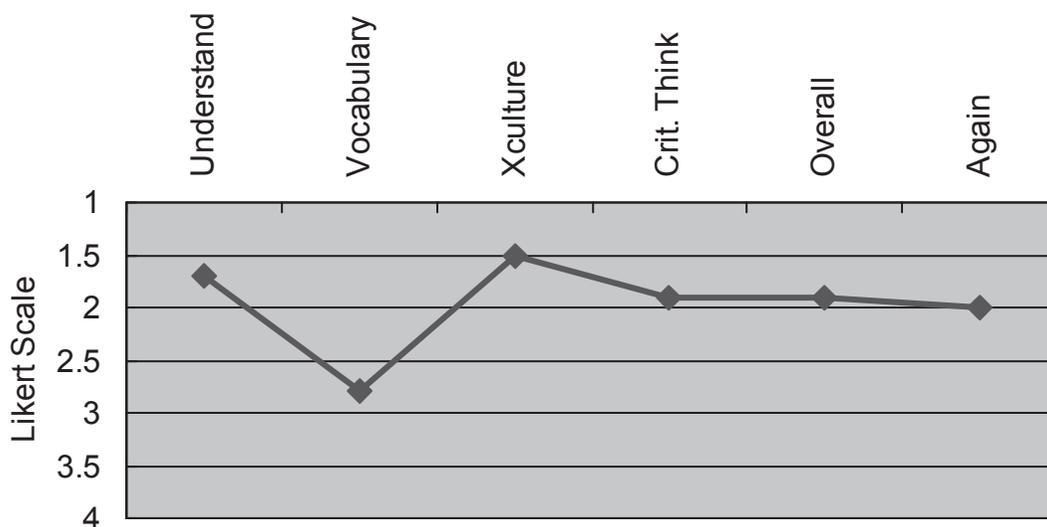
From these observations - and the numerical data of figures 1 and 2 - it seems the group secretary role may require some adjustments. Other literature circle practitioners have had few problems with 6 member reading circles so it seems unlikely that the size of the circle *per se* is the

source of any dissatisfaction. Instead, as the comments above indicate the issue may be that the group secretary is a non participative role during the discussion. To allow the group secretary to act together with the group leader in questioning and confirming *during* the discussion rather than after it would be one possible way to remedy this. By doing so anxiety or nervousness felt by some circle members about a group secretary who merely listens and writes during the discussion would be reduced. A second proposal is for teachers to proactively set up circles of students with similar abilities. The system used during the current research allowed students to mix with as many of their peers as was possible but for some weaker students it seems this was a source of unease. By actively streaming students of similar L2 abilities would help to reduce anxiety amongst weaker students, but could also help to reduce the dissatisfaction felt by higher ability students. Such streaming is however somewhat controversial as one of the main pillars of success of the discussion circle is to give each student the sense that they have an equally valuable contribution to make to the discussion; by proactively creating ability-based discussion circles could have a negative influence on class cohesion and also make a diagnostic test necessary and in doing so remove the fun, magic and enjoyment elements central to the success of the reading / discussion circle.

### *Students' views of the CBRC*

Figure 3 outlines questionnaire items 8-13 and describes what students think of the CBRC as a means to improve some key language targets. The targets under scrutiny here were (i) understanding a text (*understand*), (ii) development of vocabulary and collocations (*vocabulary*), (iii) cross cultural awareness (*xculture*), (iv) critical thinking skills (*crit. think*), and (v) overall language development (*overall*). *Again* represents students' interest in using CBRC in language classes in the future.

Based on a linear 5-point scale where 1 was 'strong agreement', and 5 'strong disagreement', students indicated the CBRC as a beneficial means to develop all five targets. The most effective were perceived as *xculture* (mean = 1.5), and *understand* (=1.7). At the same time, *crit. think* and *overall* delivered mean scores of 1.9. The language target perceived as least effectively served by the CBRC was *vocabulary* (= 2.8). These results are almost identical to the author's previous research (Williams, 2011) and, with the exception of vocabulary development, show that respondents strongly or very strongly believe CBRC are a good way to develop key areas of SLA. Future usage of CBRC was also supported by the data with a mean score of 2.0 for *again*.



*Figure 3: CBRC and 5 key SLA attributes.*

Note: (Likert Scale) 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4= disagree

Open ended responses given at the end of the semester support the data in figure 3 and highlight the fact that most students looked forward to learning through a CBRC approach. The only source of concern was no different to introducing any other new learning technique and was described by a female student who stated, “I was nervous about my ability to participate in a group. I haven’t been in a lesson like this in Japanese language so I wasn’t confident [I would be able to manage with the content and the English]”. Others were more enthusiastic at this early stage and looked forward to a new challenge, as mentioned by a positive male student, “I thought CBRC would be a good idea because we [students] will not be lazy and we can know how important it is to have responsibilities”.

At the end of the semester only one respondent retained any uneasiness towards CBRC and it was more typical for students to view CBRC positively. Typifying this attitude one male student stated, “I think my English skill has grown more than in other English language classes”. A high degree of satisfaction was also associated with using the CBRC. As one female student mentioned, “I was never bored in this lesson, it was good to be able to make friends with other people in the class”.

Overall CBRC were seen as motivating, stimulating and practical. In explaining the motivating element a male student claimed, “[In a CBRC class] you don’t end up sleeping when you’re in a group. Usually in this kind of class you get together with your friends and finish the task without getting serious about the content. But because we have a role sheet and we changed groups, we were serious and made friends with other people in the class”. Students also felt CBRC gave them

something stimulating and different. Concerning this, a second year male remarked, “The 90 minutes felt very short. Having the teacher answer questions after the discussion is a very good idea. You can get a lot from this kind of class compared to one where one teacher is talking to many students at once”. Finally, CBRC were also seen as being more practical than other approaches to L2 studies, one male student stated, “I’m strongly opposed to the ways of studying English in Japan in which you can’t learn how to speak in English, so this class was great in terms of speaking English. Usually we don’t get an opportunity to use English so it was very good”.

These results show students have a strong affinity for CBRC, appreciate its strengths, and enjoy the approach as a means to study language. Student respondents also offered some valuable suggestions to help improve CBRC further. Foremost amongst these was the need for the group secretary role to be more participative. As discussed above this may be possible by combining the role with the group leader or by allowing the group secretary to act as a leader when necessary. Other useful suggestions were: to have greater control on the time for discussion; for the task to be more accessible to weaker students (perhaps through a simplified role sheet), and for there to be a stronger component related to writing. In the case of the last suggestion, weekly assessment of the written role sheets (rather than tri - weekly basis, as made here) might be a way to facilitate this.

## Discussion

As a new approach to making the learning of more engaging, practical and student centered, the literature circle derivative, content-based reading circle is widely supported by students as a means for them to get closer to text meaning and also closer to their peers. As shown here, students enjoy the fun aspect of the learning environment and to being given a real chance to lead, find out, and discuss the text as *they* understand it. It is motivating, practical and stimulating. In this sense the CBRC can work the same “magic” that Furr (2007) describes for the fiction based literature circle.

The addition of the new experimental role (*group secretary*) described here, shows that many students enjoy taking a critical role in a group of their peers and relish the opportunity to assess others comments and to have their own comments assessed by others. This view tends to contradict more traditional sociological analyses of Japanese learners which emphasize ambivalence towards leadership, critical thinking, or individual initiative (Burrows, 2008) and offers us some insight into the deficiencies of the traditional top-down classroom approach adopted in Japan and many Asian countries. The results of the current research can thus act as a first step to refocus L2 instruction such that students become more involved in the learning process.

The role sheets distinguish reading circles from other reading/discussion approaches to L2 studies, but according to the results here not all the roles were equally popular. The popularity of *group leader* and *culture connector* may have been in response to the majority of respondents being both motivated and enthusiastic about English studies, and in many cases being confident of their discussion skills. Written responses showed that less able students embraced these more output focused roles less enthusiastically. A second reason for the high popularity of the group leader, culture connector, and CBRC more generally was the cross cultural nature of the subject matter. It is thus perhaps to be expected that students would rate the inherently cross cultural approach highly. What remains unanswered is how to make the *word master*, *summarizer* and *group secretary* more inclusive. Moreover how can we rationalize the differences in ability and ensure all students are comfortable with the approach?

As mentioned above, a first step towards answering this question is to make each role equally participative. The group secretary should therefore be seen not simply as a summarizer of the discussion but also as a sub - leader who can contribute to critical thought during the discussion as well as after it. The difficulty will lay with whether this dual role will be too much of a burden since it would require simultaneous leadership and critical examination of speech. Equally, the word master role needs to be more motivating as an output task. One possible way might be to utilize word master selected vocabulary as the basis for an in-class quiz or peer assessed quiz. In this way, word masters will feel their work is valued and any discussion of the context and background to vocabulary can be enhanced. As well as making the roles more participative and relevant the question of different student abilities remains. As one means to satisfy stronger students I offer an open-class 'anything goes' Q&A after the circle discussion during which students can ask content-based questions directly to me. This I have found a very successful way to engage the stronger, and/or more confident students but how much weaker student gain from this is unclear. Simplifying the role sheet may also offer a way to help weaker students, particularly those with weaker verbal output skills and stronger passive written or comprehension capabilities.

Brown (2009) has shown that the success of the literature circle approach is the result of the fun and anticipation found in the classroom. The results of the current research fully concord with this and show that CBRC success is as much to do with the motivation it provides as the fun it encourages. By introducing the group secretary to the CBRC, critical thinking was more visible and students could experience the pressure and more realistic environment of being listened to by a person who did not contribute to the discussion (in the capacity of professional presentation, or meeting such 'pressure' is commonplace). Despite the ambivalence towards the new role by some students with some fine tuning it can be powerful means for students to understand, develop and

practice critical thinking, analysis and leadership skills; skills that are in widespread demand in both academia and the world of employment.

## Conclusion

With clearly defined tasks the content-based reading circle (CBRC) creates a new learning context for using content-based materials in SLA. This new context is challenging, but at the same time makes for greater student involvement and language productivity. As the current research shows, students view the CBRC as a very effective way to undertake content based studies in English and in the majority of cases are enthusiastic towards it. By employing a more critical thought based role such as the group secretary, the CBRC becomes an even more powerful means to enhance content-based learning and gives language facilitators a new tool with which to make L2 studies more practical, stimulating and relevant to students.

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## Appendix A. Group Secretary Role Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

The **group secretary's** job is to listen to the comments/ contribution of other members in the group and to review and **evaluate** what was said at the end of the discussion. As well as reviewing what each member said you should add comments / questions of your own. For example, you may disagree with the points emphasized by the summarizer; or want to raise questions the group leader did not raise. Alternatively you may want more details about word master word choices, or to clarify any cultural comparisons made by the culture connector. You should also evaluate the performance of each speaker.

During the discussion, take notes and write any thoughts that come to mind.

Write your ideas about each speaker below to help you review each role (THINK: contents – questions - evaluation).

1. **Group leader:**

2. **Summarizer:**

3. **Word Master:**

4. **Culture Connector:**

### **Appendix B. Research questionnaire**

In this class we studied English texts using a role sheet and discussion group. This approach is known as a literature circle. I would like to know your opinions about this.

Please answer the questions below to help me understand what you think about literature circles (written answers may be in English or Japanese). Use question 15 for any additional comments.

Thank you for your help, your opinions are very valuable.

1. Have you used a literature circle approach in a language class before?
2. How did you feel when you first knew we would use literature circles for this class?
3. How do you feel now that you have finished the course?
4. How long did you usually spend reading and preparing your role for class?
5. Please rank the 5 roles in order of preference. Briefly explain your answer.

For questions 6-13 mark one of the five responses

a) I strongly agree

b) I agree

c) I neither agree nor disagree

d) I disagree

e) I strongly disagree

6a. I enjoyed the group leader role. 6b. I enjoyed the word master role.

6c. I enjoyed the summarizer role. 6d. I enjoyed the culture connector role.

6e. I enjoyed the group secretary role.

7. Which circle did you prefer, with the group secretary or without? Explain your answer.

8. Literature circles are a good way to understand a text.

9. Literature circles are a good way to learn about vocabulary and collocations.

10. Literature circles are a good way to develop cross cultural awareness.

11. Literature circles are good for developing critical thinking skills.

12. Literature circles are good for overall English language development.

13. I would like to study English again by using literature circles.

For questions 14-15 write your answer in the space provided.

14. In your opinion, how do literature circles compare to other ways of studying a text?

15. Do you have any other comments OR suggestions concerning our use of literature circles?

Many thanks for taking the time and effort to answer this questionnaire.

David Williams

# ディスカッションを用いたリーディングスキル習得の新たな方法

ウィリアムズ・デイビッド

## 要 旨

日本の言語学習において英語をより実践的なレベルに向上させるには、エクステンシブリーディング (ER) が最も有効な手法であると考えられる (Robb, Kano & Clafin 2011)。現在、ER の教材としてフィクションとノンフィクションがある。

その2つの教材を使用することのより「英語を」学習するのではなく、「英語で」学習することが可能になる。リテラチャーサークル (Furr, 2004) は学生が「英語で」学習できる環境を提供する手法の1つである。

本論では筆者がリテラチャーサークルを、物語の内容をベースとしたコンテンツベースストーリーディングサークル (CBRC (Williams, 2009b)) にどのように応用したかを述べている。そしてリサーチによって得たデータから批判的思考法が言語学習にとっていかに大切かを検証する。その結果から多くの学生が CBRC を行うときは指導者抜きの批判的思考法を好むこと実証された。結論として言えることは、学生らが自分たちで「英語で」学習する際に、リーディングとディスカッションは学習をより刺激的に、またより刺激的なものにするうえで重要な役割を果たすということである。