

READING (KODOKU) CLASS: Reading for Translation OR Reading for Enjoyment, Understanding and Knowledge

Alice Kawauchi

Many teachers, teaching reading course, Kodoku, in Japanese junior colleges and universities, have observed a large number of students become dependent on the teacher to do much of the work, i.e., translation into Japanese language, is done by the teacher. Thus, the students' language skills and linguistic competence cannot be developed satisfactorily. By the end of the class period, many students have become bored and thus lose interest in 'studying English.'

Richard R. Day, in the Language Teacher, expressed his opinion on how to teach reading as a second language. When teaching Reading, it is difficult because we really do not know how a person learns to read. He believes one of the best ways is to give the students a lot of interesting reading materials. The very first step is to provide reading material at the level according to the students' abilities. Within the level of a particular student, make available lots of reading material. Making available means providing a range of topics from which the student can read based on his/her own choice. Given the opportunity to choose for his/her personal enjoyment the reader will never be bored in class, for the reader is reading for his/her own pleasure and knowledge. Though the reader is reading for pleasure,

classroom reading can be read for intensive reading. That is, the student is reading for meaning. The basic reading skills are reading for main ideas, being able, first to make predictions and inferences, as well as being able to relate what was read both orally and in writing, to the teacher and classmates.

Next, teacher should teach the student some of the reading skills. For example, the reader should be able to answer the following questions:

What are the main ideas?

What are the supporting ideas?

What inferences can you deduce?

Can you predict what is going to happen?

Another important point is to encourage the student to read at an appropriate speed. In other words, do not read carefully and slowly all the time. One technique to accomplish this is practicing the skimming and scanning skills. The purpose of reading is to get the idea without having to look up each and every unknown word encountered. The task is to re-read and read ahead of the unknown word and guess what the word means in the context of the sentence and paragraph, then check word in dictionary.

Yue Mei-yum, in the English Teaching Form, substantiates Day. Teaching Reading in Yue Mei-yum's classes means teaching efficient reading. Her emphasis is based on the skimming technique whereby the reader reads to get the general overall idea of the whole text. The key is to understand the main ideas of different paragraphs and be able to put them all together in a way

of generalization to the entire reading matter.

Mortimer J. Adler, in his book HOW TO READ A BOOK, writes very succinctly how to not only enlarge our knowledge on a particular matter but more importantly how to improve our technique on understanding the 'difficult' matter read. Adler prefaces his theory for readers of books whose main purpose in reading is to increase their understanding. Of course, reading is also to gain knowledge. In either situation, one must read actively.

As you read and understand, which leads to reading with pleasure, you may have gained information, but you could not have increased your true understanding. If you understand the book completely from start to finish, then the author and you have similar minds. The words merely express common understanding that you had before you started to read.

Reading for Information and Understanding

The Purpose of Reading:

However, there is the possibility that you do not understand the book perfectly. That is to say, you understand enough to know that the book has more to say than you understand, and thus, it contains information that can increase your understanding.

So, what to do then? You can take the book to someone who can read better than you and ask him/her to explain the parts that trouble you, or, you may decide that what you cannot understand is not important and what you understand is enough. In either case, you are not doing the kind of reading the book requires.

That kind of reading is done in only one way - without asking help from anyone; you try to read the difficult book. With the power of your own mind you study the words/sentences and you gradually move from a state of understanding LESS to one of understanding MORE. Such progress, accomplished by the mind, studying a book is highly skilled reading, the kind of reading that a book tests your understanding. This kind of active reading by using your own mind requires great effort; this will be a more active reading.

There is a difference between reading for information and reading for understanding. The first type of reading is newspaper, magazine or anything else that according to our skill and ability we can understand immediately. Such reading increases our understanding because our understanding was equal to the reading material BEFORE we started.

The second meaning is reading something that at first we do not completely UNDERSTAND. The writer is communicating something that can increase the reader's understanding. Learning here means to understand more, not to remember more information that is similar to information we already possess. In other words, the writer is superior to the reader in understanding and his book must express clearly the special understanding that he possesses. Thus the reader MUST BE ABLE TO REDUCE this inequality to some degree. The reader must always try to lessen the gap. We can learn only from people who know more than we do.

Sometimes it is difficult to see the difference between FACTS that increase information and IDEAS that increase understanding. Adler

attempts to show how to improve reading skills to increase understanding.

To be informed is to know simply that something is a fact. To understand is to know everything about the fact. Why is it a fact, what is its connection with other facts, in what ways is it different or what the fact means. In other words, the difference is between being able to remember something and BEING ABLE TO EXPLAIN IT. Understanding is increased only when, in addition to knowing what the author says, you know what he means and why he says it.

Certainly another purpose of reading besides gaining information and understanding is reading for enjoyment. This is the easiest kind of reading and it requires the least amount of effort. Everyone who knows how to read can read for enjoyment if he wishes.

Reading as Learning: The difference between Learning by Instruction and Learning by Discovery

What is the difference between learning by instruction and learning by discovery? When one person teaches another through speech or writing, this process is called learning by instruction. However, we can gain knowledge without being taught. This is discovery, the process of learning something by observation, examination or searching for facts, without being taught. Said in a simple way, discovery is learning WITHOUT a teacher and instruction is learning through the HELP of one. What is important is the student him/herself must do the learning. Knowledge must grow in his mind if learning is to take place.

What about thinking? Thinking occurs both when we use our minds to gain knowledge or understanding and when we learn by discovery and learning by instruction to gain knowledge. It is possibly true that one does less thinking when one reads for information, or enjoyment than when trying to understand something. Thinking is only one part of the activity of learning. A person must also use his/her senses and imagination. He must observe, remember and create imaginatively what cannot be observed. All the above are necessary in reading to learn through discovery. In a way, a book is like nature or the world. When you question it, it answers you, provided that you do the work of thinking yourself. While a student in school, students often read difficult books with the help of the teacher. But our continuing education depends mainly on books alone, books read without the teacher's help. If we want to continue learning and discovering, we must know how to make books teach us.

Levels of Reading

Elementary reading:

At this level, the reader should be able to say what a particular sentence says.

Second level:

At this stage, the reader should be able to answer:

What is the book about?

What are its parts?

What kind of book is it...science, history, novel, etc.

Usually, reading is simply for information or enjoyment.

Third level:

This level of reading is called 'analytical' reading. Here, one reads for the purpose of understanding.

Fourth level:

The level of reading is syntopical or comparative reading. Here the reader reads not one but many books and places them in relation one to the other and to a particular subject until the reader has a complete understanding of that subject. This syntopical reading is the most active and effortful of all levels of reading. This probably is the most satisfying of all reading activities.

The First Level of Reading - Beginning Reading

There are several periods of reading development.

The first is to be able to read simple sentences. The second period is when the student can read and enjoy simple books by him/herself, WITHOUT the help of teachers.

In the third period, the student increases his/her vocabulary and skill in discovering the meaning of unfamiliar words by the way the words are used in the reading material. At this stage, the student starts to read for enjoyment, for factual information or to learn more about the world in general.

At the fourth period, the student develops the ability to connect ideas from one piece of writing to another and learns to compare the opinions of different writers on the same subject.

At this stage of reading ability, student can increase his/her reading ability for the rest of his/her life. When a person has mastered all four levels of basic levels of reading, he/she is ready to progress to the higher levels. Only then can he/she read and learn by him/herself. Only then can he/she begin to become a really good reader.

The Second Level of Reading - Inspectional Reading

Skimming or Pre-Reading:

First you want to read something but do not know whether or not you want to read the book. However, you do think it may contain information that would be of value to you.

In this situation, you should SKIM the book or as some say pre-read it. This is the first part of inspectional reading. Your main aim is to find out whether or not the book requires a more careful reading, but skimming also can tell you many other things about the book.

By skimming you may learn all that you need to know about the book at that time. You may also need not know more. But you will know what the author's main point is and what kind of book he has written. Briefly, here are some suggestions about how to skim a book.

1. Look the title page and its preface. In the preface, the author states his purpose of the book, the author's special opinion of his subject. You can also take the time to ask yourself if the book is similar to other books you have read.

2. Study the table of contents to get the general idea of the plan of the book. The table of content gives one an idea of what the book consists of.

3. Check the index. This section contains the various subjects discussed and the kinds of books and authors mentioned.

4. Read the message from the publisher printed on the back cover of the book. There the author briefly describes the main ideas in the book.

At this stage you will already have enough information about the book to know whether you want to read it more carefully or not. Now, you are actually ready to SKIM the book.

5. Now look at the chapters. Chapters usually contain statements at the beginning or end of what the chapter is about.

6. Finally, turn the pages stopping frequently reading several sentences, sometimes several pages, but never more than that. Always look for the main idea. Usually the author repeats what he thinks is new or important about the book on the last two or three pages of the main part of the book.

By skimming the book you will know whether the book contains material that you want to read more carefully or not. Skimming is a very active kind of reading. In doing this activity, one will understand and discover how easy it is to read.

The First Reading

Everyone has experienced trying but failing to master a difficult book that was begun with the hope of increasing one's understanding. Do not expect too much from the first reading of a difficult book.

When reading a difficult book for the first time, read it through without EVER stopping to think about the thing you do not understand immediately. Read through the difficult parts and as you keep reading, you will come to the things you do understand. Then re-read the book again for you will have a better chance of understanding the entire book.

What you understand by reading the book through to the end will help you when you try to read the places you did not understand in your first reading, or if you never re-read the book. Understanding half of it is much better than understanding nothing of it. Try to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words by guessing or imagining what it may mean in the context of the sentence. When re-reading the second time, the meaning may come through without looking up the unknown word in the dictionary at the first reading. Inspectional reading requires effort. In this process, you are learning by discovery.

How To Be a Good Reader

The art of reading requires a habit of asking the right questions at the right time. There four main questions you should ask:

1. What is the whole book about? You must try to discover the main ideas of the book. Also discover how the author discusses his ideas in an orderly way by dividing it into parts, ideas or subjects.

2. You must try to discover the main thoughts - what is the author saying and how is he saying it?

3. After reading and understanding the author's thoughts is the book true in whole or part? When you understand a book, and if you are reading seriously, decide for yourself knowing what the author thinks is not enough information for you.

4. Is the book important? If the book has given you information, ask what the information means. Is the information important for you to know? Also, you might wish more understanding by doing further reading.

There is very good reason for asking the above four questions. Asking these four questions is the difference between an ordinary reader and a good reader. The ordinary reader asks no questions and gets no answers. Form the habit of reading knowing the rules of a skill is not the same as having a habit. Habit means doing it. Habit is following the rules. It is hard to learn to read well. This a mental activity. The reader must think about his/her own thoughts in relation to the thought/idea of the writer. A person who does think cannot help but learn to read much better.

In order to become a better reader, one must be selective in reading material. One cannot improve as a reader if you read books and articles that are always within your ability. Read books that make you work to

understand them. Once you have read the parts and can join the ideas together as a whole, you can devote your attention to what you are reading to increase your understanding.

Being in complete accord with Day, Yue and Adler's opinions, the students in my Reading (KODOKU) class, not only in their first year but also in the second year, have the chance to improve their reading skills promoted by the above three educators. The SRA Reading Material is available to them.

By taking a very easily administered and corrected placement test, the students immediately begin to read material within their reading ability levels - the reading material on the individual student, not on a class basis. Once placed in her own reading level, she has the opportunity to read any material within her reading ability that inspires her. For certain, she is reading text for her personal enjoyment, knowledge, and understanding.

After reading her text, she must answer several comprehension questions on the read material as well as complete a 30-item word study. The exercises cover vocabulary other than those encountered in the reading material. In addition, other language skills are covered - pronunciation, spelling, punctuation, and all aspects of the English grammar. The student corrects her own exercises and is encouraged to analyze the reason(s) for the error(s), and understands what she can/must do to improve her reading skill.

The student's next task is to write a synopsis of what she read as well as making her very own vocabulary list from the reading material. For each new word, she must include it in a compound or complex sentence

incorporating the new vocabulary. The tasks are completed in English.

Then, on a one-to-one basis with the instructor, the student relates whether she enjoyed the selected reading material. She then relates what she read - main idea, what new knowledge she acquired, how she made inferences from what was read and the knowledge she already had, and most important, understood what the author conveyed in the reading text.

The student is encouraged to work towards as near 100 percent grade on the exercises and to improve her reading speed - i.e., try to read rapidly but not at the expense of losing understanding of the reading material.

It is my opinion, given the opportunity to read a lot of native English language material for two years, the student will appreciate the confidence of reading English language books in her later life.

In closing, reproduced below are some comments from the 2nd Year Reading (Kodoku) class students who have been using the SRA READING MATERIAL for their entire two years at Honan.

.....I think this style is good for students because we can read stories at own pace so we can enjoy reading. We can choose a story from many interesting stories. After reading, sometimes, I am moved and learn something new.....
AM

.....First, I read more difficult level than my ability, so the story was very difficult. I couldn't understand, so I was unwilling to read. But, I lowered my reading level; now I can read stories and articles easily. When I can

understand content of story at my own ability, I am very glad. It was hard to write comments. I took a lot of time but I learned a lot of words and idiomatic expressions.....MM

.....I was happy because I could read many stories and read at my level, so I felt a little at ease. If we read at one level for classwork, for some student it could be easy and for others it could be difficult. I could choose stories, and it is reason for my happiness. At first class was difficult for me, but now I can read easily. Vocabulary list was hard work, but I thought to make long sentences using new words was useful way to understand how to use the new word.....KY

.....At first, I took much time to read, but now the story gets more and more easy to understand and it is exciting to read. A lot of stories gave me dream, hope, sadness and I had good time reading about many things. I now read in high spirits. Here-after, I want to read many more English books.....MY

.....Although I had studied difficult words in order to take entrance examination, I hardly read basic English books. Therefore, I have been short of the basic English words. This Kodoku class helped me in my incomplete English word knowledge.....MY

.....I enjoyed the freedom of this Kodoku class -- freedom to read what I was interested in reading at my own personal pace and ability.....KY

.....We also had to write in our Kodoku class. We had to write long sentences using new words. We also had to write our impression of what we read and

I think this is useful because I learned how to organize my opinion of what I readKY

.....I was able to choose reading material on something I had read before in Japanese -- this reading was enjoyable. I also read about my hobby in English. This was easy to understand. I also learned how customs on a particular activity differed from what is done in Japan and how it is done in another country.....KY

.....Everything I read was enjoyable. Some articles moved me very much.....
EM

.....It was difficult to read in English at first, but now I can read pleasantly.....YM

.....I read many new words, which I forget. But, some new words are used many times so I learn it little by little. I enjoy this class because I can choose and read what I want to read.....CH

.....At first, I was afraid of reading English articles and stories because I couldn't understand a lot of words, but now, one and a half years later, I can read smoothly a little better than before. I get a lot of new words and I am finished reading, I am satisfied. When I was in high school, teacher did the translation into Japanese and emphasized the English grammar..it was a boring class. Today, I have the freedom to read what I wish, but of course, I have the responsibility to do my own understanding, do all the exercise myself, and be able to tell the instructor what I learned from the reading of

my choice.....TM

.....I am enjoying reading in English in my Kodoku class. Now I am reading 'MINI WORLD' of my own choice. Reading this magazine is difficult, however, I read it as I read the material from the SRA READING MATERIAL.....TM

.....What is important is not the translation, but understanding the content. I must also write a short article about what I read. This added task helps me improve my English writing ability.....TM

.....At first, I was not able to answer the questions in the exercises, but degrees, I understood what and how to answer each item in the exercise. I now enjoy meeting the challenge of completing the exercise and get a good score.....JM

.....I am happy because I could read many stories of my own choice and read them at my own pace and level. Therefore, I felt at ease to read stories and articles in English. If all the students had to read the same text as a class, I would not feel at ease because we all have different reading abilities.....KY

.....At first, I never thought I could finish reading one story in one week, but after a year and half, I do finish reading without taking too much time. I am used to my reading pace and I understand how to read. I guess at the difficult word's meaning first and then I look up the word in the dictionary to check my guessing/intuition ability. I learn various things and now think more seriously about the content of what I read and also the

character's feeling, etc. Having to write long sentences for each new vocabulary from the reading material has given me the ability to write long sentences.....YF

.....I am now reading about many, many things. At first, I was not used to reading English, so I worked very slowly, and it was hard to understand. I couldn't make heads or tails of the whole thing. This was painful, and, I wanted to give up reading. But, I wanted to keep up with other classmates. I think I can never succeed without making efforts. I am reading steadily now and at last, I am used to reading in English. I know to read is a pastime. I think my English has improved a little. It warms my heart to read books about good deeds. I think my constant efforts will surely pay off.....SY

.....At first, I was anxious about whether I could keep up in the Kodoku class because I am weak in reading and understanding long English sentences. Certainly reading and understanding long sentences are most important for us. Now, I can't keep high pace as others, because my work pace is slower than theirs. It is not because I am lazy; it just takes me longer time to read and do all the exercises. After one and a half years of reading SRA, I have improved. I want to read more and move up to the next level. This class is hard for me but the class is enjoyable and instructive.....SM

In conclusion, after reading all the students' comments regarding a different approach to the Kodoku class activity, I believe reading in English is no longer a chore but a pleasure to those who have read English using the SRA material. It is important that the students have the satisfaction of personally gauging their own improvement over a period of time. Thus, they

have the confidence of being challenged to read more English literature. Surely, in their future lives, they will be prompted to read with pleasure books written in English.

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