Integrating Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing in the Classroom

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Exactly what does integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities in the English classroom mean? Obviously, it entails desegregation of the parts of language usually segregated into separate reading, writing, literature, and communications courses. While the incorporation of these four areas into each course comprises a first step toward integration, *how* the listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities function within the classroom determines their effectiveness. The presentation of isolated activities for the sake of variety alone is not enough; the only cohesive element that such a juxtaposition of activities has is that they all occur in the same room. Instead, integration of the activities (and integration is the key word here) fosters the natural interplay of these aspects of language. The unifying purpose which underlies all the activities distinguishes integration from juxtaposition. In the integrated classroom, all activities—listening, speaking, reading, writing, or any combination thereof—contribute to the furthering of the purpose at hand. One possibility for curricular organization which supplies such as purpose for the integrated approach is the thematic-based course.

Theory and Research

The above definition sidesteps theoretical and research foundations in order to clearly indicate what is meant by the integrated approach of combining listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities within the English classroom. Now, the focal question shifts from "What is integration?" to *"Why* integrate at all?"

Basically, the argument for an integrated approach in the English classroom centers on how children learn language. A large proportion of the investigations into language development involves language acquisition in young children. In **Psycholinguistics: A Cognitive View of Language,** Helen and Charles Cairns outline the stages of linguistic development from babbling through nonsense words, holophrastic speech, two-word utterances, developing grammar, near adult grammar, to full competence (1976). They also generalize the development of language to the general realm of Piagetian cognitive development. The Cairnes, however, do not extend their discussion much beyond the theory of oral language acquisition.

Bradford Arthur in his **Teaching English to Speakers of English** presents a teacher-oriented overview of principles of "Natural Language Learning"—by which he means both "the learning of natural languages . . . and natural as opposed to artificial or mechanical ways of teaching or learning a natural language" (1973). Arthur states that language learning is natural to all children, and so teaching methods should develop each student's natural language-learning tendency. He describes the gradual, developmental process of learning of several aspects of language as part of that process. In the natural language learning situation, the child deals with many areas of language at once. For this reason, one should not teach by isolating the individual components.

The views of Arthur overlap with the parallels Constance Weaver draws between the natural processes of learning to speak and to read. Within **Psycholinguistics and Reading: From Process to Practice,** Weaver states that one cannot "teach" either process in a direct way; instead, children must develop their own knowledge of how the language system works (1980). Both Arthur and Weaver stress that teachers need to capitalize on students' abilities to handle language in a natural language environment. Weaver parallels the topic of deep-structure written language. For instance, she cites the "Mommy sock" example where the spoken surface structure of "Mommy sock" represents many meanings. This example from oral language along with children's first miscues in reading underscore young language learners' emphasis on meaning. The final parallel which Weaver draws involves the tell-tale errors which mark the developmental processes involved, such as over-generalization in oral language and miscue patterns caused by reading for meaning. Weaver concludes her discussion

with the simple statement that people "learn language by hearing it in natural and meaningful contexts and by trying to use language themselves."

The works of Marilyn Wilson and of Mark Aulls represent the current state of integrating reading and writing. In "A Review of Recent Research on the Integration of Reading and Writing," Wilson presents the strong case for the developmental link between the two processes (1981). This research leads to the conclusion that reading and writing complement each other when integrated in the classroom. In fact, Aulls presents his findings based on informal observations of his own class in "Relating Reading Comprehension and Writing Competency" (1975). He gives glowing reports on how the integration of reading and writing activities helped his students—both the "poor" and "good" readers—achieve outstanding reading results as well as keener interest and involvement. He stresses that reading as well as writing should be integrated from the early years of elementary school.

Although most of the writing about integration deals with the interrelated processes in the elementary school years, James Moffett extends the theory in his **Student Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers** (1973). Moffett discusses the deficiencies and theoretical fallacies of skills-oriented classrooms and then presents a theoretically unified curriculum guide for kindergarten through grade thirteen. Based on a student-centered classroom design, Moffett focuses on student activity and involvement in the various listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. He describes a wide range of activities, explains how to use them in the classroom, provides examples, and gives recommendations for variations and follow-up activities. While Moffett develops scores of ideas for a student-centered classroom which incorporate listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, he presents them as catagorized ideas in the four areas of language arts. In other words, he deftly handles curriculum ideas, but he neglects the curriculum framework which would integrate these ideas into a meaningful course.

Overall, the research and writings indicate that language learning is a developmental process which is not segregated into four clear-cut sections. In each case, the research points toward the interrelation of the aspects of language learning. Why integrate then? To fit the teaching approach to the manner in which learning occurs.

Aims and Priorities of An Integrated Class

In **The English Teacher's Handbook,** Stephen and Susan Judy (Tchudi) recommend ranking instructional priorities to aid sound course planning (1979). The following list of fundamental aims and priorities should help shape the integrated course in terms of approach, structure, materials, and student involvement.

Clearly, the first priority for the integrated teacher should be to direct attention to "oracy" (listening and speaking) along with "literacy" (reading and writing). The theoretical basis lies in the interrelatedness of the four aspects of language. While these processes at the elementary years tend to be the focal point of current research, the intertwined processes of languaging do not simply unravel and become perfectly clear after elementary school—they continue to interact and develop throughout life. Thus, integrated activities which involve both the aspects of oracy and literacy follow logically as a means to promote the students' overall development of language.

Second, courses and units should be based on themes or topical subjects, for instance on the family, men and women, aging and human values, the cities, or the hero. The substitution of the thematic-based for the traditional dichotomy of literature-based versus writing-based courses allows for free interchange and appropriate development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. In addition, the specification of a thematic base insures that true integration occurs. Without a common purpose, a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities could lead nowhere. With a known goal, however, the activities comprise a means of pursuing that goal. Moreover, the

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options and diversity that a mixture of activities specification of a thematic base insures that true integration occurs. Without a common purpose, a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities could lead nowhere. With a known goal, however, the activities comprise a means of pursuing that goal. Moreover, the options and diversity that a mixture of activities offers maximize the quality and effectiveness of the students' natural pursuit of the theme.

Third, a variety of literature and materials should play an integral part of any English class—a variety to include the "classics," literature by and about minorities, student writing, and materials of popular culture (films, recordings, radio, television, newspapers, and magazines). Variety should not be mistaken as an end to be sought in itself; instead, it is a means to pursue the goal of the course theme. The key is to provide the students with as many resources and experiences as possible in order to tap the full potential of the topic. Simultaneously, the students have the opportunity to explore the spectrum of possibilities which the topic offers. In addition, the wide range of materials increases the odds of student identification with some of the source material. Consequently, the chain reaction begins: student identification sparks personal relevance which heightens interest and leads to more student involvement in the material and activities.

Fourth, the view of writing as an organic process should be developed as an important part of the course. The emphasis on the process of writing—through prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—rather than on just the final product of writing is sound for any English course. Yet the process approach to writing harmonizes particulary well with the integrated classroom. Why? The traditional view of writing with the emphasis on product totally isolates writing as an out-of-class, private activity. In the process approach, however, writing becomes a process which correlates other language processes as well. For instance, whole-class or small-group brainstorming calls upon listening and speaking to aid the prewriting stage. In drafting, the students work primarily by themselves, but they do so in a dynamic environment with other students working on the same task. The revising, editing, and publishing stages truly integrate the language processes. During these final stages of the writing process, students read their own and other students' papers, give both oral and written responses, interpret both oral and written responses as guides for rewriting, and prepare their writing as potential reading material for their audience. With all the unifying possibilities that the process approach to writing affords, it should not be overlooked.

Fifth, responses to activities should include outlets, by design, for student variation. Both inter-student and intra-student variation should be considered with regard to fluctuations in interest and levels of response. Immediately, G. Robert Carlsen's five levels of literary response come to mind: unconscious delight, vicarious experience, seeing oneself, philosophical or moral speculation, and aesthetic experience (1974). Students respond to written and oral experiences based on these levels as well as on their own personalities and values. We should not only value the personal variety of responses, but also the personal values and experiences students bring to literature, writing, and discussion and how these affect students' responses.

Finally, free and/or guided individual reading, writing, and sharing should be incorporated into the course design. With classtime dedicated to individually selected reading material and open time for writing a journal, students may pursue topics and subtopics of their own interest. Hopefully, equivalent attention to both the reading and writing periods will build an unconscious equality of their importance and association in the minds of the students. Similarly, classtime could be allocated for "sharing" within the constraints of relevance to the specific topic of study. Students may share a song, lyric, poem, short story, joke, cartoon, or personal experience which they feel is relevant to the unit topic or course theme. So students orally present an item of interest to themselves and the class while other students listen and share the experience. The intent of reading, writing, and sharing in a context of

somewhat limited freedom is simple: namely, to provide a realm other than whole-class assignments in which ideas flow across all the interacting language processes.

The Hero: An Integrated Course in Action

With the definition, theory, research, and principles of the integrated approach laid as a backdrop, the scene is set for an illustration of a course in which the daily activities actually integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The course revolves around the central theme of the hero. The units of the course focus on various types of heroes and on literature or situations which have a particular hero; it follows the develoment of the hero in terms of a basically chronological sequence of literature. Even so, the unifying quality of the thematic base protects the course from disintegrating into unrelated fragments in time. Moreover, within the general context of the course theme, the units could be rearranged with particular emphases shifted in order to trace various developmental aspects of the hero. In other words, the order of the units presented is not sacred; as long as the chosen order follows a developmental trend of the hero, the pursuit of the purpose is sustained. Brief descriptions of the activities involved in select whole class units are presented below.

Everyman Unit

The major purpose of the **Everyman** unit is to acquaint the students with the common man's hero, a hero in everyday life. Corollaries to this broad purpose are to introduce students to the morality play, to help them internalize the moral or theme of the play, to help them see the relevance of the universal themes to our world, and to aid their work with the mechanics of a play in order to update and perform it.

The reading of the play comprises the first activity. Depending on time, either a complete in-class reading or a combination in-class and out-of-class reading may be determined. The in-class reading will be oral with a conscious attempt to get as many students involved as possible.

After the students finish reading the play they participate in a "written discussion." In this second activity, students write their responses to discussion questions, ones which elicit a variety of responses ranging from personal reactions to more analytical reflections on the mode of presentation, characters, Everyman as a hero, datedness, and relevance of the play to our modern world. The informality of the "written discussion" emphasizes the fact that the in-class writing is an aid to thinking through a reaction rather than a graded impromptu. Armed with their personal writing, students then participate in a brief yet high-powered discussion of their strongest responses.

Through the written and oral discussion of activity number two, along with teacher responses to every student's ideas, each student has been involved and should be ready for activity number three. This activity involves dividing the class into small groups which update **Everyman** into a play to which their peers could relate if it were performed in the school auditorium. Each group decides upon a recorder for their ideas and decisions as to the current staging of their version of **Everyman.** When the groups finish, a representative from each quickly presents the group's ideas to the whole class.

The fourth activity depends on what the students decide to do from this point. They vote for one of the three options: (1) each group produces and directs their own version for the rest of the class or other classes; (2) the class collectively produces and directs one of the small group's versions and performs it for other classes; or (3) neither of the above—move on to the next unit. If the students are sufficiently interested, they will select option one or two. The details of which version and what audience are decided, and delegation of responsibility (everyone does something) starts the play into production.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" Unit

The overall purpose of the "Ancient Mariner" unit is to actively involve students in experiences which permit them to determine whether the Mariner is a hero in their eyes and in the eyes of Coleridge. The specific purposes of the first two activities are to involve students

more in literature, to actively and creatively engage students in prediction, to encourage them to ascertain and follow through particular elements and themes in a creative way, and to liven up what some students call "the boring old stuff." This unit provides an outlet for reflective response to literature, reinforces how literature is somewhat predictable yet always influenced by the creativity of the author, and encourages students to see themselves as writers as well as readers.

The first activity centers on the students' silent reading of the first five sections of **The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.** For the success of this activity, students must stop reading after they have finished section five. Students then participate in an informal discussion of the first five sections in which their response to the Mariner and the action bears equal weight with the progression of the narrator's plot. A quick recapitulation of the action thus far with particular emphasis on how section five ends serves as a transition into activity number two.

The second activity involves students in creating their own versions of how the Mariner's story will end. Students need not keep the meter and rhyme going, but they should keep their accounts from the Mariner's point of view. If students draw blanks, open-ended questions regarding the Mariner's penance, ultimate end, and heroic qualities, along with questions about the role of the spirits and the fate of the crew, tend to unblock the writing process. Students anonymously mark their conclusions as either "okay" or "not okay" for the teacher to read to the class as a means of sharing their creativity.

The third activity brings closure to the unit. Students read the concluding sections of the poem and then respond in writing. The object is to reflect upon the relationship of their own and Coleridge's endings. Discussion questions ask the students to compare the similarities and differences of the endings and to decide how and why the Mariner is portrayed differently in the two endings.

Comicbook Unit

The main purpose of the comicbook unit is

to elicit emotional, reflective, and creative responses to the comicbook super hero. In the first activity, students read the comicbooks of their choice. After approximately thirty minutes of reading, students stop reading in order to think about the comicbook as a form of literature with its own kind of hero. The class then discusses the content and structure of this genre. For example, content might deal with imagination, action, illustration, super-human hero versus villain, good versus evil, and right versus wrong. Characteristics of the structure might be short sentences, simple language, episodes with quick transitions, and an overall formula of hero, conflict, build-up, climax, and resolution. After the general discussion, students are prompted to think about the super hero they would like to create and write about if they were a comicbook author.

The second activity challenges the students to develop a unique super hero, write within the comicbook form, and work cooperatively and effectively in a small group. Within the groups of five, the labor is divided according to the following positions: Editor in Chief, Content/Script Consultant, Writer, Illustrator, Binder. While every group member helps develop the comicbook as a whole, each person is specifically responsible for one stage.

Once the groups finish and bind their comicbooks, the whole class reconvenes to voice their response to the creation of literature and to share in the creativity of other peer writers. The authors' day falls into two parts. First, the entire class meets with the members of each group sitting together. The editors of each respective group introduce their co-workers. Students express what they thought were the best and hardest things they had to do for their position. Each group voices the uniqueness of its comicbook as well as any special problems or procedures it encountered. Once the formal presentations conclude, the program relaxes into an informal, open-house atmosphere of reading and sharing each others' works.

Summary

The activities in the hero unit outlined here work; that is, students respond well to them. The

variety in the daily activities keeps the students involved; the constant pursuit of the course theme maintains their high interest and motivation; the attention to the intertwined processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing develops their facility for language as a whole. The units in this course on the hero, however, are merely examples of the integrated approach to the teaching of English. In essence, the integrated approach is a methodology which assimilates the recent research findings on the interrelatedness of language learning. The success of the methodology depends on the teacher's integration of activities in a class that seeks an immediate course goal as well as long range development of language.

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