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 HELP & FAQs

Language Learning Diaries for Encouraging EFL Readers

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We explain two language learning diaries we have been refining and using in our respective high school and university reading classes for encouraging our EFL readers: reading achievement diary and guided-inquiry directed diary. In our diary use, we seek to encourage two complementary outcomes: nudging more student-generated awareness of the nature and cause of their individual reading difficulties, and personalizing our own attention to fostering students' self-reflection toward their self-discovery of individual learning solutions. In our

class work, we preface student responding to both diaries with explicit conscious reading strategies instruction and intensive timed practices keyed to making sense quickly of text and authentic print media articles. We exemplify both diaries, illustrating how student-teacher interchange sparks students' focusing on their reading confusions and narrowing of their perceptual-actual reading ability gap. We review the advantages of each diary as well as the nagging demerits to be overcome.

本論は、高校と大学のリーディングのクラスで改良を重ねながら使われている2種類の言語学習ダイアリー（リーディングにおける成果を記録するダイアリーと焦点を絞った質問を教師が投げかける誘導質問形式のダイアリー）を紹介する。ダイアリーを使用することで、以下の二つの補足的な成果をもたらす。一つは、個人のリーディングにおける問題点の本質と原因に対する学習者の自己認識を徐々に高めることであり、もう一つは生徒が自分の学習方法を自発的に発見できるように、生徒一人一人に対する教師の注目を「personalize – パーソナライズ」することにより、生徒の内省を促すことである。ダイアリーの導入に先立ち、学習者は明確な指導によりリーディングストラテジーについての意識を高めるとともに、時間制限があるリーディング集中練習を受けることで、学習者向けではなく一般に読まれている英字新聞や雑誌などのメディアをすばやく理解できるように訓練を受ける。生徒と教師間のダイアリーのやりとりにより、どのように生徒が自分のリーディングストラテジーについて理解を深め、自分の意識しているリーディング力と実際のリーディング力とのずれを埋めるかについて二つのダイアリーは実証する。本論の最後には、それぞれのダイアリーの長所と克服すべき短所について議論を展開する。

Formative background: Fostering self-reflection in English reading

We previously discussed our ongoing collaboration in providing our respective high school and university EFL readers with explicit conscious strategic reading instruction and intensive practice (Tanabe & Fulmer, 2003). Herein, we explain and exemplify the reflective language-learning diaries used in our reading classes and provide brief insights into what we are discovering in them with our students about their struggle to read.

Tanabe's reading achievement diary first requires students to read authentic news print articles for the main idea and answer selected strategy-employing comprehension questions within a limited time. Following each reading, students record in their diary how much they believe they consciously understand and use strategies in comprehending the article. Their semester-long record of achievement helps students build their confidence and overcome their fear of reading text-only passages peppered with unfamiliar words. Fulmer's directed diary incorporates the principles of ethnographic interviewing in written or email form. Through guided inquiry, students' narrow their perceptions of their reading difficulties over time toward self-discovered solutions. The student-to-teacher-generated responding and questioning in English stimulates student self-reflection and self-awareness, key factors contributing to their more successful learning to read.

We collaboratively engage our students in these diaries for several reasons. Coupled with our continuing reading instruction and practice, we believe our diaries afford learners a personalized opportunity to reflect on their perceived and actual reading "problems," opening on the possibility

of self-discovered practical solutions (Fulmer & Tanabe, 2003). Additionally, through the diary interchanges, we see students witness firsthand their developing awareness of reading metalanguage and metaknowledge. Equally in our diary endeavor, though we expect students' initial and continuing confusion in learning to read, we gain an ever-richer appreciation of their difficulties with this language art.

Tanabe's "Reading achievement diary"

Yakudoku continues to be a seemingly deeply rooted Japanese educational practice of word-for-word translating of foreign language texts (Gorsuch, 1998; Hino, 1988). Often identified as the primary task of an English "reading" lesson, repeated practice with *yakudoku* instills in beginning English readers an over-reliance on translation and other lower-level strategies (Horibe, 1995). Third-year high school students coming into my class on their first day are well practiced in this "reading" method as well. Invariably, the written survey data I collect from students on Day 1 of the school year coupled with class observation illuminate particular difficulties students have unknowingly developed from their ingrained reading practice. For one, students tend to be apprehensive about reading English texts that contain many unfamiliar words. Another instructional reality is the students' stop-and-check dictionary dependence. They are also inclined to maximize their attention to word- and sentence-level decoding, failing to grasp the whole picture of a reading. These difficulties together hobble students' understanding of *how* to read more quickly and comprehend more.

To enhance students' reflection on their English reading habits, I engage them in the "reading achievement diary." The achievement diary familiarizes them with strategic top-

down reading to complement their bottom-up vocabulary and grammar building. The diary pushes students to focus less on struggling with analysis of unknown vocabulary and sentence grammar and more on fostering self-reflection on their perceived and actual reading “problems.” Notably, the diary provides students with a means to track their achievement in their English reading metaknowledge building and strategies use, and not simply serve as a series of their reading performance results. Students’ awareness of English reading begins to change through their viewing and reflecting on their week-by-week “achievement records.”

Instructionally, our reading class of 46 students this term meets twice a week for a 50-minute period. Procedurally, after reconfirming students’ Day 1 survey data, I begin my combined authentic reading and diary reflection instruction using pre-taught and –practiced reading strategies. Four to nine strategy-employing questions are prepared from a current article of approximately 350 words from the regular edition of *The Japan Times*. For the diary, which is keyed directly to the reading (See Week 6 example below.), post-reading reflective questions are then prepared to increase students’ awareness of their actual use of up to 10 “finding” and “thinking” strategies for the reading, as well as their understanding of English reading metalanguage and metaknowledge. During the authentic reading practice, students have 4 minutes for the reading questions and another 4-5 minutes to work on their diary entry for a total on-task time of 8-9 minutes. Importantly, the primary diary entry focus is on students’ self-reflection and self-awareness of their reading achievement, not on their performance score for each reading exercise. For their final exam preparation later, students review all of the reading materials we will have used in prefacing their diary entries.

1. Which of the above 9 questions could you NOT understand?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

2. Circle all reading strategies below you especially used for each of today’s questions. Then put the question numbers next to each strategy you used for them.

Finding Skills:

Skipping
Skimming
Scanning
Getting main idea
Finding details

Thinking Skills:

Guessing
Predicting
Inferring
Summarizing
Opining

3. Which of the 10 reading strategies above do you NOT understand? (Mark a triangle.)

4. Which of the 10 reading strategies above do you NOT know how to use? (Mark a square.)

Figure 1. Tanabe’s “Reading achievement diary” for Week 6

As students’ diary entries progress, they are monitored weekly for evidence of consistency between comprehension question responding and strategy choice. In turn, this monitoring informs explicit strategies teaching of the 10 finding and thinking skills noted above and facilitates intensive review toward reading development. Attention is focused on uncovering students’ perceived reading problems while illuminating their confusion

and inconsistency between their reading metaknowledge awareness and their actual reading performance. Our continuing effort together allows each student and teacher to see individual language-learning progress in the diary from the students' decreasing dependence on "translation reading" and dictionary look-up, gaining confidence over time in their authentic reading, and narrowing their confusion between their perceptual and actual reading abilities.

These same reflective goals also serve as this diary's merits. As students build their functional English reading metalanguage and metaknowledge, they begin to explore their personal reading problems more deeply. In the process, they become less averse to risk taking and more at ease in cognitively springboarding quickly into the information-bearing parts of the text. In short, they become more efficient English readers. Equally, however, this diary has two principal demerits. One is that it takes time to familiarize students with the self-reflective diary entry procedure. The other is that there is initial difficulty in encouraging students' to provide personalized and detailed self-reflective comments about *how* they approach the text while reading.

Exemplified in Table 1 to demonstrate this diary at work are some telling in-progress diary entries of one mid-performing student ("Doddy") made over the first half of the term. The first examples excerpted from his Weeks 3 and 5 diary entries illustrate Doddy's confusion and inconsistency between his strategy-use awareness and actual strategy-use performance. The second example taken from his Week 6 entry delineates Doddy's diminishing confusion and increasing awareness of the value of strategic reading and intensive practice.

Table 1. Doddy's reading diary entries from Weeks 3, 5 & 6

Week 3 news article: "Ladies manage more, earn less" (2003, October 1)	
Post-reading question number & (type)	Question, possible responses & Doddy's response
Q4 (opining)	Do you think "ladies manage more"? <i>Agree</i> <i>Disagree</i> Doddy circled "Agree."
Doddy's diary response: Circled summarizing only.	
Week 5 news article: "Editors fret over how to fit 14-letter surname" (2003, October 10)	
Post-reading question number & (type)	Question, possible responses & Doddy's response
Q5 (inferring & opining)	If you were a newspaper editor, what would you do about Arnold [Schwarzenegger]'s long name? <i>Use as it is</i> <i>Make it shorter</i> <i>Give him a nickname</i> <i>No Idea</i> Circled "Use as it is."
Q6 (opining)	Did you expect Arnold would become governor of California? <i>Yes</i> <i>Maybe</i> <i>No</i> <i>I don't know</i> Circled "Maybe."
Q7 (opining)	Do you believe Arnold will be a good governor? <i>Yes</i> <i>Maybe</i> <i>No</i> <i>I don't know</i> Circled "No."
Diary responses: Put triangles on predicting and inferring intimating he didn't understand what they are.	

Week 6 news article: “Patched-up Little Mermaid returns to harbor pedestal” (2003, October 28)	
Post-reading question number & (type)	Question, possible responses & Doddy’s response
Q2 (finding details & summarizing)	Is this the first time this has happened? <i>Yes Maybe No I don’t know</i> Circled “Maybe.”
Q3 (predicting)	Will she be damaged again in the future? <i>Yes Maybe No I don’t know</i> Circled “Yes.”
Q4 (predicting)	Will more tourists visit Copenhagen now? <i>Yes Maybe No I don’t know</i> Circled “Yes.”
Q6 (inferring)	How many more years does she have to wait to become a real person? [To be inferred from time periods in the text.] Wrote “210 years.”
Q8 (opining)	Are Hans Christian Andersen and Little Mermaid popular in Japan? <i>Yes Maybe No I don’t know</i> Circled “Maybe.”
Q9 (opining)	Would you like to go to Copenhagen some day to see her? <i>Yes Maybe No I don’t know</i> Circled “Yes.”
Diary responses: Placed Q6 next to scanning in the beginning, Qs3 and 4 next to predicting, Q2 next to inferring, Qs8 and 9 next to opining.	

Doddy put Q6 next to scanning rather than inferring though his answer of “210 years” could only be derived through inference. He indicated he used inferring for Q2 which actually calls for finding details and summarizing. He thus chose inferring for the first time, which he previously claimed he did not understand. He also put the correct question numbers next to predicting and opining. These key responses informed my subsequent teaching. Though still in progress, these examples together evidence Doddy’s continuing perceptual confusion as well as his beginning awareness of using the higher-order reading strategies of predicting, inferring and opining.

Fulmer’s “Guided-inquiry directed diary”

We have a very intensive integrated reading-writing program for first- and second-year university students who also have a required 4-month ESL study program at our U.S. East Coast campus. First-year students meet two reading-writing teachers twice a week each for 90 minutes each class. Three instructional realities for our entry-level EFL students remain prominent. Baseline data from Day 1 surveys confirm students’ relative unfamiliarity with the vocabulary, meaning and conceptual understanding of pedagogical English reading-writing metalanguage. They little understand *how* to read faster and comprehend more of what they read or *how* to write clearly and logically in English. Students also cannot function well in their overseas study program without a practical knowledge of English reading-writing and the ability to talk reflectively about these language skills.

One of a constellation of approaches I use to ameliorate these problems is the “directed diary” discussed in Oxford’s workshop (Chamot, Cohen, Takeuchi, Kimura, Sano & Oxford,

1999). The guided inquiry practice involved is grounded in a primarily anthropological tradition. Significant to my inquiry effort here are Collier’s (1967) visual anthropology approach using photography and Spradley’s (1979, 1980) ethnographic interview and participant observer techniques.

Through guided inquiry, focusing here on reading only, I seek to encourage students to explore their perceived and actual reading difficulties, build their awareness and practical application of reading metalanguage and metaknowledge, and give them a sense of accomplishment in their becoming self-reflective in English about the “nightmare of reading in English.” Notably, as students gain experience in diary responding, these purposes also come to constitute the diary’s merits.

Procedurally, I give this 5-question diary to students on Day 1 and assign it as homework for Day 2. It is required for the first 8 weeks and then made optional. Students make reflective entries at least once a week by hand or email and accumulate their entries in a loose-leaf notebook or computer file for later review. I keep the principal language focus on self-reflection and -discovery, not on “perfect” communication.

I begin my guided inquiry with the very general questions given below and gradually use more specific questions to “guide” each learner through the steps of noticing or identifying, attending, discovering and resolving the student’s perceptual and actual reading difficulties. (For brevity’s sake, the similar writing Questions 3 and 4 and workshop talk Question 5 are omitted.) Our interchange sets up a series of student-to-teacher-generated “thought threads” we explore together toward the student creating workable solutions.

1. I am () in my English reading ability.

<i>very</i>	<i>so-so</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>not</i>
<i>confident</i>	<i>confident</i>	<i>confident</i>	<i>confident</i>

2. About reading in English, I want to learn more about how to:

Figure 2. Fulmer’s guide-inquiry directed diary for Day 1 (reading questions only)

My inquiry draws from a “diary responding resource” of computer-categorized and -tabbed questions, replies, suggestions and considerations developed over time. This practical database enables me to key questions very quickly yet personally to individual student responses whether they are handwritten or emailed. Conversely, this intensive effort and time required of the teacher to both build a working, easy-to-use inquiry-response database and get into the rhythm of quick yet personalized responding may equally be viewed as the diary’s demerits. Notably also, this diary may not benefit every learner, particularly as students’ learning styles, beliefs and attitudes differ of which I remain respectful.

In reflecting on students’ diary entries, I work consciously to not interpret or appropriate what I read. Rather I look for reflective connections between each student’s reading perceptions and actual reading practices that serve to personalize my inquiry and instruction. I also seek to uncover reading problems and misconceptions that may be common to the whole class. Students’ developing language-learning reflection in the diary is evidenced from the metalanguage and metaknowledge they

begin to use, their applying more strategic reading learned through conscious choice and intensive practice, and their more narrowed focus on their perceived reading problems opening on their self-discovered solutions.

My interchange for Question 2 below with “Rita,” one mid-performing reader in her class of 23 first-year learners currently in their 7th week, exemplifies this diary at work. All email entries are given as written.

(10/7/03): **Q2**. About reading in English, I want to learn more about how to:

Rita1 (10/7): “read a good way”

Pat1 (10/8): Can you explain what you mean by “a good way”? Also, can you give me some examples here of “problems” you think you have with your reading?

Rita2 (10/14): I learned skipping, skimming, and so on. So I solved “how to read a good way”. I think I try to practice this way.

Pat2 (10/15): I’m glad you learned skipping and skimming. So what’s “and so on”? Do you mean you know how to use other reading [R] strategies too, or do you mean you have other personal R techniques of your own?

Rita3 (10/23): I mean no special strategy by so on. If I don’t already know some words, I try to guess the meaning of the words first, and then look them up in the dictionary to check.

Pat3 (10/24): OK, so what do you do with your “new” vocabulary when you’ve found it? How do you use or practice it?

Rita4 (10/26): If “I’ve found” unknown words, I try to guess the meaning of the words first, and then look them up in the dictionary to check whether my guess is right or wrong.

Pat4 (11/3/03): Do you mean you look up each word as you read or after you’ve finished a reading? Besides “unknown word guessing,” are you understanding and using any other “speed thinking” strategies yet (predicting, inferring, summarizing, opining)? If these are still difficult, how can I help you learn to use these more?

Rita5 (11/14/03): I’ll check up unknown words after I’ve finished reading. If I find many unknown words, I give up this method. What I want you to teach me as a next step is;

-expand my vocabulary by knowing etymology or the roots of words and suffix followed by some branch words. Example; ism-heroism-socialism

-I may be able to infer unknown words by finding trunk and then infer branch words.

Pat5 (11/17): So you’re thinking you can use inferring to help you get the meaning of more vocabulary? Do you think there’s any relationship between guessing, predicting, inferring, summarizing and opining and reading sentences, paragraphs, articles and books? Yes/No? Why/Why not?

Rita6 (11/19/03): Yes. When I read “sentences, paragraphs, articles and books”, I often use “guessing, predicting, inferring, summarizing and opining. These make reading of English different.

Rita’s reflective entries here evidence her continuing struggle to get from *looking down* at word- and sentence-level reading to *looking through* to paragraph and higher-order reading (thinking, connecting, and associating skills relating oneself to the reading and to the world at large). She notes that speed thinking skills relate to English reading and “often” uses them, concluding that “These [strategies] make reading of English different” (Rita6). Though too early to confirm if her point here

is simply repetitive, Rita's perception at this stage may evidence her reaching one minor threshold in her developing English reading awareness -- that the structure of English reading and the conscious strategic approach to it differ from those of her L1 reading.

Closing remarks: Continuing our diary effort

Tanabe's "reading achievement diary" provides a personalized occasion for her students to overcome their well-entrenched belief that they cannot understand authentic reading material without first translating it word for word. Her diary also presses students to drop their "customary role" of passive reader (Tanabe, 2003) and assume greater confidence as active English readers. Fulmer's "guided-inquiry directed diary" fosters in his learners a developing metalanguage and metaknowledge of English reading, and ensures that what they write reflectively in English is neither appropriated nor undervalued. His diary also serves as another observational window on to what degree students' thought threads may illuminate their sense of developing awareness of conscious strategic reading.

We acknowledge several potential pitfalls in student-teacher perceptions of Japanese students' reading ability and knowledge that our instruction and diary piloting seek to address. Reading strategies students say they are using and those they actually use differ (Midorikawa, Ono & Robson, 2001). Determining whether reading students in fact develop a working metaknowledge and practical use of conscious strategic reading is difficult at best (Tanabe & Fulmer, 2003). Finally, students' perceived and actual reading abilities do not match, and the number of correctly answered comprehension questions is not a performance measure of reading ability (Fulmer & Tanabe, 2003).

Ours have been but two representative diary examples of our students' struggle and confusion in getting from their earlier learned grammar translation and choral pronunciation "reading" to conscious strategic reading and the ability to reflect on it. Though our examples may not seem significant at this early juncture, experience has shown us that these students are well on their way to making some important discoveries by end-term about actively and consciously engaging English reading. As we continue working together with these students in their diaries to narrow the gap between their perceived and actual reading abilities, we anticipate their becoming more self-reflective and self-expressive English readers.

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