

## Appendix C: Descriptions of the Class Activities

The students in class A always chose their own specific materials to read individually from a selection provided by the teacher. The basic structure of the class A lessons was for the students to first discuss something that they had read and written about individually beforehand in pairs, with one partner, and then each student would read something else chosen individually and answer questions based on it. The students in classes B and C all read the same materials assigned by the teacher for homework. Comprehension quizzes were taken on each reading assignment followed by pair discussions, with three different partners, about what was read in general and then by answering questions individually in writing based on the reading and then discussing them in small groups, of three or four students each. This was the procedure for about half of the lessons. The other lessons primarily involved pair and group discussions of various topics provided by the teacher or whole class listening practice.

In class A, the students were expected to read one graded reader,<sup>1</sup> borrowed from the university library, each week. They selected these books completely on their own. Then, they were to write a journal entry on the book and submit it through the Internet to the teacher.<sup>2</sup> The journal entry was to include the book's title and genre, a summary and the student's opinions of the story, any interesting words the student took notice of, and one question the student would like answered about the story. This assignment was to be completed by Monday.

The Monday lessons began with the students sitting in pairs and telling each other in English about the books they had read and written the journal entry about during the past week. They were encouraged to both summarize the book and give their opinions and feelings about it. The teacher wrote various words and expressions on the board to provide the students with a framework within which to speak about their books. This was similar to the format for the journal entries. Many of the students made use of these words, phrases, and sentences. After about twenty minutes, the teacher selected a few students to give a short oral report in English to the whole class about their partner's book.

Following the oral reports, each student chose a newspaper article<sup>3</sup> to read and answer the associated questions. The teacher had placed them on empty desks, and the students walked around the room to make their selections. After reading the article and answering the questions, each student walked to the teacher's desk to have the answers checked and any difficulties resolved. Then, they returned to their desks and wrote a journal entry about the article on their laptops, using the same format as for their book journal entries and also submitting it in the same way. Once this was completed, the students went to the library to exchange their books, and after returning to the classroom, began reading them.

On Thursdays, the students first sat in pairs and told their one partner in English about the newspaper articles they had read and written journal entries about on the

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<sup>1</sup> These were Oxford Bookworms published by Oxford University Press and come in various levels of difficulty, from stage 1 to stage 6; the higher the stage, the more difficult. Most students chose stage 2 or 3.

<sup>2</sup> Students submitted these into a folder maintained by the file hosting service Dropbox, Dropbox, Inc., which can be accessed from [dropbox.com](https://www.dropbox.com), <https://www.dropbox.com>.

<sup>3</sup> For many years, The Guardian created these for English language learners, and the selection changed regularly. Now, there is only an archive, which is no longer added to, from which to choose. The articles are of two levels: advanced or low-intermediate. Most students chose low-intermediate level. They can be found at the [guardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/education/series/classroom-materials), <http://www.theguardian.com/education/series/classroom-materials>.

previous Monday. This took about twenty minutes. Then, the students walked around the room in order for each to choose a short essay or story<sup>4</sup> to read and answer a portion of the associated questions, those concerning comprehension and vocabulary. The teacher had placed a selection of these of different levels of difficulty on empty desks in the room. When finished, each student brought the short reading and answers to the teacher's desk. The teacher then marked the answers and explained any corrections that were needed. After this, the students silently read their books or wrote their journal entries about their books on their laptops.

At the beginning of the semester, many of the students clearly lacked confidence in writing and speaking in English. However, by the time the questionnaire was administered, all of the students were much more comfortable in performing both tasks. The journal entries were much longer and contained a much wider range of vocabulary and expressions than at the first. The pair work discussions about the books and newspaper articles also increased in length and were carried out in a much more confident manner. Whereas at first the discussions were about five minutes of hesitating talk, by the time the data for this study was collected, it was not usual for them to last twenty minutes or more and to be full of lively talking.

For classes B and C, the students were expected to read a certain number of chapters in one of the class textbooks, graded readers,<sup>5</sup> for homework for about half of the classes, generally every other week. They were told to always read each assignment at least twice before the due date. Precisely, this was for eight classes in the first semester and, for four classes in the second semester before the questionnaire was administered.

The first thing the students did in class, when this homework was due, was to take short quiz of eight multiple-choice comprehension questions about details of what they were supposed to have read. They sat in typical rows to take the quiz. This took between five and ten minutes, and was followed by the quizzes being switched among students, the answers being gone over, and the quizzes graded and handed in, which took another five minutes or so. Then, the students walked to the back of the classroom and stood in two rows facing one another and spoke in pairs, mostly in English, about the homework reading and the quiz. After about ten minutes, the students were rotated to obtain new partners. Students spoke with three partners in this manner. For the most part, the teacher only observed and monitored the activity while walking up and down the row, though occasionally students asked the teacher questions or the teacher supplied a word or an explanation unsolicited.

Next, the students returned to their seats, which were now arranged in groups of three or four. Each student was given a written copy of the same two questions, which were somehow related to the story. For about ten minutes, students individually wrote a response to each of the questions in their notebooks. Then, they closed their notebooks and discussed the two questions, mostly in English, in their groups. After about fifteen minutes, they were given a third question to individually write an answer to for five minutes and then to discuss for five minutes. Following this, a fourth question was given to write about and then discuss in the same way. If students wanted, they could ask the

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4 These were SRA cards produced by The Science Research Associates Inc., which is now part of SRA/McGraw-Hill. They come in various levels of difficulty coded by colors and were originally for use in the teaching of reading in American elementary schools. Students generally chose purple and violet, which are lower intermediate level.

5 These were all Oxford Bookworms, which are leveled from stage 1 to stage 6, with stage 1 being the easiest to read, published by Oxford University Press. In the first semester, the first book was of short stories, stage 3, and the second was a novel, also stage 3. In the second semester, the first book was also of short stories, but stage 4, and the second was again to have been a novel, stage 3; but, the questionnaire was administered before the students began work with this fourth book.

teacher questions, which did not happen very often. Otherwise, the teacher walked among the groups, mostly just monitoring the speaking and observing, and occasionally adding information or ideas or suggesting words the students were searching for.

The homework for three other classes each semester was to listen to the both of the two two- to four-minute recordings for one lesson of an ESL radio drama<sup>6</sup> and answer the printed questions about them. In the class this was due, the students first compared answers to the homework with a few classmates and then asked the teacher any questions they had. This took about ten to fifteen minutes. After this, the teacher led the class in doing the next lesson of the radio drama, followed by a short dictation using a very short passage of the recording. All three of these classes were also carried out in the second semester before the questionnaire was administered.

In two classes in the first semester and in two classes in the second semester before filling out the questionnaire, the students were given topics to speak about in pairs and in small groups. In two other classes in the first semester, the students participated in a variety of language learning activities.

In the beginning of the school year, quite a few of the students had difficulties writing and especially speaking in English. As time went by, most students became able to do both of these tasks to a much greater extent and much more comfortably. These things were easily observable. It is somewhat impossible to comment on whether or not the students' reading abilities improved based on classroom performance as all the texts and quizzes were different. The same is true of their listening, which was either mostly listening to their classmates, which never seemed to be difficult for them, or mostly listening to the recordings, which always seemed to be rather difficult for them.

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<sup>6</sup> This was an intermediate-level listening text published by Longman and is now out of print.