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ABSTRACT

Experiences in teaching a first-year reading course in the intensive English program at Kansai Gaidai Junior College (Japan) are discussed. In the period described, there were six classes of 16 students each. A proficiency-oriented approach incorporating a learner development component was adopted to facilitate the transition from traditional language instruction to communicative language learning and use. An objective was to develop learners' ability to assess their own proficiency levels, decide on long-term proficiency goals, set short-term achievement goals and develop appropriate strategies to achieve them, identify individual strengths and preferences in learning, and compile portfolios demonstrating proficiency level. The report describes the use of two different instructional frameworks, Dimensions of Learning and KASA (Knowledge, Awareness, Skills, Attitude), to design the course. Selection of texts, curriculum organization, design of learning activities, and portfolio design processes are outlined, and lessons learned are discussed. It was found that three course components were vital to instructional success: authentic language tasks; use of weekly learning sheets for students to track their own progress; and a portfolio cover sheet containing the student's narrative reflection on language learning. A timeline and sample course materials are included. Contains 14 references. (MSE)

Proficiency, Portfolios, and Learner Development in the Reading Classroom

by
Carolyn Layzer and Judy Sharkey

Introduction

Learner development considerations are rapidly coming to the foreground in course design and implementation. Authentic assessment and alternative assessment are also hot areas in recent language learning research. Why? Certain aspects of learner development, notably fostering metacognition and strategy training, have been recognized as key factors in successful learning (see, for example, O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

Another reason for the increased interest in these areas might be that the testing world has not caught up with the communicative aspect of language learning. Teachers who stress communication seek assessment tools that will more accurately reflect what students can or cannot **do** with language rather than what they can memorize. Even standardized tests such as TOEIC and Eiken[1] now incorporate authentic and semi-authentic tasks. Helping students to meet the challenges of learning language in new ways and for new real-life communication purposes is one of the challenges we face as teachers. By adopting a proficiency orientation in our teaching and including a learner development component in our curricula, we can facilitate the transition from traditional language study to modern language learning and use.

Aims

The purpose of this paper is to describe how we addressed the above aspects in a reading class by adopting a proficiency orientation and incorporating a learner development component in our course design. Our goal in designing the course was for students to be more involved in their learning. Specifically our aims were to enable students to:

- assess their own proficiency levels,
- decide upon long-term proficiency goals,

- set short-term learning/achievement goals and develop appropriate strategies to achieve them,
- reflect on learning to identify individual strengths and preferences in learning, and
- compile portfolios demonstrating their proficiency levels

By sharing this example of what we did, we hope to provide teachers--who might be interested in addressing authentic assessment and learner development but who are concerned about sacrificing time needed for other class work--with concrete ideas of ways to include a proficiency orientation and learner development components in course design and implementation.

Defining the terms

"Proficiency", "portfolios" and "learner development" are all terms that are currently variously interpreted in the field. In order to avoid confusion, we will present our definitions of some of the terms that we will use in our discussion.

Proficiency. What is proficiency? *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (3rd ed., 1992) defines it as "having or marked by an advanced degree of competence as in an art, vocation, profession, or branch of learning...[and] implies an advanced degree of competence acquired through training." Although this definition is useful, most of us have a hard time pinning down the precise qualities and characteristics that comprise proficiency in language. We talk about being "fluent" or, if we have been reading research in applied linguistics, "competent." Whichever term we use, we may have a general idea of what it signifies, but the specifics are rather slippery. For this reason, researchers and practitioners have been working on guidelines to help practitioners plan curriculum and devise assessment tools for proficiency-oriented language learning.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is an organization that works on defining and measuring language proficiency, and in

assessing and developing language teaching and testing materials. They developed a system based on three criteria: content (topic or content area); function; and accuracy. Using these three criteria, ACTFL has developed proficiency rating scales and curriculum guidelines which set out in a fairly general way content/topic areas, functions, techniques and accuracy descriptors for four basic levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior (see *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, 1986).[2] [Also see sample of modified ACTFL guidelines page in Appendix.]

For us, adopting a proficiency orientation for our course means we will always be thinking about "what can students do?" not "what skills/information did we teach?" However, it does not mean that we have relegated our personal teaching philosophies to some rigid construction. As Alice Omaggio Hadley (1993) reminds us:

> "Proficiency is focused on *measurement*, not method. There are no methodological prescriptions in the guidelines. The descriptions of what learners can *do* in functional terms can have an effect, however, on what methods and procedures we choose to use in our classrooms to help students attain certain goals. Instruction that fosters the growth of proficiency for all learners will need to be flexible in order to accommodate learners' differing needs and preferences. Rather than being prescriptive or restrictive in nature, proficiency-oriented instruction must embrace and reconcile many different approaches and points of view about language learning and teaching."
> (p. 33)

Adopting a proficiency orientation helps us to make sure that our teaching is enabling students to do things in the target language. The guidelines developed by ACTFL are helpful in planning content, but they do not dictate exactly what we should teach. Again, Omaggio Hadley writes:

> "Whether one uses the ACTFL proficiency guidelines or some other framework for describing language ability, it is important to bear in mind that these descriptions are meant to be used to *describe* and *measure* competence in a language, not to prescribe methods, materials, or approaches to language teaching and learning."
> (1993, p. 32)

Our principal reason for using these guidelines is that they can be made accessible to students. For students, this means that instead of guessing what the criteria for "fluency", "competence", or "an 'A' in the course" are, they could actually use the

same guidelines to assess their levels. We hypothesized that they could also use the guidelines to set goals for their learning.

And finally, the textbook we selected for our course was very good for helping students develop the skills they needed to read effectively, but it did not provide authentic content. To ensure that students were exposed to authentic content, we used the guidelines to help us select topic areas appropriate to students' proficiency levels. [Note: For example, an Intermediate-level student may be able to find the main idea and supporting details (reading skills) in a text about a tradition or custom, but she might not be able to do the same task with a text about molecular biological processes. The latter topic probably falls in the Superior level of reading proficiency, while the former topic may be in Intermediate or Advanced level.]

Portfolios. A portfolio is "a collection of artifacts accompanied by a reflective narrative that not only helps the learner to understand and extend learning, but invites the reader of the portfolio to gain insight about learning and the learner" (Porter and Cleland, 1995, p. 154). In the United States, portfolios are gaining acceptance each year as a more accurate assessment tool than exams. In fact, in several states (e.g., Oregon and Vermont), portfolios are required at every level of schooling. In the near future, high school seniors will need to submit a portfolio in order to gain admission to colleges in those states.

Portfolios have most commonly been used to show students' progress in writing. Our aim was to devise a type of portfolio that could demonstrate students' progress in developing reading proficiency--a reading proficiency portfolio.

Learner development. Research has shown that good learners not only have strategies but that they know how to use them appropriately (see for example, O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Studies have also shown that students at all levels benefit from explicit strategy training (see for example, Oxford,1990). Learner development, simply stated, means helping students become better learners. In our experiences with

Japanese college students we have found that starting a learning dialogue with students is a crucial first step (see Sharkey and Layzer). When we talk about "learner development" in our classes we are referring to, in addition to explicit strategy training, a range of activities that are designed to encourage students to make choices, reflect on those choices, and identify what helps/hinders their learning. We want students to participate more consciously in their learning.

Many current textbooks address this objective by incorporating learner development activities: the *Tapestery* series and the *Atlas* series (Heinle & Heinle, publisher), and the *Impact* series (Lingual House, publisher; specifically designed for Japanese students), for example, all have strong learner development components. It is becoming easier for teachers to incorporate a learner training/development component in their classses--choosing a textbook that includes such a component means that teachers does not have to spend time creating their own learner development materials.

Frameworks for teaching and learning

Learner development asks students to question what, why, and how they are learning with the belief that through this process, students will become better learners. Teachers need to engage in similar questioning when planning and structuring our courses. If a student has discovered that *x* activity does not help her learn, then naturally her next question will be "Why are we doing this activity in class?" We believe students have a right to know the teacher's rationale regarding objectives and activities in class. We have also benefited from students' questions as the answers have helped to clarify and deepen our beliefs about teaching and learning.

Two different frameworks were extremely influential in shaping our classes last year. One was the Dimensions of Learning, and the other was KASA (knowledge, awareness, skills, attitude).

The Dimensions of Learning model was designed by primary and secondary school educators in the United States who advocate curriculum that is built around what is known about learning. In other words, learning must inform and shape teaching.

The five dimensions are meant to serve as metaphors for the different types of thinking that occur when learning is taking place. The dimensions of learning are:

1. Positive Attitudes and Perceptions About Learning
2. Thinking Involved in Acquiring and Integrating Knowledge
3. Thinking Involved in Extending and Refining Knowledge
4. Thinking Involved in Using Knowledge Meaningfully
5. Productive Habits of Mind

(Marzano, 1992)

The dimensions are not isolated from one another, nor are they hierarchical in nature. They interact and foster mutual growth. Dimensions 1 and 5 are often seen as setting the right environment for ensuring the others. Attitudes and perceptions can either hinder or facilitate learning. Having healthy mental habits is essential if students are to reach higher levels of thinking. "What good does it do students to learn content if they do not learn to seek accuracy and precision, avoid impulsivity, work at the edge rather than the center of their competence, and so on?" (Marzano, p. 15).

KASA: a framework for learning. The above framework was a tremendous help when we were designing activities, evaluating our objectives, and making content and process decisions as the course evolved. In other words, it helped us to think about the different pieces of learning and ensure that we were addressing all of those pieces in our teaching. However, we also wanted a framework that was clear and accessible to students that would allow them to see the different pieces of learning. During week 3 of the first semester we presented KASA (knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness)[3]: a framework for learning, to the students. We defined the terms as follows: knowledge is information and understanding about a subject; attitude is how you think and feel about something; skills are knowledge and ability that allow you to do seomething well; awareness is knowledge of what is happening and why it is happening. Of course, students were already aware of different factors in learning, but the KASA framework, provided us, as a learning community with a starting point for dialogue--establishing

common terms for discussing learning. [Furthermore, *kasa* in Japanese means umbrella, providing a nice visual metaphor for learning.]

The Teaching Context

In this paper we discuss our experience in teaching a first-year reading course in Kansai Gaidai Junior College's Intensive English Studies (IES) program. In the period described, there were six classes of 16 students each. Each week, in addition to their regular classes, students had fourteen 50-minute IES classes: 4 reading/vocabulary classes, 4 writing classes, 4 listening/speaking classes, and 2 grammar classes. Students' reasons for applying for the IES program vary greatly, the most popular including: small classes, friendships that the small classes foster, and the desire to improve English for purposes of studying abroad, increased employment opportunities, and/or traveling overseas.

The Reading Class

As mentioned above, the IES program divides English into modalities. Originally, the first-year reading/vocabulary class was designed to develop reading skills and increase vocabulary. We recognized the value in addressing these areas but felt that the course still lacked a coherent, cohesive framework. This is where the proficiency guidelines helped us.

We decided that we wanted the broad-based objective for the reading/vocabulary class to be to increase students' proficiency levels in reading. To accomplish this we addressed three areas: reading skills, vocabulary development, and learner development. We hoped that students would increase their proficiency levels by applying what they learned in these three areas to authentic material that they had chosen. Required texts for the course were: *Reading Power* (Mikulecky and Jeffries, 1986), *Vocabulary Builder* (Seal, 1986), and all IES students were required to purchase *Collins COBUILD Essential English Dictionary* (HarperCollins).

Developing reading skills. *Reading Power* was the main text for the year. We followed the authors' recommendation, each week doing four passages for faster reading (no more than two during one class), one page of thinking skills exercises, and six pages of comprehension skills exercises. The vocabulary level in *Reading Power* is designed for beginning level students. However, the book works well with high-intermediate to advanced students for whom skills such as previewing and predicting are new.

The reading comprehension skills introduced in this text are: previewing and predicting, scanning, guessing word meanings, identifying topics, identifying main ideas of paragraphs, finding patterns of organization, understanding pronoun referents, and skimming. Exercises for increasing reading speed and "thinking in English" are also included. Of course, attention to each skill must be ongoing, so once a skill had been introduced, students continued to practice it for the rest of the year. Our aim was for the skills to become so familiar that students would be able to use them strategically (rather than just using them because they were instructed to do so as part of an assignment).

Periodically we introduced authentic practice activities to allow students opportunities to see the application of the skills they were learning and thus increase their motivation to develop the skills. Examples of this type of activity are: scanning exercises using advertisements, movie listings, product labels; matching captions to photos; matching headlines to front page blurbs (materials for all of these activities were taken from locally available publications and products).

Increasing vocabulary. Many language instructors consider how to teach vocabulary, and some of the most well-attended sessions at professional conferences have titles such as "101 ways to teach vocabulary." Paul Nation's (1990) excellent research in the field has re-focused the attention where it belongs: on how students *acquire* vocabulary. His findings compelled us to take a new look at how we would address vocabulary learning in reading class.

The vocabulary portion of the course was characterized by exploration and experimentation. During the first half of the first semester we gave students vocabulary to study. We chose words based on what the students needed to function comfortably and successfully in cooperative learning activities and to understand instructions in their textbooks. During the second half of the semester we distributed a list of the 1000 most frequent words in English (West's *General Service List of English Words*, 1953). The students marked the words they knew. Students formed vocabulary groups, each consisting of 4 students. Each week the group was responsible for choosing 10 words they wanted to learn and designing a quiz for themselves. Students were given time in class to work on the vocabulary. One group member would hand in the quiz two days before it was to be taken in class. We checked to see if the words were being used appropriately. Students were encouraged to write about authentic situations using real names in their sentences. Some groups wrote stories and others wrote ten unrelated sentences.

During the second semester we used *Vocabulary Builder*. This textbook introduces new words thematically in short passages, provides activities for controlled and free practice, and encourages students to make connections between their own experiences and the new vocabulary items. Because of time constraints, we were only able to cover 12 of the 30 units, so the students chose which units they wanted to study. At the end of the second semester, each student was assigned a unit and designed a task that would help her classmates review that unit.

This was a year of experimentation both for us and for the students. As we tried to help students find the most efficient way to build their vocabulary, students worked together to discover effective ways of choosing and learning new words. Most students found it much more difficult to learn words from the 1000 and 2000 word lists. Nearly all students preferred learning words using the contextualized practice in the vocabulary textbook and choosing words from articles and books read independently. On the other hand, students also valued the opportunities to experiment with different ways of learning new words.

Addressing learner development. A key aspect of learner development is that learners must become actively involved in their learning. This means talking about styles and strategies, identifying preferences, setting goals, reflecting on learning experiences and saying what was good, bad, difficult, easy, etc. It also means helping students to see that learning (as opposed to studying) involves making choices. Reflecting on those choices can help students understand what they need in order to learn most effectively. We see learning as a dialogue, and when students are involved in the dialogue, they are learning. When they are not involved in the dialogue, they are merely studying.

Students completed weekly learning sheets on which they were asked to write objectives and strategies, list what they did in class that week and how they felt about it, assess their participation and motivation levels and offer comments and suggestions about the class. The learning sheets and the portfolios helped students monitor their progress and efforts in class. [The learning sheet is described in greater detail below.]

As mentioned above, we wanted students to make more choices in their learning. However, we also realized that for students new to a learning-centered classroom, making informed choices is a new process. If students do not have extensive experience with group work or pair work and they are asked, "How would you like to do this exercise? By yourself? With a partner or with a group?" most students might say they prefer to work by themselves because that is what they know, *not* because it is what they prefer. This is an example of a false choice. The types of choices students made included:

• vocabulary: first semester --choosing words from the 1000 word list; second semester--as a class, negotiating which units to cover in *Vocabulary Builder*

• pleasure reading: students selected novels according to their interest and level of difficulty (some chose to read ladder editions of popular works)

• authentic tasks: on various occasions students brought newspaper/magazine articles to class

• weekly schedule: in the second semester, each week consisted of 2 days of *Reading Power*, 1 day of *Vocabulary Builder*, and 1 day of authentic tasks or a story. Each class voted to decide on the scheduling of those days.

• portfolios: each portfolio reflected a greater amount of choice regarding the content.

Key Components:

Three components of the course proved to be vital to the success of our efforts: the authentic tasks, the weekly learning sheets, and the portfolio cover sheets. These are the three pieces that need to be tailored for each teaching context. For example, the authentic tasks should be relevant to the students' lives so that they will be interesting and provide motivation. The learning sheets' design will depend on the class content and schedule as well as the elements of the course which the teacher wishes to emphasize. The design of the portfolio cover sheets will depend on what information teachers want learners to reflect on as well as what they want to know about the learners. Each item is discussed briefly below, and samples are provided in the Appendix:

Authentic Tasks: These were tasks which we designed to fit the topic/content areas in the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Each task was based on an authentic text and was more or less like a "reading role play" in which the learner read and demonstrated comprehension by responding appropriately. Authentic tasks are tasks like those a person might actually undertake, such as reading a bus schedule, filling out an application form, ordering from a catalogue, or reading and understanding a personal check. The movement towards authentic tasks in mainstream education (i.e., non-ESL/EFL) has been promoted by theorists such as Grant Wiggins (1989) who assert the need for a shift from artificial tasks designed to cover content to authentic tasks designed to "engage learners in complex issues that enhance the learning of content and the ability to learn" (Marzano, 1992, p.13).

For this course, we prepared two sets of tasks spanning the Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid levels. As the students moved up to the Intermediate-High level, they became ready to work with longer, more sophisticated texts such as short newspaper articles. We prepared such articles for one topic area, including specific comprehension questions and rather detailed self-assessment. For subsequent topic areas, however, students had to find articles for themselves and apply skills they were learning in the textbook (such as finding the main idea and supporting details) to the articles.

The Weekly Learning Sheet: As previously mentioned, the weekly learning sheets helped students keep track of their progress and efforts in class. A common problem with asking learners to reflect on what they have done is that they are often unable to recall specific activities, goals and strategies, and feelings they had about class activities during the week. These sheets helped students by providing a structured space in which they could record such information. Although students handed the sheets in after the end of each week, some students chose to reflect immediately after completing an activity, others looked back at the end of class, and others at the end of the day. Naturally there were some procrastinators who put it off until the morning it was due, but it proved such a chore for them (because it was so difficult to remember everything they had done) that most of them began to take notes during the week.

Students were not, however, unanimously enthusiastic about the learning sheets. In fact, "troublesome" was a word used by some students to describe completing the learning sheets. On the other hand, about 95% of all students were glad that their effort and attitude in daily classwork counted. The learning sheets provided tangible evidence for students of their daily performance that would not register in a typical exam. The learning sheets also served as reminders to students that they had objectives to achieve and strategies to help them do it.

The Portfolio Cover Sheet: The cover sheet is the first page of the portfolio. It is one of the most important parts of the portfolio because it houses the reflective narrative in which learners show their awareness of what they are learning. In determining the contents of the cover sheets for portfolios in this class, we had to decide what information we wanted students to consider and what kind of information we wanted from them and which aspects of their learning we wanted them to focus on.

Students complete the cover sheet after compiling the portfolio, but they know the questions while they are compiling the portfolio, so they mull them over while putting things together. Compiling the portfolio is a wonderful in-class activity because learners go in and out of solitary reflection, asking classmates about which category something fits into, checking with each other to make sure they have understood the questions, and so on. It is also interesting to watch them amid their piles of papers--sorting them, remembering particular activities, all the while collecting ideas to write about in the narrative.

Sequence of Portfolios

We started the semester with the idea that students would be able to identify a proficiency goal and then complete the necessary tasks and compile a portfolio that would justify their self-assessment. However, we had to consider the background of the students and their views of teaching and learning, student and teacher roles and responsibilities in the classroom, and goals and expectations held by students prior to entering the classroom. We wanted to create an environment in which learners could feel comfortable questioning, challenging, and asserting their own opinions--this would be very different from the educational contexts in which students had found themselves previously. Therefore, much of our work with these groups of first-year students was in training students to (and how to) ask questions, reflect on their work, work together constructively in pairs and small groups, and take responsibility for their learning. We did this by introducing one new element at a time so as to allow students a chance to adjust to each change before facing a new one. In fact, the change students were able

to make during one academic year was remarkable--such a leap would have been daunting (if not insurmountable) to most at the beginning of the year; taking it step by step, however, some students could hardly remember a time when they had not worked autonomously, asked "why?" when they did not understand, or scanned an English-language newspaper for an interesting story to read.

The first semester:

Students submitted three portfolios in the first semester of the course. In the first one, we (teachers) specified exactly what should go into it. The reason for this was that the*idea* of compiling a portfolio was completely new to students. If students were able to compile the portfolio correctly, according to the instructions, they received full credit. On the other hand, a haphazardly thrown-together collection of papers would not meet the minimum criteria for the portfolio. The challenge of the first portfolio was in categorizing learning activities in terms of areas of learning, using the framework of KASA.

The second portfolio was again organized according to the KASA framework. This time, however, students selected only their best pieces of work for their Knowledge section (and all work for the remaining three sections). The challenge in this portfolio was for students to assess the work they had done in class up to that point and to comment on work they thought demonstrated their strengths.

The third portfolio, the last one in the first semester, was similar to Portfolio #2. The new elements in this portfolio were student-selected articles, student-selected vocabulary, and (most importantly) an assessment of their learning in each of the four areas of KASA.

Following this portfolio, most students were familiar enough with the process of compiling a portfolio that we gave them the optional assignment of making a Summer Portfolio to show what they did during the summer. Students were free to design their own portfolios, including determining contents and deciding how to organize them.

The second semester:

In the second semester, we had two portfolios. In the first one, Portfolio #4, a new element was introduced: proficiency. In other words, this portfolio contained all of the sections of KASA plus one of proficiency. By the time the first portfolio was due, students had already been introduced to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and had already completed authentic tasks in the Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid levels. For this fourth portfolio, they selected the tasks that they felt proud of and wrote a self-assessment of their proficiency, citing the items included in their portfolios as evidence.

For the final portfolio of the year, students selected their best work to show their progress in the four principal areas of the course: Developing Reading Skills, Increasing Vocabulary, Increasing Reading Proficiency, and Learner Development. In a detailed self-assessment, students wrote about what proficiency level they thought they were at, the next level they wanted to reach, and what they planned to do in order to reach it. The unfamiliar element in this portfolio was the new format for organizing the contents. However, compiling the portfolio in this way helped students to look back at the course contents with a fresh eye and redefine what they had learned. In this way, they were able to re-assess what they had done.

Early Outcomes

At the end of the second semester, we had an amazing collection of portfolios from students. In each one, students had written at length about their learning: their strengths and weaknesses, their strategies and attitudes, specific accomplishments and goals, evaluative comments about specific aspects of the course and their performance in it--all in English. What a transformation from the beginning of the year! Students grew in ways that we had not anticipated and taught us things we had not expected to learn. On the other hand, although we did meet some of the aims set out at the beginning of the course, others remained unmet:

1. *Were students able to assess their own proficiency levels (by considering the ACTFL guidelines)?*

Approximately 60% of students used the ACTFL guidelines to assess their own proficiency levels. This stemmed in part from the fact that many students did not have the goal of increasing their proficiency in English--they actually had other reasons for being in college and being in an intensive English program.

Another consideration is whether students need to be able to use the exact ACTFL terminology when assessing their levels. For example, some students did not identify an ACTFL level, but rather said they were "middle" level, and then went on to talk about their learning in ways that clearly demonstrated that they were very aware of what they could do, what they wanted to achieve in the future, and how they could achieve that goal.

• Some typical examples of statements from students who did use the guidelines are:

"I think I am at Intermediate-High level because I can understand all parts of Intermediate-type tasks or articles. But sometimes I can't get a main idea from them, so I'm not at Advanced level completely. (Sometimes I can.)"

"I think I am at Intermediate-High level because I could do Intermediate-Mid level almost all perfectly. Also, when I read Intermediate-High level or Advanced level things, I could get these contents. Even if I make several mistakes, I don't mind because usually these are small mistakes. However, I have to master not to make careless mistakes anymore."

• An example of a student who didn't use the guidelines, but has an awareness of what she can and can't do:

"I think I am at 6 level (if all is 10) because I became to read many articles and books and I can image the contents of each, but I can't guess meanings of words."

2. *Were students able to decide upon a long-term proficiency goal?*

Because most students were not interested in increasing their proficiency *per se*, only a few were able to set long-term proficiency goals that corresponded to the ACTFL guidelines. On the other hand, almost all students were able to identify long-term proficiency goals that were connected to their future plans. In particular, students who did have specific language goals nearly always cited one of the popular tests in Japan, TOEFL, TOEIC, or Eiken.

• Some examples of students' statements about long-term goals are:

"In order to advance to the next level, I have to read more articles to find out complete main ideas in order to become Advanced level."

"In order to advance to the next level, I have to read much more newspapers or books in Japanese to get prior knowledge. Also, I have to study vocabulary more."

3. *Were students able to set short-term learning/achievement goals and develop appropriate strategies to achieve them?*

Yes. Students set goals according to their individual learning aims and through trial and error identified behaviors that helped them to achieve their goals. Furthermore, students learned from each other, getting ideas about what kinds of tools and behaviors their classmates had found to be helpful.

• Here are some examples of students' strategies for reaching goals they stated:

"I should review [patterns of organization] to improve this skill more and more."

"I have to read anything, even [if] it's short or simple topic, in English every day to get used to see English."

"Practice to be able to guess words' meanings."

4. *Were students able to reflect on learning to identify individual strengths and preferences in learning?*

Yes, in fact the students themselves were pleasantly surprised at how well they were able to articulate strengths and areas needing improvement, interests, and preferences in learning. Perhaps most importantly of all, students' evaluations of their abilities were truly accurate and more specific than they would have been if their teacher had written them.

5. *Were students able to compile portfolios that demonstrated their proficiency levels?*

The portfolios did demonstrate the students' proficiency levels but not in the way that we had originally envisioned. Our initial idea was for the students to identify a proficiency level as a goal and then compile portfolios that demonstrated that they had reached that goal. However, what the students compiled revealed so much more than proficiency. Attitude, motivation, effort, and progress and were also revealed. If students were asked to compile a portfolio that only demonstrated their proficiency,

they would be able do it. In fact, that might be an interesting and valuable project for students to complete during the first weeks of their second academic year.

Our overarching goal was for students to be more involved in their learning. From students making choices about what they learned (selecting tasks, selecting articles, choosing which pieces to display, etc.), how they learned it (devising their own strategies, working at their own pace, etc.), and why they learned it (setting their own goals, assessing their performance and their learning strengths/weaknesses) we conclude that using proficiency portfolios was indeed an effective way of fostering greater student involvement in the learning process.

These are only the initial outcomes of our work with this group of students. As with any learner development activities, the value of increased awareness grows with time. Many students commented at the end of the second semester of their first year that they were amazed how much more they were able to accomplish during the second semester than in the first. We believe that their increased productivity was due in large part to their increased awareness of their own learning strengths and preferences, increased ability to set goals and devise strategies to meet those goals, and to reflect on their learning behaviors.

Students will face new challenges in their second year of study. We hope that the hard work they did in learning to become better learners (as well as in working to develop concrete skills) will help them to make the most of their learning time in college and that they will value increased involvement in the learning process and continue to become more autonomous learners.

Overview of the year

weeks 1-5:
-introduction to the course: objectives, materials, routine
-adjusting to learning centered classroom: working in pairs and groups, discussing, explaining answers,
-introduction to learner development: completing feedback forms, reflecting on learning experiences, describing self as a learner, writing goals
-introduction to KASA (knowledge, awareness, skills, attitude)
-reading skills introduced: previewing, predicting, faster reading, using an English-English dictionary
-Portfolio #1 due at the end of week 5

weeks 6-10:
-mini-conferences regarding portfolio #1
-students received 1000 word list and formed vocabulary groups
-students began completing weekly learning sheets (writing strategies, listing work completed and comments, offering suggestions/comments for class)
-reading skills introduced: scanning, guessing words from context
-Portfolio #2 due at the end of week 10

weeks 11-14:
-students had option of forming new vocabulary groups
-students selected 3 different articles to bring to class
-students assembled student-generated summer reading text
-reading skills introduced: identifying topics
-vocabulary review
-reading skills review: applying skills practiced during the semester to a reading passage
-compiled portfolio #3

Summer vacation: most students compiled summer portfolios

Second semester:
weeks 1-6:
-introduction to second semester course objectives
-students voted on weekly schedule (2 days of RP, 1 day vocabulary, 1 day story/authentic tasks)
-students wrote goals for the second semester
-students shared/discussed summer portfolios
-review of KASA
-review of reading skills from first semester
-introduction to proficiency (definition and first round of authentic tasks)
-students created personal learning metaphors
-reading skills introduced: identifying topics of paragraphs
-Portfolio #4 due at the end of week 6

weeks 7-12:
-students completed second round of authentic tasks (optional)
-more discussion on ACTFL proficiency guidelines (how to use when setting language goals)
-Proficiency task #1: students chose 2 out of 3 teacher-selected short articles on health, answered questions related to main idea and supporting details
-Proficiency task #2: students brought an article related to a hobby or interest, identified main ideas and supporting details
-Proficiency task #3: students brought an article related to a custom or tradition, identified main ideas and supporting details

-Story activities included: reading and retelling Aesop's fables/Halloween stories and finding the lessons in the texts, unscrambling a story
-reading skills introduced: finding main ideas, identifying patterns of organization: listing and time order

weeks 13-16: -Proficiency task #4: students brought an article on topic of preference, identified main ideas, supporting details, and pattern of organization
-reading skills introduced: identifying patterns of organization: cause-effect and comparison/contrast, using reference words, skimming
-vocabulary review
-story activities included stories related to Christmas and New Year's traditions

week 17: -compile final portfolio: required synthesizing all pieces of the course and reflecting on work and progress throughout the year

Notes

[1] The Japanese Eiken is a six-part series of non-standardized tests produced by the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP), published in Tokyo, Japan. The STEP test levels are: level 4 (low beginning), 3 (high beginning), pre-2 (low intermediate), 2 (high intermediate), pre-1 (low advanced) and 1 (high advanced).

[2] For more information, or if you are interested in purchasing a copy of *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, contact ACTFL at the following address: ACTFL, 6 Executive Plaza, Yonkers, New York 10701-6801 USA; (914) 963-8830; fax (914) 963-1275.

[3] The KASA framework was introduced to us in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont (USA). It was developed by MAT faculty for use in teacher education.

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Modified ACTFL Reading Proficiency Guidelines Chart*

Content/Topic areas: *"What is it about?"*

==/== Intermediate-Low ==/==

Personal/biographical information

Money matters

Numbers 1-1000+

Invitations

Post office

==/== Intermediate Low-Mid ==/==

Restaurants/Food

==/== Intermediate-Mid ==/==

Transportation

Shopping/making purchases

Lodging

Meeting arrangements

==/== Intermediate Mid-High ==/==

Activities/hobbies

==/== Intermediate-High ==/==

Health matters

Customs

Function: *"What can I do?"*

Get the main gist (general idea).

Get key ideas (most important ideas).

Get some supporting detail (details that explain or are presented as evidence).

Accuracy: *"How well can I do it?"*

The **Intermediate-Low** reader has:
-a fairly good understanding of main ideas and some facts
-some misunderstandings

The **Intermediate-Mid** reader has:
-a good understanding of main ideas
-some misunderstandings

The **Intermediate-High** reader:
-can read all parts of Intermediate-type texts with an equal degree of understanding
-can get main ideas and information from texts at Advanced level which are narration or description
-may have to read material several times for understanding

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* These proficiency guidelines were developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The purpose of the guidelines is to allow assessment of what an individual can and cannot do; they are not intended to measure classroom achievement. They have been modified for use in the classroom by Carolyn Layzer and Judy Sharkey, with permission from ACTFL. {1995}

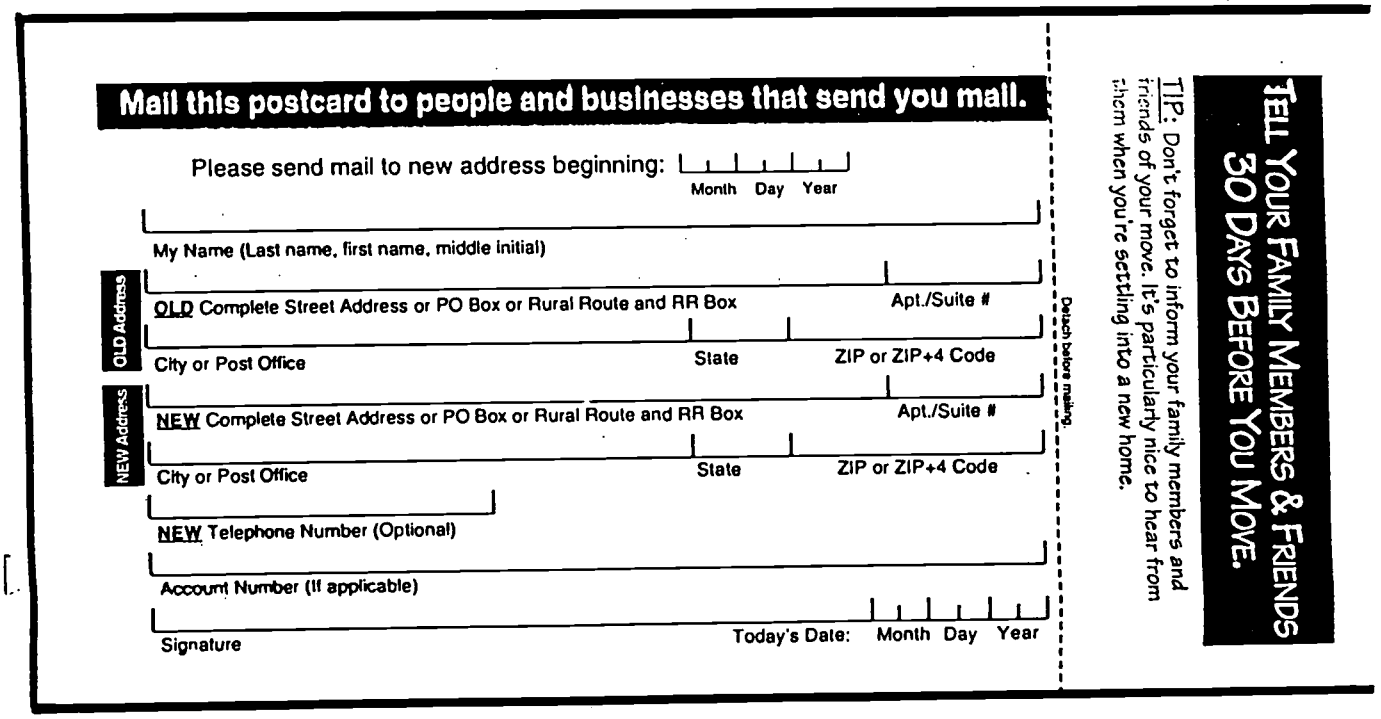
level: intermediate-low **Content area 5:** Post Office
Task #5a: change of address

Joy Paxton is moving to a new apartment on October 1, 1995. She wants her friends and business associates to know her new address. Using the following information, complete the postcard for Joy.

old address: 526 Harrison St., Apt. #3, Seattle, WA 98102
telephone: (206) 754-1212

new address: 734 Lesley Rd, Apt. #203, Seattle, WA 98108
telephone: (206) 765-1378

Question: How many days before she moves should Joy mail these postcards?



Name _____

This week my language strategy (ies) is (are): (AWARENESS)

Last week my strategy (ies) was (were):

My strategy (ies) last week was (were) successful/unsuccessful because: (AWARENESS)

The list of reading activities I did this week: (SKILLS)
___day: ___day:

___day: ___day:

I read ____ pages in my novel this week. (Write 3 or 4 sentences about what you read in your novel this week.) (ATTITUDE, pleasure reading)

How did you feel about class this week? (ATTITUDE)

Which activities did you like most? Why? (AWARENESS)

Which activities did you like least? Why? (AWARENESS)

How was your participation this week? 0 1 2 3 4 5 (AWARENESS)
Why?

Do you have any suggestions or comments?

Appendix 4: Sample Portfolio Cover Sheet

IES Reading **Second Semester: Portfolio #1** -- Cover Sheet
Name:_____ IES Class: _____

A portfolio is a collection of your best work. The purpose of the reading portfolio is for you to have an opportunity to show the best work you have done in this class. Below are some questions about the contents of your portfolio. Please answer carefully. Continue on the back of the page if necessary.

1. What do you think are the best points (the pieces you are most proud of) in this portfolio? Explain why.

2. Which parts of your portfolio would you like to improve in the future? Give specific examples and explain.

3. Now that you have completed the first set of proficiency tasks and checked your answers, you must decide:
--Are you ready to advance to the next (higher) level of tasks? ___YES ___NO
or
--Do you feel you still need to improve your skills at this Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid level of proficiency? ___YES ___NO

Explain why:

4a. You have been working with objectives and strategies. Which strategies have been the most successful for you? Why?

4b. Which strategies have not been successful for you? Why?

4c. Please tell about one new strategy that you have tried that you really like. Tell why you like it.

5a. In the first week of this semester, you wrote goals for this semester. Please look back at that page and write below about your progress. How are you doing? Are you getting closer to reaching the goals you wrote? Please explain.

5b. Do you want to add any new goals or change any of the goals you wrote? Why/why not? Please explain.

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