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Teaching English Literature and Critical Thinking, beyond just Language Acquisition

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This study suggests that English literature educators need to be eclectic and flexible in applying theories and methods, not simply adhering to one or two for all situations and occasions. They need to be available to go with the flow and particularly employ whatever is needed at any given moment of class time. There is a current trend emphasizing English literature as merely a language resource rather than the study of English literature as an end in itself. Without much attention given to literary analysis and criticism, students tend to lack creative and critical thinking abilities. Given the current imbalance, it would seem important to address the issue, and create English class programs that maintain a balance between teaching the study of English literature to improve students' critical thinking abilities, and its use as a language resource. To fulfill this goal, thorough preparation is required. Indeed, we can direct our intelligence more effectively when we are well prepared and we are familiar with the basic methods and mechanics of teaching our subject. The greatest achievement of the English literature class I taught was that the students showed unexpectedly remarkable creative and critical appreciation of the novel we studied, in addition to improving their English language skills.

[Teaching English literature/eclectic approach /preparation/critical thinking ability/language acquisition]

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English literature in the twenty-first century will demand more flexibility and less specialization because the boundaries are becoming less clear between literary criticism and creative writing, between teaching and theatrical performance. There are also

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less difference between abstract ethical theories and the concrete moral problems involved in teaching material that raises a multitude of difficult human issue from abortion to zero tolerance law enforcement. Besides, as the practicality of English literature for communication competency is emphasized, the identity (purpose) of teaching English literature is facing a crisis. People have come to stress English literature as a resource rather than the study of English literature as an end in itself. Consequently, students today tend to lack creative and critical thinking abilities and, what's worse, they do not seem to want to use their brain, but just do what they are instructed. Much more surprisingly, according to my experience of teaching English literature in the classroom, students with good grades hold more rigid and narrow perspectives in understanding different thoughts and behavior compared to students with lower grades. They are not likely to bother to make time to think over different ideas because they are too busy focusing on, almost obsessed with, acquiring English language proficiency. Regarding this trend, there have been many voices expressing concern about the identity crisis in the teaching of English literature as a primary object of study, and many debates and suggestions offered in how to deal with this crisis among English scholars, researchers, and educators. However, most opinions remain abstract and theoretical without concrete and practical examples. Thus, this paper aims at providing some ideas for incorporating the study of English literature and its use as a language resource into English literature courses in Korea, based on the experience of the English novel class I taught in the first semester of 2010.

As Gregory (2001) claims, we can't "assume that one [teaching] method or another will solve problems .... No one method can meet all the demands of learning" (p. 75). Thus, it is very important for English educators to be eclectic and flexible in applying theories and methods, not simply adhering to fixed ones. They need to be available to go with the flow and pick up whatever is needed for each moment of class time. This does not mean that you do not have to prepare for the class. According to Felman (2001), "Good, effective improvisation only follows good, effective preparation" (p. 207). Indeed, we can direct our intelligence more effectively when we are well prepared and we are familiar with the basic methods and mechanics of teaching our subject. Therefore, I will first provide theoretical background, describing overall theories on teaching English literature, followed by methods. Then I will show how I taught the class, and in particular how I prepared for it. Lastly, I will argue that teaching English literature contributes significantly to students' creative and critical thinking, as well as English language acquisition.

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II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Theories on Teaching English Literature

English educators sometimes get confused by the many different theories on teaching English literature when applying them in the classroom. Unfortunately, there are no definite ways to figure out which one or more theories to apply for a particular class. However, it is of no doubt important to possess as much knowledge as possible of the theories on teaching English literature, in order to confront many diverse classroom situations. Therefore, it is worth examining and clarifying the main theories on teaching English literature in this paper. I will now proceed to do so. By and large, there are two categories of theories we should look at regarding teaching English literature: the first is 'issues of importance in teaching English literature' and the second is 'effective approaches in teaching English literature'.

1) Issues of Importance in Teaching English Literature

The issue here is about whether we should teach only the text, or also the social, political, and cultural context. We might also focus on the relationship between reader and text. Regarding this issue, there are theories including Leavisite, New Criticism, and contemporary criticisms including Cultural Studies, New Historicism, Feminism, Post-Colonial Criticism, and Reader Response. The Leavisites, in the beginning of the twentieth century, elevated the position of English literature to "the academic province of dilettantes and gentlemanly aesthetes" (Showalter, 2003, p. 22). According to Eagleton (1996), "in the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all" (p. 27). F. R. Leavis was deeply concerned about establishing a literary canon, a commonly accepted inventory of 'great literature', and believed that the problems caused by industrialization and urbanization could be resolved or overcome by the study of great English literature. "Leavis dealt with a broad range of genres including prose narratives, drama and epic poetry, as well as … the short lyric poem" (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000, P. 20). He directed his critical attention to the close reading of texts. He applied 'collaborative discussion' to prompt students to make their own judgments, using a question form like "'This is so, isn't it?' rather than a flat authoritative statement. In doing so, he intended to invite students to either agree or disagree, … [by providing] qualifications [such as] 'Yes, but ...' or 'No, but. ...' [He was further convinced] that literature was important to life; that it could touch its readers deeply with the power to change their ideas and attitudes" (p. 20). However, his work on the literary canon "appears to many readers to be highly elitist and to narrow down literature rather than open it up to a broader understanding" (p. 21).

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The contemporary critic, Raymond Williams, who developed Cultural Studies, challenged the notion of 'great literature' as a collection of overly revered texts, which Leavis' approach had stressed. He contended that literature should be appreciated and understood within the broader historical and cultural context. It should be grasped and valued in social, political, economical and philosophical, and other terms, which provide the framework of meaning and understanding of human life. The more elitist position of Leavis made judgments about what is truly high literature, beyond the confines of time, place, or context. The influence of Williams reshaped the way of (academics) determining what was high literature, and what might be worth seriously reading and teaching to students. Resulting from this shift of viewpoint, teachers and students came to pay attention to more popular texts, and started to use them as classroom texts, not only to be read for pleasure. Eventually, this new notion became prevalent not only in the literature-for-language context, but also in the area of Cultural Studies.

New Criticism known as Practical Criticism, mainly developed by I. A. Richards, reached the height of its popularity in the 1940s and 50s. This approach is still found these days in language-based classrooms. In Practical Criticism, a student is given a text to read verbatim, without being given any further information about context or clues which are in the text itself. Thereby, the student develops reading skills and techniques, and appreciation of the textual structure composition. In the United States, both the objectivity and formalism of New Criticism were similar to Leavis's ideas and I. A. Richard's practical criticism of literary texts. New Critics in the US extended Richard's vision and emphasized the text as the single focus without any external reference. In consequence, New Critical close reading "offered a tough-minded quasi-scientific methodology ... and the poem, their favored pedagogical genre, became a language laboratory of irony, tone, paradox, tension, and symbolism. But it was also an aesthetic sanctuary and harmonious retreat from social conflict" (Showalter, 2003, p. 23). Therefore, Eagleton (1996), a Marxist critic, denounced the New Criticism as "a recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo" (p. 27). Like Eagleton, "most contemporary critics would argue that while the author's intention is part of the whole picture, it is not definitive. The creator of the text is assumed to have consciously intended to communicate something, but there is usually some unconscious or unintended meaning in the text as well" (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000, p. 22). Spolsky (1994) saw the writer as "both conscious and unconscious creator of the text" (p. 145). There is also going to be lack of information as literature is not scientific explanation and descriptively finite and underdetermined.

In relation to New Historicism, Feminism, and Post-Colonial Criticism, "during the 1960s and 1970s, teaching literature became an explicitly political act for radical and minority groups in the university" (Showalter, 2003, p. 23). English departments began to hire more female and African-American activists, who pushed their causes. This

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influenced teaching literature to become more a form of philosophical inquiry about signification, representation, and ideology. By the 1980s, questions were raised over the importance of theory, and of secondary critical and theoretical texts over imaginative literature itself. H. Vendler advocated teaching works of imagination rather than overemphasizing theory in *Teaching Literature: What is Needed Now*, while J. H. Miller supported teaching theory as the primary focus beyond literature itself (Engell & Perkins, 1988). Whether we believe in pleasure, politics, or philosophy or simply language acquisition as the goal of teaching literature, many educators believe that teaching literature and critical thinking are both important, not only in education, but also for life in general.

Reader Response is a slightly different theory from the above, despite also being opposed to New Criticism. Reader Response critics were interested in the relation between reader and text in terms of the processes of interpretation and understanding. Firstly, they closely examined a text to reveal the relationship between the reader and the author's intent towards the reader throughout the text. Secondly, they explored how the reader actually interacts with the text. Unlike the focus on poetry with the New Critics, W. Iser, one of the Reader Response critics, "worked largely on prose narratives. He tried to show how the text actually forces readers into becoming active, into creating their own version of the text that they are reading, arguing that every text contains numerous gaps, omissions and what he calls indeterminacies, where the reader has to fill in the gap or interpret what is indeterminate" (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000, p. 7). This is the process which many language and literature teachers regularly apply to improve reading and logical skills, sometimes introducing their own gaps into the text for students to fill in.

2) Effective Approaches in Teaching English Literature

We need to examine approaches in teaching English literature to find out which ones are the most effective for students. Content-centered theories, teacher-centered theories, student-centered theories, or eclectic theories are available for selection. Content-centered theories emphasize content and information, often presented as the right answer, and carry the implication of being determined by the teacher, whether from his or her political or intellectual convictions. In the late 1980s, some teachers were openly imposing their ideologies upon students to shape their minds. However, this anti authoritarian attitude toward society contrasted with their coercive and undemocratic approach in the classroom. In response, the theory called "teaching the conflicts" advocated by Graf (1987) arose. According to the theory, teachers of literature should deliberately include disciplinary and political conflicts in their classes. However, too overblown conflicts confuse students. They were introduced to too many competitive philosophical ideas and interpretations

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from phenomenology, Existentialism, Jungian archetypes, Marxism, to Deleuzoguattarian Anti-Oedipus. These conflicting ideas generated an aggressive atmosphere in the classroom and students started to resist the process and reject even the author. Without a clear purpose, teaching the conflicts may leave students feeling battered.

Teacher-centered theories focus on the teacher's active leadership. This theory includes two different main ideas: one is to see teaching as performance and the other teaching as a spiritual journey (Showalter, 2003, pp. 32-4). Performance teaching drives the classroom to become a lively and dynamic place where intellectual interactions between the teacher and students actively occur. Thus, performance teaching emphasizes the educator's speech, intellect and behavior. Advocates recommend clear speech preparation. On the other hand, Palmer (1998) is a promoter of a spiritual theory of teaching, and believes that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). He underlines that the teacher should reveal their true self, inner being, as well as their self-knowledge. He also claims that the major enemy of learning is fear, not ignorance, and the teacher and students can overcome the fear by exposing their ignorance through the spirituality of education, which is to create a learning space of trust and acceptance. It is important to establish an atmosphere of hospitality and exploration. The group must be supportive and mutually familiar so that each member can express their own ideas without fear of others' criticism, which is an especially sensitive matter in Korea. The teacher must "make it clear we are all in the same boat, we all make mistakes, we all get nervous about saying something in front of others, and we are here to learn and help each other learn" (Perroni, 2007, p. 65).

Student-centered theories focus on the way people learn, and the organization of the classroom process to maximize active learning. According to McKeachie's (1999) philosophy, "What is important is learning, not teaching. Teaching effectiveness depends not on what the teacher does, but rather on what the student does. Teaching involves listening as much as talking. It is important that both teachers and students are actively thinking, but most important is what goes on in the students' minds" (p. 6). The point is that learning is critical, not how brilliantly the teacher performs. Understanding the learning process is necessary to be a good teacher, and good teaching is facilitating good learning.

Eclectic theories are probably the most widespread theory of teaching literature. The current idea is to have no primary or exclusive theory at all, and to try to employ whatever theory will do the job at any given time. However, the concept of having no single exclusive theory does not mean we should be ignorant of pedagogical theories at all. On the contrary, it is rather essential to know about as many theories as you can so that you are able to move back and forth between them spontaneously in the class. It is also equally important not to get obsessed about those theories so that you remain open to others.

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Axelrod (1985) writes that "as teachers, we need to be pragmatic, using whatever seems to work and not getting in the way of the book and the students" (p. 74). The eclectic approach is probably the one most teachers actually use in the classroom today. The exponent of Eclecticism, Woodring (1990), emphasizes that teacher preparation, namely obtaining knowledge of the various pedagogical theories prior to actually entering a classroom, is so important (p. 182). This is teacher-centered, and then upon entering the classroom, his approach becomes student-centered. "He begins with an open-ended question that requires the students to make comparative judgments. When and how he uses his preparation is less clear, and perhaps that is the point - an eclectic teacher is ready to go with the flow, to use whatever is needed" (Showalter, 2003, p. 38).

2. Methods of Teaching English Literature

In terms of applying ways to teaching English literature, there are traditional and contemporary modes. These days, educators tend to cross over methods in a flexible manner according to circumstances of the class. To mention some old and new means, traditional ones include reading aloud, learning by heart and writing text summaries, translation, representation of secondary resources; while new methods suggest reading a variety of texts, reading for content and comprehension beyond textual content, reader response, structural analysis, reading for foreign-language acquisition, related fun activities, and prediction activities. Except for the abovementioned methods, others such as teacher-centered lecturing, discussion leadership, providing sample models, plus using new forms of technology will be also explained.

The idea of reading aloud has lately been thrown out by English teachers, who preferred students to study the text as homework. However, some students enjoy the reading aloud first method, because the time allows students to think over the passage of the text, so a compromise may be necessary. Learning by heart and summarizing the text can help students learn the basic storyline of the literature, and relevant background. Learning by heart simply involves the memorization of information supplied by the teacher. In terms of summarizing the text, students can develop their writing and comprehension skills, tackling how to contract or reduce the longer text into shorter terms, considering and paraphrasing larger structures or units into smaller ones, yet retaining and conveying meaning. Through this process, a teacher can see how much students understand the content of the text.

Translation is a controversial issue. It is necessary for lower level students, but even for higher level students it can occasionally be useful for particularly complex expressions. High level students should not need to mentally translate an L2 text, but rather understand it directly without resort to L1 language. However, it is nowadays accepted that learners often need some recourse to translation at the metaphorical or idiomatic level. However,

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translation should be limited so that the learner progresses to understand the text in L2 fashion. As for the case of resorting to secondary resources, educators and learners have noticed to their chagrin that students start to interpret the text in the light of another book. L2 students can become overwhelmed by forms of criticism that they can no longer enjoy the study of the book. Thus, the use of forms of criticism should not be the primary goal, but should help the students express their understanding through discussion or writing.

Contemporary methods promote a communicative form of foreign language teaching. Reading a variety of texts is encouraged because quantity tends to improve all areas of language acquisition. Reading for content and comprehension beyond textual content broadens students' cultural horizons. There are no right or wrong answers in terms of understanding the text, but the important thing is that students understand and empathize with each other, even if they differ. The beauty or value of the text should be adhered to and appreciated in itself. The reader or personal response method involves asking students what they want to consider after having read a book. They are encouraged to give their opinions and reactions to the text without being forced by the teacher to respond or the teacher allowing the best students to show off. Structural analysis is about carefully examining the language of literary texts, in technical detail, and their purpose.

Reading for foreign-language acquisition concerns studying a text and considering any unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar. The ways of handling this might involve summarizing and paraphrasing some parts of the text from a particular point of view, without the text being crucial. However, a heavy focus on this might reduce the learner's interest. Games and fun activities can be useful. They revitalize students' interest after intense instruction. However, the most serious students might consider this to be trivial or below their abilities. In prediction activities, students may be asked to guess what is going to happen next in a story, in progressive stages from the beginning (hearing the Title) and then throughout stages of the text. "The likely benefits are at least threefold - heightened awareness of general literary conventions, closer attention to details of plot, and an increase in real language and in personal involvement. The main dangers are that it can be over-used and become too routine, and that it might lead to an exclusive focus on plot at the expense of other interesting features" (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000, p. 37).

Teacher-centered lecturing is basically universal in higher education, despite pros and cons. Everybody has limited attention span and the lecture is only a passive form of learning for the listener. It does not response to individual students' needs. However, McKeachie (1999) stresses in *Teaching Tips* on "Teaching large classes" that "active learning does not necessarily involve only student talking, writing, or doing; what is important is active thinking" (p. 214). To generate energy and involvement, a teacher might provide guessing or predicting games, debates, or quizzes to students. Employing group work can be another activity to activate the class. Students in groups should become

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more cooperatively involved, trying to figure out solutions to the related questions or the task given by the teacher (Felder, 1992, p. 18). The class can be enhanced by use of other means like media excerpts using new forms of technology like disseminating information to students by email, electronic discussion boards, and bringing in suitable guests.

Regarding discussion leadership, Garvin (1991) explains, "When the instructor must anticipate the probable flow of discussion and plan for in-class dynamics, preparation is a far more complex task than it was when content alone was king" (11). Students may be asked initially to consider their answers and perhaps pair off before discussion. This method would probably agree better with Korean students, who are self-conscious, in the sense that they are given some time to prepare for answering questions. The modeling method provides students with ways to practice skills and techniques they have learned before they have to demonstrate them in examinations, offering them the confidence required to be successful. The use of new forms of technology includes such things as Video, MS PowerPoint, and computers and the internet. This may involve intra University websites, electronic discussion boards, and other means to enhance student to student, and student to teacher interaction and communication.

Most of the theories and methods addressed above in the section called Theoretical Background, can be applied to the broad spectrum of genres in English literature. New Criticism theory known as Practical Criticism, would be most suitable for reading poetry, since it focuses on text itself, especially the form of the text. However, you can still modify its approach when you believe close reading is necessary for a certain part of a genre like drama, prose narratives, and even the novel. The critically important thing is to keep in mind the level of students, their reading interest, the nature and objective of a class, and so on. These factors are essential in selecting one or more appropriate theories and methods to employ, not simply to decide upon theories and methods, based on which English literature genre you are going to teach.

III. TEACHING THE NOVEL IN THE CLASSROOM

Teaching the novel is a very complicated and difficult task because there are too many factors needed to consider and what makes it harder today is the demand to apply methodologies to improve the four basic skills of English, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. As an English teacher, I chose to be eclectic in the application of theories and methods when I first started teaching the novel class. I did my utmost to stick to the purpose of teaching English literature, which I believe helps students improve their critical and creative thinking, and I did my best to figure out what activities should be employed for language improvement. To fulfill this task, the most important thing is to

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select appropriate texts, and consider theories, methods and activities for the class and students. Thus, thorough preparation, making a general plan, for the abovementioned aspects should be made ahead of the real class, and for the preparation, we need to know exactly who our students will be and what the class will be like. Fortunately, I have known my current students for more than two years. I also made it a part of the plan to do a survey in the middle of the course to make sure that the general plan was going smoothly for the class and to decide whether I should continue with the original plan or not. Thus, in this section, I am going to first demonstrate what, how, and why to prepare for specific texts, theories, and methods before the class, and how to implement the general plan into the class. Then, the survey will be explained, with a description of the feedback. After that, the final evaluation supplied by students at the end of the course, follows.

1. Preparation

The importance of preparation cannot be overemphasized, not least in the sense that good preparation is the major key to attract and motivate students to enjoy the class. It is so essential to consider ways to make students interested. Among the elements involved in preparation, the first priority is choosing an appropriate text, since no matter how great theories and methods are, they are of no use if students are uninterested in the text. Chin (2009) points out that "Interest is essential, for it enhances motivation, which in addition is a crucial factor to the development of EFL reading skills. In order to motivate the desire to read in English, teachers should introduce interesting texts, which are appropriate to students' reading levels" (39). In order to choose a suitable book, careful consideration should be given to several elements, such as the level of students, their personal interests, plus the length, content, and language style of the text, as mentioned above. Available audios or videos related to the text, teaching style, learning style, translation in L1, and deciding upon using only English or being bilingual in class, and so on, are also important.

It took me three months or more to make the final decision about which text to use for the novel class. It was a difficult decision because of the interrelationship between students and a text not immediately matching their historical and current life experience. The language acquisition was critical. I wanted to choose a book that was suitable to both the level and cultural understanding of my students. The level of my students in general was not highly advanced, but rather on a more intermediate level. There were a few more advanced students. However, I knew most of them could not handle books which deal with profound and serious themes. After much thought, I finally chose the novel *The Catcher in the Rye,* by D. J. Salinger (1951), among other alternatives, such as *Jane Eyre, Frankenstein, The Great Gatsby,* and *The Old Man and Sea*. Here are more reasons why I chose this book.

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The Catcher in the Rye (Salinger, 1951) is not particularly long and its language style is simple, written in everyday English, and above all, its theme deals with a teenager's mental confusion, depression, (and behavior), which is what many of my students have recently been through or are still facing today. The only aspect that made me feel uncomfortable was the coarse or obscene language used in the book, which caused some schools or educational institutions in the US to ban teaching the book to students. The language style still upsets some teachers, parents and students. Some of my students were not comfortable with the language but other than that, they became fond of reading it. Before deciding to select the novel, I was concerned with whether I should give students the opportunity to choose novels themselves in order to induce students to participate more actively, and to take more responsibility for the class, as the student-centered approach and the reader response method suggested. However, I decided not to because my students are not yet at the level of organizing and developing their own learning. Giving them too much freedom or choice can lead to side effects because they often want to take the easy way out. Having chosen the textbook, I then allowed some freedom to students to organize or develop the project.

To be honest, it was hard to free from the issue of canon. *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) quickly became considered as quality literature but I am not sure if it will be compared with the great classics. The main reason that made me choose the novel was, as Ellis (1974) said, to consider literature as a functional rather than an ontological term. This is about what the text does for you rather than what is written in the text itself. I thought the text could lead students to consider their life differently, thinking about who they are and what their problems are, and considering solutions to their problems. At the end of the course, I was happy to see students respond to and learn from the text so that they grew and formed new perspectives on life and the world.

In order to extend the scope of teaching, I decided to show students a couple of movies related to the novel such as *Finding Forrester* (Sant, 2000) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955), even though neither of them were directly based on the novel itself. This is because the writer did not want his books to be made into a movie. I also provided one audio book of the novel that students could use to improve their listening skills. I wanted to have the class more enjoyable and dynamic with a variety of learning activities and also to improve students' listening and speaking skills. After watching each movie, we had a discussion and students had to hand in a report about their impression of the movie, in order to enhance their writing skills. Since most of my students do not enjoy watching short segments of a movie, I showed them the whole movie after going through a significant part of the text. I let them see *Finding Forrester* before the midterm exam and *Rebel Without a Cause* towards the end of the course. I showed students *Finding Forrester* first because the movie was about the author, not the story of the novel. I had students

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compare the film *Rebel Without a Cause* with the book *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) especially concerning the main characters and the endings of both. Many of the students are likely to interpret the endings of both as homecoming of the two main characters; in other words, signifying their return or readjustment to social norms. Students seemed to be relieved by the above interpretation and I think that reflects the unconscious desire of students or their moral conscience to believe that the main characters should go back to their family or society. On the other hand, there were a few students who distinguished between the two genres, recognizing that the novel's ending remains open-ended with the fate of the main character unclear, but the film closes showing the main character compromising with his parents. This led us to think over both the book and the film in the political context of the early 1960s in the US. In this way, students extended their perspective to a wider range of thoughts and ideas into realization that there are different ways in which the two mediums can present a point of view.

Another point that I was concerned with in preparing for the novel was whether to allow students to use Korean translation or not. I used to consider counting on L1 translation as taboo. I would have preferred to choose a text with lots of secondary resources such as a package of notes and self-study questions, and one with an abbreviated version and perhaps a bilingual text with concrete explanations for L2 learners. There were several guidebooks in English such as Sparksnotes but they are all for L1 leaving only best students capable of benefiting from them. I thought that there were a lot of L2 secondary resources available but in fact there was not much choice. Thus, I was led to select the original text and allow a basic Korean translation. I thought it would be more productive to encourage students to learn something even by means of access to translation because I did not think that they could dispense with the Korean translation at their level.

Another factor I was concerned about was whether to use only English in class, or be bilingual. Under the current political administration, teaching subjects in English including English in class has been strongly encouraged. However, in reality, the policy has not been well conducted, and my students were not yet ready to do so. According to Life and Kim (2007), Japanese students have also shown strong support for bilingual assistance and only one third of students prefer instructions in English only (p. 59). Therefore, I decided to use both English and Korean, requiring students to speak only in English during discussion periods. I think students should be given some time to consider given topics beforehand but I felt compelled to give students the questions for the discussion at least a day before so that they could have enough time to think about them at home. However, some of the students still kept silent in the classroom, keeping their heads down. I even invited a native English teacher to the movie discussions, following the idea that bringing writers to class can boost the atmosphere of the class (Showalter, 2003, p. 52). Although the teacher was

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not the writer, students appreciated having the opportunity to hear different opinions and ideas, especially Western, on particular issues related to the movies.

2. Theories and Methods Applied in the Novel Class

Being eclectic, I tried not to focus on limited theories or methods, but tried to combine variations of a number of them, and apply them intuitively in relation to the circumstances. Of course, I had a few ideas about what theories and methods I was going to employ for the specific class activities. My original plan was to start with close reading of the text, and then to consider the general context, and have students give their personal response to the text. However, I often ended up changing the order, mixing them up during the process. Likewise, I also applied various approaches like content-centered, teacher-centered and student-centered as mentioned above for different activities, along with various other methods from traditional to contemporary, such as writing text summaries, translation, reading for content and comprehension beyond textual content, reading aloud, representation secondary resources, reading for pleasure, reader response, prediction activities, teacher-centered lecturing, discussion leadership, and so on. I sometimes used them separately or combined them depending on the circumstances of the class.

Here I am going to explain about why I decided to apply certain theories and methods for particular times. I adopted close reading because my students had a difficult time catching up with the general idea of the given assignment. My primary concern was to make sure whether my students understood the passages that they read. It is not worth their reading secondary resources without their comprehending the main text. I tried to teach them some small structural elements of the general language used as well as the broader picture. This way, close reading forces us to be active rather than passive consumers of the text.

As the Leavisites and New Critics suggested, I picked up some particular paragraphs or sentences or words from the text to look at closely and discuss about, because we cannot read the whole text in the classroom. Actually, as homework, students had to read three chapters meticulously and make a summary in English, and also prepare for discussion as well as analyze particular words and grammatical constructions. By doing so, I wanted them to improve their English language acquisition, especially their reading, writing and speaking skills. I used 'collaborative discussion' as employed by F. R. Leavis to encourage students to give their own opinions, using the question form "This is so, isn't it?" I also used the question forms proposed by Practical Criticism such as "Why does the author use particular words, images, grammatical constructions, even this punctuation? How do these choices affect your response as a reader? What other choices might the author have made? How does the verbal texture of this paragraph illuminate the theme of the book?"

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(Showalter, 2003, pp. 98-9) I usually emphasized that there was no single exact answer but there could be numerous opinions and ideas arising from the content, and that, through the practices, students could broaden or expand their perspective on life and the world. This activity agrees with the two main aspects of the Reader Response theory; the first being that there is no clear-cut right and wrong answers and the second being about the importance of speaking out.

I both informed my students and got them to research the broader literary, social and historical context of the story. By doing this, I wanted to give students the opportunity to realize the limitations of the author, who appears to transcend his own time and space, as the almighty creator of that piece of literature, but nevertheless remains an individual who is also controlled by the circumstances, just as everyone else is. By understanding this, students could learn about their own limitations, too. They could comprehend that literature should not be specially privileged as some kind of unique or transcendent object but should be recognized as part of the complex discursive activity of particular societies. However, students wondered about the necessity of reading about the context because it took too much time even reading one piece and comprehending it. They became agitated and frustrated especially by incomprehensible terminology used in literary criticism so that they came to doubt that it did not mean much more than a play on words. Thus, I decided not to concentrate on literary criticism too much as long as students understood the basics of contemporary criticism. By using the Reader Response theory, I drew students' individual responses about specific words, phrases, sentences or parts of the text and got them to articulate their personal feelings or responses based on their own experiences. I wanted to see how students read the text and what they made of it, and, through the process, how students could become creative and critical like the Reader Response theory advocates. I applied the three main theories and began with close reading theory and then, as you have seen, it automatically turned into reader response practice during the process, or sometimes the other way around. The two contrary theories blended to form a more dynamic class, making up for each other's weaknesses.

In reference to the basic approaches of content-centered, teacher-centered, student-centered, and a more eclectic holistic approach, these four also happened to be employed sometimes separately or simultaneously. Basically, I went for the eclectic approach, crossing over and between the four theories. I applied content-centered theories to show students that there were many different ways to interpret the story. Agreeing with "teaching the conflicts" as one of content-centered theories, I tried to make the class a field where students were free and comfortable to express contradictory opinions to each other. However, in order to prevent the class from becoming adversarial, political, and hostile rather than intellectual, which many English educators are concerned about, I advised them to keep in mind that their own opinions were just one of many. I also reminded them that

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expressing their opinions is not a competition about superiority, but rather to broaden and deepen their range of thought. I wanted students to learn to maintain a harmonious relationship even with others who have a different point of view. Teacher-centered theories were also applied to make the classroom a dynamic and dramatic space and to establish an atmosphere of trust and exploration. I wanted to make it clear that both the students and I were all in the same boat. We all make mistakes, we all have some fear of public speaking, but we are here to assist in each other's learning. However, it should be remembered that students tend to prefer a knowledgeable instructor over a simply friendly one (Life & Kim, 2007, p. 59).

Student-centered theories were employed to maximize active learning for the class. I began with open-ended questions that required the students to make comparative judgments. I tried to focus on what goes on in the students' minds, how students learn and how to help them learn. However, I decided not to give them full autonomy for two reasons; one reason was because students were not as active and enthusiastic as I would have hoped and not able to exercise their full autonomy as creative and expressive individuals. Rather they wanted to be instructed. The other reason that made me reluctant to adopt the student-centered approach was that the class was large with 26 students, that taking care of all their individual needs was beyond my capacity. Thus, I decided to adopt the student-centered method to only a partial degree. I divided students into small groups of four or five and allotted each group a different project to complete. However, I left how to fulfill the task up to them, in order to develop such skills as problem solving, question formulation and answering, discussion, explanation, debating, and brainstorming. In this way, I could compromise between what students wanted and my mission which was to get students involved in active learning. Observing students working in groups, I could see them improve their cooperative capacities as well as their individual competence. However, I could also notice that they did not entirely enjoy the group work. They seemed to feel more comfortable working alone even when their group was composed of friends.

3. Survey and Final Evaluation

To see how students respond to my teaching, I conducted a survey with thirteen questions in the middle of the course and my students were supposed to provide detailed answers. The questions involved or concerned whether they liked the choice of the novel, having a Korean translation for self-study, the appropriateness of the reading assignment, the interest level in the story, and how well they prepared for and reviewed after the class. They were also asked about whether they liked watching movies or not, the amount of movies they preferred, whether they liked having a discussion in English after watching the movies and if they enjoyed having a native English teacher attend the discussion. The

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usefulness of group work and presentation, whether they wanted to have the class only in English, and finally whether they preferred watching the movies in class or at home, were also considered.

Among their answers, there were some surprising results. Most students enjoyed the novel because it reminded them of their personal problems as adolescents so they could empathize with the main character. Due to the writing style in everyday English, the novel was easy to read but a few students did not like the crude and obscene language. They liked the choice of movies and enjoyed watching them in class because they felt the movies to be a part of the lesson. Some of them indicated that three movies were too many because they had to write movie reports after watching them, and prepare for discussion in English. Instead, they suggested that two would be appropriate and I concurred. They liked the discussion in English to the degree that they could share ideas and opinions with each other on specific issues related to the movies but they felt somewhat uncomfortable speaking in English in spite of being given questions for the discussion beforehand. Korean students seem to prefer officially prepared presentation to spontaneous discussion since they do not want to make mistakes in front of the class and lose face. Korean students tend to speak only when they think they are good and ready. That was why I gave them questions in advance but still some of the students appeared afraid of speaking up. Maybe, their English level was inadequate for discursive purposes. Some students wished they could discuss issues in Korean and then the discussion might become more profound and insightful.

In general, they liked inviting a native English teacher since it provided an opportunity to hear about Western ideas perhaps differing from their own. However, to my surprise, there were a few students who did not think it was necessary to have him present. They probably felt unable to speak up in front of him for fear of losing face. Kim and Yi (2008) also discovered this kind of fear in their research which pointed out that Korean students tend to avoid using an English-only zone in a Korean university because they think their English is not good enough to speak freely and confidently (p. 231). With regard to having the class in English only, almost all of them, except perhaps for one, did not agree. Many of them were worried about not being able to understand enough in the class. I found out that the worries of my students were the main enemies preventing them from speaking in English. In fact, they were desperately eager to speak well in English. The survey revealed that most of my students seemed to be satisfied with my class.

After completing the course, I checked the evaluation record from the students and found, to my astonishment, that it turned out to be beyond my expectations. This class produced the best evaluation that I have ever received from students. I believe that the successful result was due to both my thorough preparation and my eclectic position. I chose a suitable textbook, appropriate theories, and methods for the class. I was ready to be

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spontaneous and adaptable, and to change my original plan to whatever seemed appropriate at any particular moment.

IV. CONCLUSION: BEYOND JUST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

As mentioned, I tried to implement ways of incorporating English literature as an object of study and as a resource into my class, to meet the demand to raise English communication skills. I focused on improving language skills, conducting different activities that my students could manage and enjoy. At the same time, I made great efforts to help my students develop their critical thinking abilities, and expand their perspective on life and the world. Students showed some progress in reading, speaking and writing but not so much in listening because I did not create as many listening activities compared to the other three fields. Through the whole course, I strove hard to make a balance between achieving the two goals of improved language acquisition and students' mental growth, and secondly, stimulating and maintaining class interest. Due to time constraints, I was forced to limit the listening component.

In terms of students' progress, it's difficult to quantify accurately but based on their written requirements and tests, I could make some basic quantitative as well as intuitive judgments. In reading, they became absorbed in the story, which means they became more positive and enthusiastic to pursue the study program. Their comprehension of the book improved and they caught onto the underlying meanings or themes more quickly. In speaking skills, students did not show much difference compared to at the beginning. In fact, there were only two discussion sessions so they could not be expected to make much progress. However, I could tell there was some improvement in their speaking confidence in front of the class, and also in front of the native English teacher. In general, students produced more correct sentences but relatively simple ones, but there were a few students who could manage more complex sentences including more complicated grammatical features such as relative clauses, conditionals, and diverse passive forms. I suppose their progress was driven by the fact that their speaking aloud and more actively counted towards their final grade. In writing, students showed more progress than in speaking. I assume that this occurred because they practiced their writing more frequently than their speaking, and had more time to consider and revise their writing. Students had to write a summary of three chapters in a group, two film reports individually, and a book report at the end of the course. Of course, their writing also contributed to their scores. As students became involved in the story, they had more things to say and their writing became richer and more intensive with better grammatical and structural usage.

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In truth, my major concern initially was the response of students toward the text, because they were not fond of reading English literature, especially literary canon. On the contrary, throughout the course, students showed unexpectedly remarkable appreciation of the novel, realizing things about themselves that they had never consciously thought about, which pushed their underlying resentment and defiance to the surface. They got more in touch with their own rebellious streaks even if they did not have any clearly formed ideological cause. Their rebellious concerns were probably more related to their family and social circumstances. Fiction can be a mirror of the life cycle. Students will hopefully see their own lives reflected in the stories they read and consider, and perhaps good literature will change their thoughts and lives, so that their beliefs and future can take fresh narrative shape and meaning by studying it.

My students admitted that they were slowly getting more involved with the book, and started identifying with the main character; laughing and crying with him, getting angry, becoming depressive, feeling insecure and regretful, just like him. One of the students confessed in a written response that she shed many tears when the main character went mad; yelling, crying, talking to himself and finally hurting himself on the street. The scenes reminded her of the desperate loneliness and emptiness that she had experienced a few years ago. Observing the dramatic change in students' ways of thinking, I became excited and confident that the barriers and differences between people (myself and my students) could be overcome by considering such issues that arose from the book and our efforts to communicate our feelings about it. At the bottom of our hearts, we are eager to become better persons. My class was like a trigger to get students to realize something important that they had been missing and to start to move forward towards a better life. This is the power of literature, getting students, to become personally and emotionally activated and excited about the content of the class. English literature can generate an exciting dynamic between students and teacher.

In conclusion, the greatest achievement of the course was that students became positive toward English literature in addition to improving English language skills. English literature can be a great means to teaching the English language as well as critical thinking, beyond just language acquisition.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: High Intermediate Secondary or College Learners

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