

## Varieties of Integrated-Skills Instruction

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### ABSTRACT

Like other ESL/EFL buzzwords such as Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Task-based Learning (TBL), Integrated-skills Instruction is a popular catchphrase that encompasses a range of classroom practices. However, unlike these other terms that have much literature devoted to them, there has been far less discussion of the varieties of integrated-skills instruction. On the one hand, this is unsurprising. Skills-integration is probably best thought of not as an instructional approach in itself, but a corollary or byproduct of other approaches such as CBI and TBL that take principles other than the mastery of discrete skills as their instructional entry point (see Oxford, 2001). On the other hand, considering the ubiquity of the term and its use among practitioners, course designers, and textbook publishers, it is worthwhile digging deeper into the concept to gain a clearer understanding of its attributes and applications. This paper aims to bring greater clarity to the term by proposing the following distinctions: *global/local* and *strong/weak* skills integration. To illustrate them, the authors present syllabi and classroom activities from university, secondary, and elementary school contexts in Japan.

### INTRODUCTION

Skills-integration tends to be viewed favorably in the literature for its potential to reinforce learning across the four skills (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), provide for more authentic communicative experiences (Oxford, 2001, Su, 2007) and more closely approximate the way languages are learned than segregated-skills instruction (Weaver, 1990). However, it can also be a vague and nebulous term, difficult to pin down or use as a pedagogical construct.

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Though often used by commercial publishers as a marketing tool to add value to course books, skills integration is probably quite common in classrooms, at least in a very general sense of the term. Even a traditional grammar-translation classroom may combine all four skills. A student might listen to a teacher's lecture about a grammatical concept such as the subjunctive mood (listening), take notes (writing) while deciphering sample sentences in the in the course book (reading), perhaps even responding to the teacher's questions about it (speaking). Given this expansive view of skills integration, it may actually be harder to find forms of instruction that *do not* integrate skills in some way!

This paper aims to bring greater clarity to the term 'integrated-skills'. It begins by looking at how it has been conceptualized in the literature. It then proposes distinctions between 1) *global/local* and 2) *strong/weak* skills integration. These concepts are then illustrated through sample syllabi and classroom activities from university, secondary, and elementary schools in Japan.

## INTEGRATED-SKILLS INSTRUCTION

Perhaps the best known description of skills integration is Oxford's oft-cited (2001) article distinguishing between segregated and integrated-skills. Oxford (2001) identifies two types of integrated-skills instruction: 1) Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and 2) Task-based Learning (TBL). These approaches, according to Oxford (2001), provide opportunities to "weave the skills together" (p. 3) as learners communicate about course content (CBI) or perform meaningful social tasks (TBL). While CBI involves students practicing the skills "in a highly integrated communicative fashion" by studying subject-matter such as "science, mathematics, and social studies", TBL "stresses doing tasks that require communicative language use" including pedagogical and real-world tasks such as "editing a class newspaper, developing a television commercial, and enacting scenes from a play" (Oxford, 2001, p. 4).

In this view, therefore, skills integration is not an end in itself but a corollary or byproduct of classroom practices that foreground meaningful interaction. Just as students need to read, write, speak and listen to others as part of the process of creating a newspaper, they need to complete course readings, listen to lectures, write essays, and take part in discussions in order to learn the content of a social-studies course. The skills are not addressed in isolation but emerge 'naturally' from the social activities learners perform.

Oxford (2001) also acknowledges, however, that in practice the distinction between segregated and integrated-skills instruction may not always be clear, observing that in some cases "the segregation of language skills might be only partial or even illusory". She explains that even discrete-skill courses such as 'reading' often make use of multiple skills. As pointed out already, this may be the case even in traditional grammar translation courses, where students receive a lecture (listen) take notes (write) read the course textbook (read) and practice grammatical structures (speak).

Indeed, it is not clear that CBI and TBL forms of skills-integration are any more integrative than the incidental ones that occur in traditional teacher-fronted classrooms. A content-based course may integrate skills around subject-matter, but have little connection among the skills in particular classroom activities. Students of the course might complete required reading and writing assignments outside of class, then attend a lecture in one class and a discussion-based seminar in another. While all four skills are integrated through the course content, they do not occur in close proximity to one another; rather, they are incorporated more loosely at the syllabus level. Such an occasional meeting of skills can hardly be considered a strong form of skills integration.

On the other hand, the four-skills can be integrated at a much more local level in classes that are not explicitly task- or content-based. In a traditional grammar class, for example, the teacher could have students complete grammar activities in class (reading and writing) and share their answers in groups to reach consensus on the correct answers (speaking and listening). Although the course syllabus may be driven by grammar rather than meaningful tasks or content, all four skills are tightly interwoven in the classroom activity.

To sum up, existing characterizations of integrated skills instruction are very broad and encompass a wide range of classroom practices. More delicate distinctions it seems are needed to account for these varieties of skills-integration. In an attempt to bring greater clarity to the term, the following sections propose the concepts of *global* versus *local* and *strong* versus *weak* skills integration.

### Global and local varieties of skills-integration

One way to view skills-integration is from a global syllabus level and a more local classroom-activity level. Figure 1 shows a continuum where at one end skills that are integrated globally are referred to as *syllabus driven* because skills-integration at this level is a product of decisions at the syllabus level. A content-based or task-based course may require students to complete course assignments such as readings, term papers and collaborative projects throughout the course. In this type of skills integration, however, there is no guarantee that the four skills are tightly integrated into any particular classroom activity.

On the opposite end of the continuum is Local Skills-Integration. This involves more spontaneous decisions by the teacher to include particular classroom activities or engage in incidental classroom interactions that combine the four skills. A teacher of a traditional grammar-translation class might integrate skills by having students read about a particular grammar point and then use the target language to discuss differences between sentences. Thus, unlike Global-Skills Integration that is principally concerned with meaningful engagement with content and tasks, a Local-Integration of Skills can be used to develop any number of areas from content knowledge and conversation strategies to grammar and vocabulary.

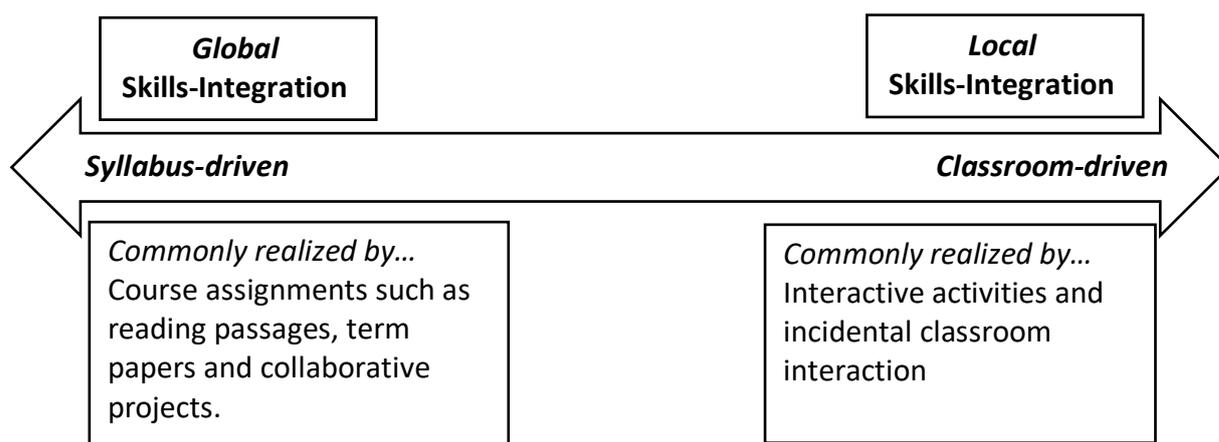


Figure 1: Global and Local Variations of Integrated-Skills Instruction.

### Strong and weak varieties of skills-integration

In our view, the strongest type of skills integration combines both global and local forms. Figure 2 shows a continuum from *Strong Integration* on the left to *Weak Integration* on the right. As apparent in Figure 2, strong forms are characterized by integration at both global and local levels, while weaker ones may not incorporate all of the skills or they may be integrated only globally or locally.

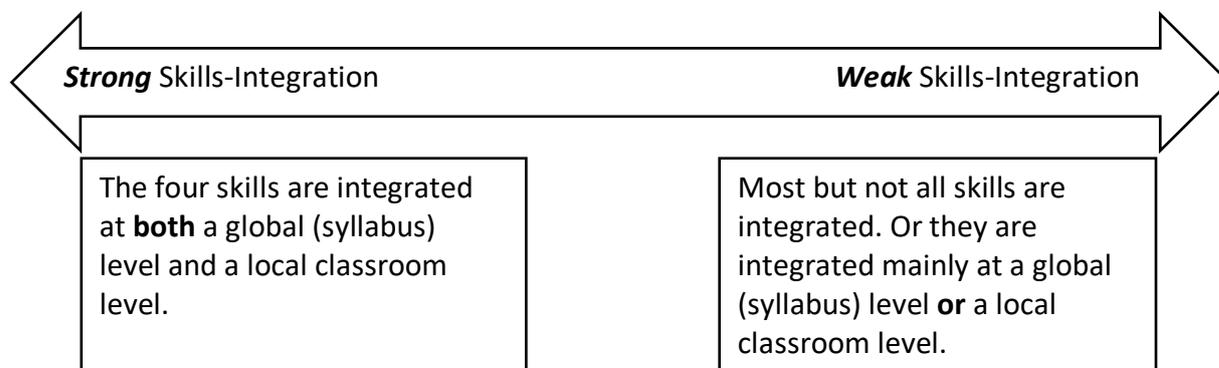


Figure 2: Strong and Weak Variations of Integrated-Skills Instruction.

This distinction between strong and weak forms of skills integration offers a lens for examining the use of different skills in curriculums and course materials. Many commercially published ESL/EFL textbooks appear to offer fairly strong forms of integration. Books are often organized around themes or topics such as *Endangered Languages* or *Tourism* and include reading and listening passages. Writing tasks are usually located at the end of the unit and some books even include suggestions for collaborative projects. Thus, from the perspective of a global integration of skills, such books can be said to offer a fairly strong form.

However, this global integration on its own does not guarantee a strong integration of skills. The strength of skills-integration also depends on the particular pedagogical decisions of teachers (local skills integration). When preparing classes, instructors may decide to give a lecture on a topic while students take notes (less integration) or they may have students work in teams to teach each other about the topic (more integration). In summary, strong forms of integrated-skills are syllabus *and* classroom-driven, and thus, they involve both a global and a local integration of skills. Weak forms, on the other hand, may not incorporate all of the skills or they may be integrated only globally or locally.

### **Caveats of Integrated-Skills Instruction: Integration vs. Fusion**

A final point regarding skills-integration is the distinction between *an integration of skills* and *a fusion of skills*. The notion of 'skills-fusion' is mentioned briefly in Myskow, Underwood and Hattori (2012, p. 33), and is elaborated here to show how well-intentioned attempts at skills integration may run into problems. When teaching the different skills, especially writing or speaking, they should be aligned with their intended social purposes. A presentation is typically intended to be delivered verbally, and thus it is used to develop the skill of 'speaking'.

A fusion of skills occurs when genres such as presentations and essays are merged together in a way that dislocates them from their intended social purpose. A teacher who asks a student to write a short essay and 'present' it to the class is fusing together an essay genre that is intended to be read with a presentation genre that is intended to be spoken. Written texts typically include, among other features, a great deal more nominalization and lexical density than those that are designed to be spoken. The result of merging written and spoken

genres together can be boredom and confusion among audience members and a failure of the speaker to achieve his/her rhetorical goals. Thus, when incorporating different skills in the classroom, it is important that they do not become fused together but remain, as Oxford puts it, “strands” that “are woven together” (p. 2). In other words, a necessary condition for the integration of multiple skills is the integrity of individual skills.

## SKILLS INTEGRATION IN THREE CONTEXTS

In this section we explore various options for skills integration in the following three educational contexts in Japan: 1) a university course focusing on English for Academic Purposes; 2) a secondary-school CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classroom; and 3) a project-based syllabus at an elementary school. Each of the following sections begins with a brief contextual description followed by a discussion of how skills are integrated globally at the syllabus level and locally in particular classroom activities. The course samples shown here are derived from the authors’ teaching experiences in these contexts. They are used for illustrative purposes and do not necessarily reflect how courses are conducted in these contexts.

### Integrating Skills around Academic Tasks in a University Course

The first example of integrated-skills instruction is an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course taught at a university in Japan. The course is mandatory for all freshmen students in the university and its purpose is to prepare them to take further academic courses in English. Students are streamed into levels based on a placement test (Reading and Listening) that they take upon enrollment. The particular selection of materials outlined here is from an intermediate level course (Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), B1 and B2). The class meets for two 90-minute sessions per week over 15 weeks in the semester.

#### *Global integration of skills in a university course (Syllabus-driven)*

Figure 3 shows the scope and sequence of the aforementioned university course syllabus. As apparent in the middle column of Figure 3, (*academic skills covered*), a wide range of academic sub-skills are addressed such as skimming for main ideas, scanning for details and note-taking. This breadth of sub-skills was considered important for an introductory course aimed at developing a broad foundation of skills for aiding learners in their future academic studies.

As also shown in figure 3, however, the course is not concerned simply with learning discrete skills. They are taught in connection with *major tasks* (displayed in the right column) such as writing a summary of academic material and presenting an academic article. Thus, the course syllabus is informed by a task-based approach to language learning and was designed in accordance with the following four criteria of a task outlined in Ellis (2003): 1) a primary focus on meaning, 2) some form of "information gap" in order to create opportunities for communication, 3) a clearly defined communicative outcome and 4) space for students to draw on their own linguistic resources to complete the task (p. 1).

Each of the *major tasks* displayed in Figure 3 necessitates the use of multiple subskills. The *Book Review task* instructions (weeks 7-8), for example, are further elaborated in Figure 4 to include four subskills. These are formulated as *enabling objectives* because they help or ‘enable’ students to complete the target tasks, (i.e., *terminal objectives*) (see Brown, 2001, p. 150-151 for a detailed description of terminal and enabling objectives; see also Ball, Kelly and Clegg 2015 and Anderson and Krathwohl 2001 for other types of objectives).

Week	Academic Skills Covered	Major task(s)
1	Course overview and self-introductions	
2-4	Types of reading (academic/ extensive reading), Finding reading resources (library resources and collection of graded readers, online resources), Reading strategies (skimming and scanning, organizational patterns)	Finding a book for extensive reading, Writing a summary of academic material
5-6	Presentation strategies (introducing a book), Academic writing (academic register, summarize and paraphrase)	Book presentation (poster presentation)
7-8	Writing a book review (paragraph structure, organizational patterns), Leading a discussion (thinking of discussion questions, phrases for saying and asking for opinion, agreeing and disagreeing)	Book review Group discussions
9-11	Note-taking strategies (reading and listening), Writing an argumentative essay, Citing sources in academic writing	Group discussions Essays
12-14	Finding reliable sources, Presentation strategies (introduce an academic article)	Presentation Final essay

Figure 3: Scope and sequence of a university level course organized around academic tasks

As the list of terminal and enabling objectives in Figure 4 shows, the Book Review task involves not only writing but reading, listening and speaking. Enabling Objective 1 (*identifying main ideas and key points...*) requires students to read while Enabling Objective 5 (*verbally summarizing key points of a book review...*) provides opportunities for both listening and speaking.

<b>Book Review Task Objectives</b>
<p><b>Terminal Objectives:</b>  <i>Students will be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) write a review of a book of their choice.</li> <li>2) participate in a discussion expressing their views about different books.</li> </ol> <p><b>Enabling Objectives (sub-skills):</b>  <i>Students will be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) identify main ideas and key points of a book review.</li> <li>2) use appropriate organizational patterns (listing, compare/contrast, sequence, cause/effect) in their book reviews.</li> <li>3) use appropriate signaling expressions associated with organizational patterns.</li> <li>4) format summaries in accordance with academic conventions and submit them via an online class forum.</li> <li>5) verbally summarize key points of a book review in verbal reports to other group members.</li> </ol>

Figure 4: Book review task objectives.

As this discussion shows, the university course outlined here necessitates an integration of skills at the global, syllabus level. As pointed out previously, however, a strong integration of skills also involves the incorporation of multiple skills in particular classroom activities (i.e., local skills integration).

#### *Local integration of skills in a university course (Classroom-driven)*

A variety of classroom activities were developed to meet the aforementioned syllabus objectives for the book-review task. The following is one classroom activity devised to address the third Enabling Objective in Figure 4, *to use appropriate signaling expressions associated with organizational patterns*.

- 1:** Students are put into groups of four and decide their own roles (leader, note-taker, presenter, time-keeper).
- 2:** Teacher distributes a worksheet to each student that is divided into four sections. Each section has one of the organizational patterns as a heading (listing, compare/contrast, sequence, cause/effect).
- 3:** Individually, students fill in their worksheets by adding appropriate signaling expressions under each heading (e.g., the signaling expression ‘as a result’ would be listed under cause/effect). At this stage, students do not consult dictionaries or course materials, but rely on their own linguistic knowledge.
- 4:** Students are then instructed that they can add to their lists by scanning reading passages and selecting signaling expressions.
- 5:** Students then share their signaling expressions with their teammates while they listen and add them to their lists. Groups must reach consensus on which organizational patterns the signaling expressions are associated.
- 6:** Teams share their findings with the class.

Although the instructional sequence consists of just six steps, all four skills are tightly woven into it. Step 4 of the task requires students to scan passages to identify signaling expressions (reading) and add them to their lists (writing). The requirement in Step 5 that students reach consensus on the appropriate heading to list each signaling expression requires both listening and speaking.

In sum, the academic tasks in this university level course involve a combination of the four skills at both the syllabus and classroom levels, indicating a strong integration of skills in the course. The syllabus is comprised of several major tasks including written book reviews and discussions of them, which bring together multiple skills as students engage in meaningful academic tasks. This syllabus-driven, global integration of skills is complemented at the classroom level with particular activities aimed at developing sub-skills such as the appropriate use of signaling expressions, which in turn also necessitate a combination of the four skills.

#### **Integrating Skills around Academic Content in a Secondary School**

This course sample is from a first-year junior high (grade 7) CLIL social studies course taught at a private secondary school in Japan (see Ball et al. 2015 for an in-depth discussion of CLIL). As the school is an authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, in accordance with IB curriculum specifications, explicit skill instruction and curricular goals are articulated across all subjects. Students enrolled in the IB program (CEFR B1 – B2) receive approximately half of their classroom instruction in English. This

means that three to five of the 50-minute sessions per week are dedicated to social studies, depending on the period of instruction. As the English courses are designed to satisfy compulsory education requirements of the IB Organization as well as Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the factors affecting course design are not only IB-related subject-matter competences but MEXT guidelines for communicative proficiency.

*Global integration of skills in a secondary-school course (Syllabus-driven)*

Figure 5 shows a first-year junior high school geography-based social studies scope and sequence. Like the previously discussed university-level syllabus of academic tasks (e.g., book reviews), this syllabus contains ‘major tasks’ or *summative assessments* such as a *written report* or *oral presentation*. However, unlike the university-level class, the organizing principle of this syllabus is learning content (i.e., geography) rather than performing general academic tasks such as book reviews that could be useful in a variety of academic disciplines. The syllabus presented here (Figure 6) was developed using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework (Wiggins, Wiggins & McTighe 2005) in which individual units are structured backward from purposeful tasks to specific activities and learning processes that emphasize understanding and learning transfer of specific academic subjects.

<b>Unit Name</b>	<b>Inquiry Statement</b>	<b>Social Study Aims (Explicit)</b>	<b>English Language Aims (Implicit)</b>	<b>Summative Assessment(s)</b>
<b>Maps (1<sup>st</sup> Term)</b>	<i>Our view of the world is shaped by the maps we use. Simultaneously, the maps we make are shaped by our view of the world.</i>	<b>How to</b> ○ evaluate a map’s strengths and weaknesses	<b>How to use</b> ○ descriptive language (It is good for / bad at) ○ hedging in oral and written speech ○ note-taking strategies (e.g. Cornell notes)	Written Report  Oral Presentation  Process Journal (Reflection)
<b>Climate and Culture (1<sup>st</sup> Term)</b>	<i>Climate directly influences cultural development.</i>	○ analyze a climate graph ○ conduct research relating to culture (e.g. architecture / clothing)	○ comparatives and superlatives ○ hedging in oral and written speech	Written Report  Oral Presentation  Process Journal (Reflection)

<p><b>Countries around the world (2<sup>nd</sup> Term)</b></p>	<p><i>Systems are composed of a variety of networks that exhibit patterns and trends on a national and global level.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ analyze population pyramids, economic graphs, and ranking lists</li> <li>○ conduct research relating to systematic measures relating to population, trade/economics, and human development indexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ comparatives and superlatives</li> <li>○ cohesive language for connecting cause and effect</li> <li>○ hedging in oral and written speech</li> </ul>	<p>Written Report</p> <p>10 min Oral Presentation</p> <p>Process Journal (Reflection)</p>
<p><b>Prefectures around Japan (3<sup>rd</sup> Term)</b></p>	<p><i>Many different measures can be used to observe the growth and development with a country.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ analyze population pyramids, economic graphs, and ranking lists</li> <li>○ conduct research relating to systematic measures relating to population, trade/economics, and human development indexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ comparatives and superlatives</li> <li>○ cohesive language for connecting cause and effect</li> <li>○ persuasive and sales-oriented language</li> <li>○ hedging in oral and written speech</li> </ul>	<p>Written Report</p> <p>10 min Oral Presentation</p> <p>Process Journal (Reflection)</p>

Figure 5: Scope and sequence of a secondary-school CLIL-based geography course.

Summarizing the information in the *Culture and Climate* Unit from the geography syllabus (Figure 5), Figure 6 shows how the four skills are integrated globally at the syllabus level. The terminal objectives require students to complete a written report (*writing*) and an oral presentation (*speaking*) that explain how climate influences the cultural development of a region. These tasks, which involve an analysis of the architecture and clothing styles found in specific climate zones as identified using the Koppen Climate Classification System, also require speaking and listening. Using this classification system, students have to define a region in terms of specific climate zones, describe how they came to their conclusions, explain the major cultural elements for the region they selected and how elements are shaped by a region's climate.

As this discussion illustrates, in CLIL-based courses general competences such as written reports and presentations can serve to integrate skills around subject-matter at the syllabus level. As the next section shows, skills-integration can be strengthened further by combining them in local classroom activities (see Ball et al. 2015 for a related discussion of Competences and procedures in CLIL course design).

<b>Climate and Culture Unit Objectives</b>
<p><b>Terminal Objectives:</b> <i>Students will be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) create a written report explaining how climate influences culture.</li><li>2) deliver an oral presentation explaining how climate influences culture.</li><li>3) maintain a process journal that records the student's learning process.</li></ol>
<p><b>Enabling Objectives (sub-skills):</b> <i>Students will be able to effectively use:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) comparatives and superlatives to compare the effects of climate in different regions.</li><li>2) hedging and boosters (overall, it is good at; some weakness are...)</li></ol>

Figure 6: Climate and Culture Unit objectives (Secondary School CLIL Course).

#### *Local integration of skills in a secondary-school course (Classroom-driven)*

The focus in CLIL courses on content or subject-matter usually means there is a great deal of new concepts and material to be mastered. The traditional way a teacher might approach this is to distribute readings and deliver lectures on them. However, there are other more interactive and engaging options a teacher could choose when planning classroom activities using multiple skills. The following is a cooperative jigsaw activity (adapted from Kagan, 1992) that can be used to familiarize students with key concepts in the Koppen Climate classification system.

- 1:** Teacher prepares four different cards with short reading passages on them. Each card contains key points about one of the four climate types (cold, tropical, dry, temperate).
- 2:** In teams of four, each student receives a different 'climate card'.
- 3:** Students are told to study their cards and take notes on important information that they want to explain or 'teach' their teammates.
- 4:** When time is up students are instructed to turn over their cards. Looking only at their notes, they take turns explaining the information they learned from their cards.
- 5:** The activity is finished when all four students have presented to their teams and all students have taken notes on the contents of their teammates' cards.
- 6:** For additional accountability, students can be randomly called upon to share information they learned from their team members with the class.

This activity, which involves students explaining or 'teaching' their teammates about the different climate types, brings together all of the four skills. Students must first read and take notes on their cards before describing their content (speaking) to their classmates who listen and take notes on the information (writing).

To sum up, the course sample outlined here illustrates strong form skills integration. The four skills are integrated around subject-matter competences such as written reports and oral presentations at the syllabus/global level. They are also tightly woven together at the local level through the use of the jigsaw classroom activity.

#### **Integrating Skills in an Elementary School-Trip Project**

The final course sample discussed here is from an elementary school syllabus. The course is designed for sixth-grade students in classes of approximately 25 students that meet for one hour, 35 times over one academic year. The syllabus is mainly topic and project-based, for example talking about future dreams or introducing Japanese holidays, and it aims to help students develop oral communication skills using basic phrases. There is some exposure to reading and writing but it is not a focus of the curriculum as Japanese students experience rigorous training in reading and writing at the junior high and high school levels. An important goal of the elementary school syllabus, therefore, is to foster a positive attitude towards English, primarily through listening and speaking.

#### *Global integration of skills in an elementary-school course (Syllabus-driven)*

The project outlined here involves sixth-grade students interviewing visitors to Japan while on a school trip to a famous Japanese tourist site. The purpose of this project is to provide students with a meaningful and authentic communicative experiences in English. The project consists of three phases: 1) preparation for interviews (i.e., preparing interview questions and phrases to introduce oneself), 2) carrying out the interviews and 3) consolidation, which involves creating posters displaying the results of interviews. Figure 7 overviews the school-trip project objectives. As apparent in Figure 7, the first phase of the project is concerned with addressing the Enabling Objectives 1 and 2 (phrases to introduce themselves and *wh-/ yes/no* question types), the second phase with Terminal Objective 1 (the interview) and the third with Terminal Objective 2 (creating posters).

<b>School-trip Interview Project Objectives</b>
<p><b>Terminal Objectives:</b> <i>Students will be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) interview visitors to Japan at a famous Japanese tourist site.</li><li>2) create posters displaying the results of interviews.</li></ol>
<p><b>Enabling Objectives (sub-skills):</b> <i>Students will be able to effectively use:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) phrases to introduce themselves (e.g., Hello my name is...).</li><li>2) <i>wh-</i> and <i>yes/no</i> question types (e.g., Where are you from? Do you like....? What is your favorite...? Can you...?).</li></ol>

Figure 7: School trip interview project objectives (Elementary School).

While the main skills addressed in this project are speaking and listening, which are of particular focus in the preparation and interview stages, reading and writing is also employed, especially in the post-task consolidation stage where students create posters.

#### *Local integration of skills in an elementary-school course (Classroom-driven)*

At the local classroom level, a variety of activities employing multiple skills can be used to achieve the objectives of this project. For example, to address Enabling Objective 2 (effectively using *wh-* and *yes/no* question types) teachers could choose to use the classic ESL/EFL activity called *Find Someone Who?* This activity involves asking multiple class members a series of *yes/no* questions and recording their names if they answer 'yes'. This makes for effective practice of the target language and integrates all four skills, albeit rather superficially, especially in the case of reading and writing.

Another, lesser known, activity that can be used to practice not only *yes/no* but *wh-* type questions is one described in Alberghini (1997, p. 140) called “*Zip-around*”. This activity, which was originally developed as a review activity in history classes, is adapted here as a means to practice asking and answering interview questions. The *Zip-around* task procedure is as follows:

- 1: Teacher writes an answer at the top of one card (Card 1) and a question unrelated to the answer at the bottom (e.g., *yes I can; where are you from?*)
- 2: Teacher then writes the answer to the question on Card 1 at the top of a new card (Card 2) and a new question at the bottom of Card 2.
- 3: Teacher continues writing questions and answers on new cards until there are enough cards for each member of the class. As an alternative, sets can be distributed to teams with each team member receiving an equal number of cards.
- 4: Student 1 stands and asks a question on his/her card and the student with the correct answer (Student 2) says it aloud. Student 2 then asks the question on his/her card.
- 5: This continues until all questions have been asked and answered (Note: For this activity to work it is essential that the first card contains the answer of the question on the last card!)

Though this activity only includes three of the four skills--listening, speaking and to a lesser extent, reading--it is a lively activity for practicing questions and answers that provides practice using the language students will need in their interviews.

To sum up, the focus of this elementary school syllabus is primarily on speaking and listening, and thus, there is less of a global integration of skills than the previously discussed courses at the university and secondary school levels. However, as the local classroom activities for the school-trip interview project show, teachers have a variety of options available to them when deciding how to address these objectives--options that could include the use of skills such as reading and writing that may not be specified in the syllabus.

## CONCLUSION

The central aim of this paper was to bring greater clarity to the concept of skills integration in ESL/EFL courses. Several new concepts were proposed (Global/Local & Strong/Weak integration). A Global integration of skills is characterized as syllabus-driven because the four skills are specified at the syllabus level in connection with major tasks, competences, or projects. A local integration, on the other hand, is a function of the particular classroom activities that teachers employ when addressing course objectives. We argued that the strongest forms of skills integration are characterized by the use of the four skills at both the global and local levels--that is in both the syllabus and in particular classroom activities.

To illustrate these concepts, we presented course samples derived from our experiences teaching in a variety of contexts (university, secondary school and elementary school). In detailing these, we also tried to show how a strong integration of skills can be realized by using a variety of educational approaches from task-based English for academic purposes at the university level to subject-matter CLIL courses in secondary school and project-based learning on elementary-school field trips. While these contexts and approaches vary greatly, there is one common underlying theme throughout this paper--that is, effective skills integration occurs only when students are engaged in meaningful social activities. Whether it be sharing book reviews with peers, teaching classmates about a subject-area, or

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interviewing visitors to one's country, all of the course samples described here are designed to promote meaningful engagement with others. After all, it is learner engagement--not skills-integration--that is the preeminent goal of foreign-language instruction.

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