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INTEGRATING EXTENSIVE READING INTO AN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES PROGRAM¹

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Abstract

This paper reports on the inclusion of extensive reading in three separate 12-week courses taught by different teachers on an EAP programme at a New Zealand university. The inclusion of extensive reading was experimental and sought answers to two questions: would students respond positively to the extensive reading component, and how could extensive reading be included? On each iteration of the extensive reading component a different approach was taken. On the first occasion, the reading was a stand-alone part of the teaching programme but on the second and third occasions the reading was integrated into the programme. In each of the three classes the students responded positively to the inclusion of extensive reading. The integration of the reading reflected teacher and learner differences, and supported the belief that the way in which extensive reading is included in a programme should be determined by the specific language learning environment.

Ever since the classic Fijian ‘book flood’ reports (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981, 1983), there has been a growing body of research to support the use of extensive reading in the language classroom. The claim is that through readings lots of easy, enjoyable books learners will have better language learning outcomes. The impact of extensive reading on different skill areas including listening, reading comprehension and speed, writing, vocabulary, examination performance and attitudes to reading in the target language has been well-documented (Bell, 2001; Cho & Krashen, 1994; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Janopoulos, 1986; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989; Robb & Susser, 1989; Tsang, 1996). Yet there is a dilemma. As Grabe (1995, p. 44) pointed out, ‘We learn to read by reading a lot, yet reading a lot is not the emphasis of most reading curricula.’ It appears that this absence is particularly apparent in programmes targeting the needs of more advanced learners, such as university preparation programmes. It is possible that teachers in such situations are not convinced of the merits of extensive reading for their students, and for this reason alone ‘the role of extensive reading needs to be examined more closely for its potential contributions to student success in advanced EAP settings’ (Grabe, 2001, p. 26). Appropriate further research may encourage teachers to reconsider the possible role of extensive reading in their programmes.

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However, an investigation of teachers' attitudes towards and practice of extensive reading (Macalister, in preparation) suggests that teachers generally hold positive beliefs about the power of reading, and that a lack of attention to extensive reading in their classrooms has a range of causes other than a lack of research evidence, including the challenge of finding time to add a new activity to already-crowded teaching programmes and the belief that students preparing for university study will not view extensive reading as a valid activity. That second cause is of particular concern in situations where classes typically consist of international, fee-paying students, as is the case in New Zealand.

With these thoughts in mind, two questions arise for the teacher wishing to include extensive reading in an EAP programme:

- will the students respond positively to an extensive reading component in the programme?
- how should extensive reading be included in the programme?

This paper addresses these questions by reporting on three iterations of an EAP programme which included an extensive reading component. The experiment took place within a well-established, 12-week, theme-based programme taught at a university in New Zealand. An IELTS score of 4.5 is required for entry to this course, and the motivation for most students enrolling in the programme is university preparation.

Pilot Study

The first attempt to implement extensive reading in an EAP class has been reported elsewhere (Macalister, 2007), and is here summarised briefly. The class was relatively low proficiency and consisted of 18 students, mostly from the People's Republic of China, but with others from South Korea & Indonesia. With the exception of one slightly older student, all were aged between 19 and 24. Six of the class were not intending to pursue university study in New Zealand. The nature of the extensive reading programme was 20 minutes a day of sustained silent reading in class, at the end of the three-hour morning session each day. This amounted to almost one full teaching week over a 12-week course. Students read self-selected graded readers. There were no follow-up activities related to this reading, and only informal monitoring/guidance. In its implementation, the programme met all ten of Day and Bamford (2002)'s principles, which are:

- 1 The reading material is easy.
- 2 A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
- 3 Learners choose what they want to read.
- 4 Learners read as much as possible.
- 5 The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.
- 6 Reading is its own reward.
- 7 Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
- 8 Reading is individual and silent.
- 9 Teachers orient and guide their students.
- 10 The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Because this course was taking place in an ESL environment where learners had opportunities for exposure to English language input both inside and outside the classroom it would have been difficult to isolate any impact of the extensive reading on the learners' language development. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the 18 learners were

reading a wide assortment of books, and that the course was of relatively short duration. The principal concern was that these learners as a group would do as well on the end-of-course tests as previous groups with similar entrance scores. It was important to be reassured, in other words, that the devotion of almost one full week of class time to extensive reading was not penalising the students in any way. The final results were, in this respect, reassuring.

Qualitative data about the extensive reading component in the pilot study was obtained from various sources, and indicated positive attitudes towards the reading. For example, one student reported during the course:

Before sleeping, I always read fiction book which borrow from school.

Another wrote of the programme's benefits on the final evaluation questionnaire:

Help me read more books. Reading. I like reading now.

The feedback suggested that the learners had accepted the in-class reading component as a worthwhile activity.

As a result, it felt that the pilot study had given permission to proceed with the inclusion of extensive reading in this EAP programme. All the same, it was clear that there were some issues that needed to be addressed. These included:

- a degree of scepticism among teaching colleagues as to the merits of privileging extensive reading over some other component of the existing programme
- an on-going concern to ensure that extensive reading as part of the programme had face validity for international, fee-paying students

The appropriate response to these issues appeared to be to achieve greater integration between the extensive reading component and the remainder of the programme. As implemented in the pilot study, extensive reading was of the stand-alone nature criticised by Green (2005) in the context of the Hong Kong secondary schools. It had worked successfully in the New Zealand pre-university context, but that was no reason not to try a more integrated approach. Such an approach would, however, require pre-selection of reading texts, discussed in the following section. Pre-selecting the texts appeared to compromise at least one of the Day and Bamford principles, *Learners choose what they want to read*, and deliberate integration of the reading into the programme would have an impact on another, *Reading is its own reward*. As the value of the principles is as guidelines rather than rules, this was not seen as problematic.

It did, however, seem important to retain the pilot study's commitment to daily in-class reading in any subsequent inclusion of extensive reading in the EAP programme. This was simply to ensure reading was done. After all, as Mohd Asraf and Ahmad (2003) noted of a programme in Malaysia, 'without incorporating extensive reading as part of a class program, the students might not read English books on their own.'

The Selection of Reading Texts

There is always a risk when choosing a book for another person that the recipient may not like it. The same risk exists when selecting books for a group of unknown students. The best way of mitigating that risk is to identify books recommended by others, and on this occasion the Extensive Reading Foundation's annual Language Learner Literature Awards

(<http://www.erfoundation.org/erf.html>) was used as a guide. The finalists in the category *Adults & adolescents/advanced* for 2004 and 2005 were chosen as matching both the maturity and the anticipated language proficiency of the learners². One of these titles proved to be out of print, and advice was sought from the in-house resource co-ordinator as to a suitable replacement. In the end, the following six titles were chosen.

Falling Leaves, Adeline Yen Mah, retold by Sue Harnes, Penguin Reader level 4

The Accidental Tourist, Anne Tyler, retold by Jennifer Bassett, Oxford Bookworms level 5 *

Cold Mountain, Charles Frazier, retold by Mary Tomalin, Penguin Reader level 5 *

A Tangled Web, Alan Maley, Cambridge English Reader level 6

Cry Freedom, John Briley, simplified by Rowena Akinyemi, Oxford Bookworms level 6 *

Captain Correlli's Mandolin, Louis de Bernières, retold by Mary Tomalin, Penguin Reader level 6 *

The selected titles were appropriate for various reasons. First, they represented a range of difficulty. Graded readers are ordered by vocabulary levels and, although different publishers use different grading systems and these grading systems do not match (Wan-aron, 2007), these six represent a progression of difficulty. Second, the six readers contain both fiction and non-fiction, so are not confined to 'literature' in the narrow sense. Not only is there a mixture of both fiction and non-fiction, but different genres are represented – a mystery, a love story, a memoir, and so on. Finally, four of the readers (marked *) had been made into films, available on DVD, which allowed the possibility of adding a viewing component to the extensive reading programme, thus providing additional opportunities for interaction and integration.

It is worth noting that these readers were purchased in sets of 18, to allow every student a copy. This did entail not insignificant start-up costs for the programme which, when combined with the risk of purchasing unsuitable texts, could be viewed as a deterrent to this approach to extensive reading. On this occasion, however, the known benefits of extensive reading and the option of re-using readers in the Language Learning Centre library were sufficient to mitigate the risks.

The Second Class: Integrating the Reading

A teacher volunteered to integrate the extensive reading programme into her class programme. This class was at a considerably higher proficiency level class than the pilot study class had been, and had a different composition. At the start of the course there were 17 students, of whom ten were female. Nine of the students came from Korea, with the remainder from the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Argentina. Three of the class were described as "more mature" and, for a range of reasons, three students did not complete the course.

² In 2006 the language proficiency distinction between beginners, intermediate and advanced was not retained, which makes the awards less useful for this purpose.

Apart from ensuring 20 minutes' in-class reading each day, the nature of the extensive reading programme was left fairly much to the teacher's discretion. While suggestions were made as to how to introduce the book, associated activities, and use of the DVDs, ultimately it was felt that as it was the teacher's class, how she used the resources had to be up to her. It was her programme, her teaching style and the intention was not to be too prescriptive.

During the twelve weeks of the course, comments about the extensive reading programme were recorded in a journal. Most, but not all, of the comments were made by the class teacher. As the following extracts show, the first week of the programme was reasonably eventful, and re-affirmed the decision to introduce the readers³.

Day 3

T reports one student already finished story, S said it was 'very emotional'

Day 4

Another S finished the book. Suggested start next book next Weds.

Day 5

A T asks over morning coffee whether she can start using GRs with her class – co-teacher not keen – so much else to do, but a compromise may be worked out. Seems that T who asked had a student who came to her yesterday and wanted to move to Cl. 2 because of reading programme.

Day 7

T reports enthusiastic response by Ss to first reader

As a way of integrating the reader into the class programme, the teacher devised a "Say It" activity based on characters in the book (see [Appendix 1](#)). A range of integrating activities was used during the course, with the consistent thread being links through writing. A different type of writing was used with each book, as follows:

- for/against theme in book
- book review
- expressing preference for a character
- academic prompt
- argument essay
- emphasise personal response as stimulus for writing

The teacher noted in her final report⁴ on the course that "The students really got into reading books in English", and there seemed little doubt that the reading component was well-received by the students, as the following comments from the journal indicate.

T back with class – reported that stand-in T said how 'into it' the students were on Tuesday, which is their day for a full hour on the book.

Not all going smoothly with class – seminars at moment, short first half, one student in ICU after car crash. But reading established as a habit, a routine. E.g. when T struggling with video camera for seminars today, told class to take out books and read – they did.

T remarks that when she came to class after break, two students were sitting reading their book.

³ These selected extracts are unedited. T = teacher, S = student, GR = graded reader.

⁴ This report was a standard administrative requirement of all teachers at the end of each course, just as the evaluation questionnaire mentioned below was also standard procedure. Information about the extensive reading component was, therefore, gathered through existing tools.

In terms of what the students enjoyed reading, it seemed that the use of a range of genres was justified for different books appealed to different students.

T reports that one S, who she's often thought needs 'a kick up the arse', has already read and enjoyed *A Tangled Web*.⁵

T reports one S read half the book last night, following loss of in-class reading time yesterday (see email) ... she taught him the word 'gripping'!

At the end of the course, the students completed an evaluation form as part of which they were invited to rate the books in terms of enjoyment of a five-point self-report scale. This suggested that the most popular books were *Falling Leaves* and *Cold Mountain*, with the least popular being *The Accidental Tourist*. One possible conclusion from this is that vocabulary level was less important in determining enjoyment than plot, as the Penguin level 5 readers (i.e. *Cold Mountain*) work with a larger headword count (2300) than the Oxford Bookworms level 5 (*The Accidental Tourist*, 1800 headwords).

This second incorporation of extensive reading into an EAP programme was again marked by positive teacher and student responses. It was different from the pilot study in that the teacher had pre-selected the readers for use, and in the deliberate attempt to integrate the readers into the programme, particularly through using them as a stimulus for writing in a range of genres. There was a possibility, however, that in both classes to date the respective teacher's enthusiasm for extensive reading had been a factor in determining the success of the extensive reading component. It seemed worthwhile, therefore, to use the sets of graded readers again but with a different class and a different teacher.

The Third Class

The teacher who volunteered to run the extensive reading component on this course was enthusiastic in principle about extensive reading but diffident about using it with students as she had attempted to do so unsuccessfully on another occasion. She was teaching the highest proficiency class, which meant that the students tended to be older than in the previous two classes and that a number were taking the 12-week course as preparation for a programme of post-graduate study. Another difference from the previous classes was the diversity of nationalities. Among the nine women and five men no national or linguistic grouping dominated, with students coming from Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Spain and the Netherlands.

The intention was, again, that reading would take place in-class and that the teacher would shape the extensive reading component to the class and her teaching style, although at her request I went to class and started the programme. This began with a brief explanation of what the extensive reading programme was and why we felt it was important for the students. This resulted in a number of questions, including:

- can we read hard books?
- what activities will we be doing?
- can we write in them?

There was also a promised opportunity to review this component of the course at its mid-point⁶. Once the students appeared comfortable with the use of extensive reading in the

⁵ Because it was a mystery.

course, the focus shifted to introducing the first reader, *Falling Leaves*. The class teacher had decided to use a write-before-you-read approach (Spack, 1985), and after sharing thoughts about life for a woman in China in 1937, and how it would change over the next 50 years, with key words being recorded on the white board, the students wrote before they were given the books.

The extensive reading programme with this class developed in a different way from the previous classes, as the following journal entries illustrate.

Class has finished first book and have had discussion. T says they really enjoyed that. Perhaps the book a bit 'girly'? T commented that with Cl. 1 always running to keep up, provide enough input, so this a good way of giving them more.

T brings back *Accidental Tourist* (which students enjoyed "moderately"; one woman said she'd laughed at it – that's good; it's supposed to be funny) and takes away *Cold Mountain*.

First day of mid-course break. T tells me that not doing reading in-class because such a high-powered group, but that are reading at home & discussing. One said that Inham should have died when shot in head – shocked others.

The main ways in which reading the graded readers was integrated into the rest of the programme in this class were through write-before-you-read, discussion of the books, and reading and retelling. There was less regular feedback from this teacher about the extensive reading programme than there had been with the previous class, and so we decided that I would run a loosely structured discussion with the students towards the end of the course. The discussion was intended to explore five main areas – the degree to which the students had enjoyed reading these books, whether they had read others as a result, to what extent they had watched the DVDs, whether they had perceived any benefits from the reading, and what their general reaction to the extensive reading had been.

Enjoyment

The response to the books was generally positive, although there was variation among individual students. One said, for example, she did not like love stories, but she seemed to be by herself. Another said that she had not enjoyed the first three graded readers so much, but now that they were reading at the top level she found the richer style more enjoyable. At least a couple indicated they would have quite liked to have read stories with a New Zealand and/or British background. Of the readers available, *Falling Leaves* and *Cry Freedom* seemed to have been the most popular, and the students seemed particularly pleased to have been allowed a choice between *Cry Freedom* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* for the final round of reading (when they were required to read and report back to a reader of the other book). This response drew attention to the importance of one of Day and Bamford (2002)'s principles, *Learners choose what they want to read*.

Students did wonder whether more than six sets of readers could be made available. While there would be no objection to this in theory, and it does accord with the Day and

⁶ This mid-course review had been present with the previous two classes as well. It was important to have an opportunity to evaluate and to make changes if necessary, including dropping the extensive reading component, if students did not like it. This reflects the importance placed on student satisfaction in courses largely composed of international fee-paying students.

Bamford (2002) principle, there are clear budgetary implications in expanding the number of graded reader sets. All programmes need to be run within realistic limits.

Reading Other Books

Some students said that reading the graded readers had encouraged them to read other stories. One commented that he had never read in his first language, so this experience was very new to him. He also said that he had read one book in one night.

The Use of DVDs

None of the students reported having watched a DVD of the book, apart from excerpts shown in class. This lack of use of the DVDs was related to the fact that issuing and viewing of the DVDs was managed through the university's Language Learning Centre. There was a very enthusiastic response to the proposal that students could borrow the DVDs for overnight viewing from the class teacher instead.

Benefits

Vocabulary growth was the first benefit that the students mentioned. They also mentioned increased awareness of writing styles, and grammar (particularly verb tenses). Not all benefits were linguistic, however. One student said she liked reading and the extensive reading programme saved her money because we gave her the books to read. The benefit of reading and learning about different cultures was also mentioned.

The above benefits were all offered freely by the students. In addition, when prompted, fluency was also mentioned. One student said that he was very slow at first with the first book, but now found he read much faster.

Reactions

The students were refreshingly honest about their initial reaction to the graded readers. While one said she had been glad, most admitted to having felt less enthusiastic with some feeling not sure or wondering why they would be reading these books. Furthermore, a couple admitted to not being pleased. They thought that it would mean they had more work to do, and that the extensive reading would not perhaps match their goals (relating to university study). Now, however, all felt positive about the reading experience because (a) they had enjoyed the books and (b) they perceived benefits from reading. Once again, therefore, the decision to include extensive reading as part of the EAP programme appeared to have been vindicated.

Conclusion

One of the two principal goals of this use of graded readers was to demonstrate that the incorporation of an extensive reading component in an EAP programme is possible, particularly in terms of student acceptance. Given that it has been demonstrated to be possible, and given the known benefits of extensive reading for language learning, it would seem desirable that EAP programmes include such a component.

The second important goal was to demonstrate how that incorporation may occur. Three classes of differing proficiency experienced extensive reading in three different ways. In the pilot study, extensive reading was a stand-alone activity and fully reflected the principles proposed by Day and Bamford (2002). In the other two classes a deliberate effort to integrate the reading of graded readers with the broader class programme was made, which to some extent compromised the principles. In both cases the exact nature of the integration was left to the class teacher, and in one class the in-class reading time was dropped after around four weeks. This did not affect the extensive reading component, however, and simply underlines the fact that the exact nature of any extensive reading programme is going to be affected by a range of factors and so the programme must be flexible in order to suit the particular learners. Flexibility is also necessary as the evaluation of each iteration of the programme is likely to suggest small changes, such as the way in which DVDs can be accessed.

A further area of interest in this exercise was the selection of suitable books. Rather than relying solely on teacher intuition or publisher catalogues when choosing books, guidance from some scrutinising source, such as the Extensive Reading Foundation, is likely to be helpful, as is input from librarians/resource room people who know what students actually like.

While it is understandable that language teachers in EAP situations have some reservations about including extensive reading in their teaching programmes, the success of the experiment reported on in this paper suggests that such doubts may well be groundless. That being the case, this experiment should encourage teachers to place greater emphasis on extensive reading in their classrooms.

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Appendix 1**SAY IT ACTIVITY: FALLING LEAVES**

The purpose of this activity is to help your speaking fluency. Work in pairs. Take turns calling a square in the grid for your partner to respond to.

	1	2	3
A	Imagine you are Adeline. Describe the most unhappy time in your life.	Imagine you are Niang. Explain why you hate Adeline so much.	Imagine you are Aunt Baba. Describe the changes that have happened in your life.
B	Imagine you are Ye Ye. Your life is coming to an end. What were the best and worst years of your life?	Imagine you are Adeline finally reading your fathers' will. Talk to Bob about it, telling him what you think.	Imagine you are Lydia. You have written piles and piles of letters to Niang about Adeline. What do you think of Adeline and why?
C	Imagine you are Adeline. Who in your family was most unkind to you. Why do you think this person treated you like this?	Imagine you are Adeline at the Sacred Heart School and Orphanage in Hong Kong. Explain how you feel.	Imagine you are Adeline. Explain why you want to please your father so much.