

Extensive Reading Reports – Different Intelligences, Different Levels of Processing

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Bio Data:

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Marc is a well-known writer and teacher-trainer. He is the author of over 100 professional articles, book chapters and textbooks including the popular English Firsthand series (Longman) and "Listening" in Practical English Language Teaching, David Nunan (ed.), (McGraw-Hill). Marc has been a featured speaker at KOTESOL, JALT, ThaiTESOL and other conferences. He is particularly interested in language planning, extensive reading and brain-friendly teaching.

Introduction:

Extensive Reading (ER) is an important aspect of any English as a Foreign/Second Language reading program. In this paper, I will consider a definition of ER and benefits of including it in a program. In the main part of the paper, I will explain four reporting forms that work with different intelligences and levels of processing.

While there are many variations in ways to implement an ER program, what they all have in common is that the learners read very large amounts of material in the target language.

Extensive Reading can be defined as:

Students reading a lot of easy, enjoyable books (Helgesen, 2005).

Each element of this definition includes elements which contrast ER with skills-based methodologies that focus on skimming, scanning, main idea identification and the like. The first point is that the students spend most of their time actually reading, not answering comprehension questions, writing reports or translating. They may do those things, but such tasks are subordinate to actually reading. The second element is that the students are reading a lot. Bamford and Day (2004) suggest that, although specific targets will vary, goals such as "a book a week or 50 pages a week" are realistic. This is in sharp contrast to traditional reading programs which had learners reading a single book over a term or a year and doing a detailed analysis of it. The easy aspect of the definition is important. Easy books build speed and reading fluency. Anderson (1999) suggests that 200 words per minute is a useful and realistic goal for second language readers. To achieve this target, the books need to be easy. Enjoyable is also a key part of ER. ER is much like the way people read for pleasure in their native languages. Enjoyable is, of course, a relative

term – it can only be determined by the reader. For that reason, Day and Bamford (1998) suggest that it is best if the books are self-selected. There is no assumption that learners are all reading the same book. Indeed, it would be unusual and perhaps impossible to find a single title that all members of a class find interesting. Different learners will prefer mysteries, love stories, biography and other forms of non-fiction, even comics. In the ER classroom, these genre preferences are respected. The final element of the definition is books. While any reading material can be used, graded readers which present stories with controlled vocabulary and, at times, limited grammar and information flow are often used.¹ These are books that can help learners become fluent, skilled readers.

In a review of ER research, Day and Bamford identify several benefits of ER including the following:

- Increased reading ability. This is unsurprising since that is the stated goal of ER.
- Increased affect and motivation. It should be noted that reading is one type of study that can actually be enjoyable as it is being done. Students are reading books they choose at a level they can enjoy. This pleasure orientation seems to impact their overall feeling about learning English.
- Improved vocabulary. Students need to meet vocabulary in context many times to acquire it. ER seems to be a good way to achieve this.
- Improved listening, speaking and spelling abilities. Interestingly, even if listening and speaking are not the goals of the class, ER seems to support these skills, possibly because of the increased exposure to English vocabulary and discourse.
- Facilitation of acquisition. Most current theories of second language acquisition recognize the roles of language input and intake. ER provides these necessities.

Typically, much of the student reading in ER happens largely outside the classroom. With students required to read large amounts of English – typically several books a month rather than one book a term or a year – there simply is not enough class time for all that reading to happen during class time. (Helgesen 1997, Anderson, 2005). If the goal of ER is to develop a reading habit, it can not be limited to being a classroom activity. Also, teachers often choose to provide a balance of extensive and intensive reading activities (Waring, 2005). In such cases, class time is frequently used for skill building activities while ER is done outside of class.

Classroom management and grading requirements may require a way to keep track of what learners are reading. In some cases, this involves having learners keep a reading portfolio (Markovic, 2005) or, in a portfolio's simpler form, a reading notebook (Helgesen, 1997) to report on books they are reading.

The remainder of this paper is to present four written report models. The models intend to accomplish several goals:

- to allow students to report using several different sensory modalities (Jensen, 1995) and intelligence types (Gardner, 1993), thus insuring that, at times, everyone is working in the type(s) that they find most comfortable.
- to provide variety and avoid habituation (Howard 2000). That is, by giving learners a range of ways to report on the books, teachers can avoid the fatigue and boredom that comes with repeating the same task many times.
- to reach several levels of comprehension. Barrett (cited in Richards, 1990) suggests that comprehension can be considered on a the following continuum:

5. Appreciation (affective) – highest level of comprehension

4. Evaluative
3. Inference
2. Reorganization
1. Literal (lowest level of comprehension).

The forms provided here exercise comprehension across this range of levels.

Four reading reaction report forms.

The following are the forms² students in my university use in their ER classes. They are introduced in the order given here. Each form is introduced two to three months after the previous one. Learners must use each type at least once. After that, they are free to use whichever previously introduced form they like. Reports are glued into a student reading portfolio notebook. The portfolios are collected weekly and read by the teacher who stamps “OK” on the page and writes an occasional comment or question.

The “student voice” comments following each form are taken from anonymous questionnaires my students submitted. On the questionnaire, they rated each form for interest and wrote comments about each. Comments were accepted in either English or their native language.

“Summary/reaction” form

This is the first form the learners meet. It is the most traditional, asking them simply to summarize what happened in the story and give their opinion. It deals with what Gardner (1993) calls “linguistic intelligence.” They are reacting to language and using language to do so. Since they are reporting what happened in the story, they are processing primarily on a literal level. Asking for their opinions about the story is an attempt to encourage them to incorporate their feelings (intrapersonal intelligence) and process at a level of evaluation or appreciation.

Reading for pleasure
Reaction Report Date _____

Your name: _____

Book's title _____

Type (circle): NON-FICTION: **cu** - culture **hs** - history **bio** - biography
se - science **nf** - other non-fiction: _____

FICTION: **hm** - humor **my** - mystery **lv** - love **ad** - adventure
sf - science fiction **of** - other fiction: _____

Publishers (circle): **B** - Black Cat **C** - Cambridge **H** - Heinemann
L - Longman **M** - Macmillan **O** - Oxford **P** - Penguin **F** - Ferron
PF - Perfection Form **HB** - Harcourt **S** - Scholastic Other: _____

yes no Movie tie-in? yes no Seen it? yes no

Level: _____ Pages _____ x _____ = Weighted pages _____
real value (lev. 1= 0.5, lev. 2 = 0.75, lev. 3 = 1.0, levels 4-6 - 1.25)

Reaction Report:
 (Include: • what the book was about • what you thought of it)

< **Write quickly.**
 10 minutes or less.
 Don't waste time erasing.
 It is OK to ~~cross out~~.

.....

Evaluation: **Good.** I'd recommend this book to a friend.
 Average. It was just so-so.
 Poor. This book was not interesting.

Figure one: Summary / opinion form

Student voices:

- I like this because it fits any type of story.
- This type is good because I can write any kind of feelings.
- This is easy to write.

Teacher's reaction.

• The fact that this is the most standard school task-type included in the forms may be why the learners find it easy to do. Since the idea of ER and of reading English for pleasure is new to most learners, it is probably useful to start with a fairly simple task.

“Draw a picture” form

Two months after starting the ER program, students get this form. Note that they are asked to draw a picture from their imaginations, not copy one from the book. This reporting method is an attempt to get them to use “bodily-kinesthetic” intelligence. At a minimum, learners have to reorganize information – transfer the words into a mental, then a drawn image. In practice, their pictures often reflect emotion more typical of an evaluative or appreciative response.

Reading for pleasure Draw a picture Date _____

Book's title _____ Your name: _____

Type (circle): NON-FICTION: **cu** - culture **hs** - history **bio** - biography
sc - science **nf** - other non-fiction: _____

FICTION: **hm** - humor **my** - mystery **lv** - love **ad** - adventure
sf - science fiction **of** - other fiction: _____

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yes no Movie tie-in? yes no Seen it? yes no

Level: _____ Pages _____ × _____ = Weighted pages
real value (lev. 1 = 0.5, lev. 2 = 0.75,
lev. 3 = 1.0, levels 4-6 = 1.25)

1. Draw a picture of a scene from the story.
Don't copy a picture. Draw one from your imagination.



2. Explain the picture.
What is happening? What happened before this picture? What happened next?

3. Your opinion. What did you think of the book?

Evaluation: Check(✓) one Good 😊 Average 😐 Poor 😞

Figure two: “Draw a picture” form

Student voices:

- I used this many times. This type is good for thinking and imagining.
- I can't draw pictures well but I like this type.
- It was useful when I didn't (know the words to) explain the story.
- I like this because sometimes I want to change forms.

Teacher's reaction.

- The comment “I can't draw well” was frequent. It caused some learners to dislike this form. Others, like the one who commented here, weren't satisfied with their drawings but still like the form.

- The student who commented that drawing a picture was useful when she didn't know a word was touching on the fact that reading is a receptive skill. We can always understand more language than we can produce so the drawing task works well here as a compensation strategy.

- The comment about wanting to change forms deals with habituation. When teachers and students follow the same routine too rigidly, boredom and disinterest can set in. Using a different form can combat this.

- This is good because I think about my life again. I feel it's interesting.
- It's useful but I think it's hard to find a book (with) which we can compare my life and the story.
- I think the "kind of book" is important.
- This is good for (books about) the history of the person (biography).
- This is not good for mysteries.

Teacher's reaction.

• Several students commented that this form is easiest with biographies. Of course, it is possible to compare nearly any kind of book to one's own life by comparing personalities or experiences but biographies tend to be less abstract than some other books so the comparisons are easier.

In this paper, I have attempted to make a case for Extensive Reading in the EFL/ESL classroom and present a series of forms which allow learners to report on their own reading in ways that fit a variety of intelligences and levels of understanding. ER can be a useful, powerful tool for our students.

References

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Notes:

1. For information on various graded readers series, see

<http://www.extensivereading.net/er/materials.html>

For a somewhat impressionistic description of the the most popular series, see

http://eltnews.com/features/thinktank/023_mh.shtml

2. These forms are available as downloadable jpgs on the Internet

<http://www.extensivereading.net/er/marcreports.html>

3. For a critique of literal comprehension questions and more information on Barrett's taxonomy of comprehension, see <http://www.mgu.ac.jp/~ic/helgesen/marc.article1.htm>

Internet resources

www.extensivereading.net - a resources site for teachers

<http://www.ials.ed.ac.uk/eper.html> - The Edinburgh Project for Extensive Reading

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ExtensiveReading/> - a discussion list for teachers interested in ER

www.erfoundation.org - The Extensive Reading Foundations, an independent, non-profit organization which promotes ER. The foundation awards the "Language Learner Literature" awards to the best graded readers each year.