

Selling ER

—Investigating Factors in Classroom Management that Affect Reading Performance—

(多読のススメ——読書に影響を与える要因の究明)

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1. Introduction

Much has been written about extensive reading. The literature focuses on reasons for using this methodology and results from its application. Less has been written on the practicalities of implementing ER programmes. This includes the motivation of students, and the building and administration of libraries. Perhaps more important still are the motivation and attitudes of teachers, and the actions which these lead to. Rather than investigating the effect of reading on language proficiency, this paper aims to investigate possible effects of the classroom on reading.

Extensive reading (ER) has been an integral component of the Comprehensive English Programme since its inception in April 2006. As course designers we have, therefore, had a relatively brief span of time in which to analyze the results of our initiative and to consider how to develop the ER program in the future. It is heartening, though, as we struggle with these issues to observe that we are not alone and that, throughout the Japanese secondary and tertiary English education system, there is growing awareness of the benefits of ER and an intensifying interest in exploring how best to integrate it into the broader scheme of existing curricula.¹

1.1 General Aims

One aim of this project was to explore the effectiveness of interviews with teachers as an instrument for staff and curriculum development. The focus of the interviews was limited to a specific area of the Comprehensive English curriculum: the extensive reading (ER) programme. We chose to concentrate on ER for several reasons. In the first place, ER is a relatively new departure and we are all too aware that there remain several problems that urgently need to be addressed. From our point of view as curriculum developers, there is no longer any question about the usefulness of ER in the EFL classroom. The weight of the research evidence now makes it difficult to argue with the contention that there is no more efficacious route to language acquisition. However, the logistics of implementing a large-scale programme are challenging. The problems are also, we suspect, compounded by the fact that the teachers involved have

widely varying attitudes to ER. This is particularly true with regard to the single most contentious issue we have had to deal with so far, that of assessment; and this was consequently one of the central topics dealt with in the interviews.

The original, and less ambitious, aim of this investigation, however, was to explain an anomaly in the ER programme results within a particular faculty in which three different teachers taught six second-year classes. As part of the assessment, students were required to keep a record of the number of words they had read. For the four classes taught by two of the teachers, the average word counts were between 65,000 and 75,000 words. The other teacher's two classes averaged over twice as much (197,000 and 163,000). The students were split into two groups based on results in a test of reading speed and comprehension (the EPER extensive Reading test), and each group was then distributed at random into three classes. Each of the three teachers was allocated to one "A" class with higher scores and one "B" class with lower scores. Given that the teacher with the conspicuously high scores should have had students within the same range of ability as the other two teachers, it seemed likely that teacher practice was having a large influence on the results. The motivation for investigating this scoring anomaly, and one that is central to the development of the curriculum, was therefore to investigate classroom practice in the hope of discovering how we, as teachers, can more effectively guide our students through the learning process, and what the institution can do to support us in this endeavour.

The aim of our research, then, was to investigate teacher practice and identify factors in classroom management that affected the outcome of the ER programme; and we felt that the best approach would be to undertake a qualitative study. The resulting interviews demonstrated that there are many issues in the ER classroom. These range from logistical and superficial matters of where the books should be placed and how the paperwork should be managed, to deeply held beliefs and attitudes about the value and nature of reading and the place of reading inside and outside the classroom, some of which go back to the teachers' own experience as students. No clear answer has been found to the original research question of why the scores were so much higher for one of the teachers. The value of the interview, not only as a qualitative research tool, but also in the service of faculty development is, however, clear.

A dogmatic application of ER-based language acquisition theory, with the emphasis it places on self-selection of texts and student autonomy, might conceivably lead one to question the necessity of having a language teacher in the classroom at all. The potential for drawing such conclusions will undoubtedly be particularly unsettling for teachers who are used to standing in front of a class of students all engaged in the same task. In fact, though, far from writing the teacher out of the picture, much ER literature proposes several new and indispensable roles for the instructor. Teachers are called upon to act not only as motivators and classroom managers but also as librarians and even 'booksellers' insofar as they need to encourage their students to browse through what is on display and come away from the class with a book that they will enjoy. These latter roles may well seem unfamiliar, as perhaps will the roles of explaining or justifying a particular methodology, a strategy which appears essential in cases where ER amounts, as it often

must in Japan, to a disorienting departure from the kinds of learning regime that students have grown accustomed to at earlier stages in their English education.

2. Interview methodology

The interview was chosen as the research tool in this investigation. In his short book, *The Long Interview*, McCracken describes the interview as one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury (1988: 9). Kvale (1996:127) describes the seven stages of an interview investigation as thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting.

2.1. Thematizing and Designing an Interview

Wengraf (2001: 61) makes an important distinction between theory questions and interview questions. Theory questions are research questions, written in theory language, often steeped in the obtuse jargon of a particular field. Interview questions are couched in everyday language. In our situation, the respondents are professionals in the same field, and superficially this distinction between language does not apply in the same way as to a sociologist, for example, interviewing under-16 shoplifters. Indeed, there is a strong case in EFL research for avoiding the use of jargon as the majority of language teachers do not belong to one academic field. However, regardless of the issue of jargon, the following warning seems pertinent: “if you find many of your basic theoretical concepts in your research conceptual framework pop up into your interview questions, the chances are that your designed interview will fail badly.” (Wengraf: 66)

Wengraf suggests a hierarchy from the research purpose to a central research question, leading to theoretical questions, which are then represented as interview questions or interview interventions. He describes different approaches to filling in this framework, from deductivists who will begin with the research purpose and work systematically from left to right, to inductivists who will begin with an image of an ideal informant and work backwards from an interview plan. He also describes those who begin with a “muddle in the middle” and work in both directions to fill in the gaps. (p. 73).

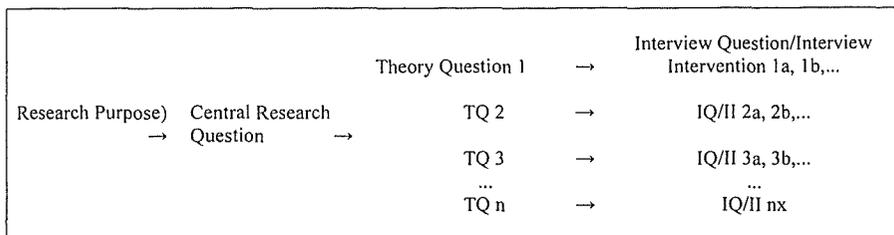


Figure 1. Interview design (Wengraf)

Our research purpose is to identify factors in classroom management that affect reading performance. The central research question is “What can teachers do in the classroom that will affect their students’ reading?”

Before interviewing, the following issues were identified, based on our own experience teaching ER, on responses in previous questionnaires with teachers and students (Brierley and Ruzicka, 2005, Brierley, 2006, and Brierley and Orlandini, 2007) and on informal discussions with other teachers. The teacher’s attitude towards reading is likely to play a key part in this, and may affect many aspects of teaching.

Theory issues	Interview questions
<u>Underlying Attitude</u> towards ER towards assessment towards students’ reading styles towards content and level of the books <u>Interaction with the students</u> Orientation of students Guidance, recommendations to students Feedback to students <u>Classroom practice</u> Library management Classroom layout Time management <u>Assessment</u> Reliability Validity	How did you introduce ER to your students? Did you do anything differently in different classes? What did you do differently? How did you change your approach? Why? What did/do you usually do while students were/are reading? How did/do you assess students?

Rather than producing a list of questions for the interviewer to ask, a grid was produced (see figure 2) in order to give the investigator and respondent freedom to follow their own ideas. Mishler (1986:52) describes the joint construction of meaning between the two agents in an interview, and Kvale (1996:127) describes the interview as “a stage upon which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee roles”. As the investigator is another practitioner of extensive reading, his opinions may justifiably be included in the research, particularly if the emphasis of the research is to develop the Extensive Reading programme, improve procedures and identify ideal teacher practice.

The grid covers four areas relating to the teacher’s practice (introducing ER, classroom layout and time management, what the teacher does while students are reading, and assessment). For each area the interviewer was encouraged to find out about the past (what the teacher did in a previous semester or year), the present (what the teacher is doing this semester) and the future (what the teacher plans to do next year). It was hoped that the answers to these questions would provide answers to the theory questions.

	Past	Present	Future
Introducing ER			
Classroom layout and time management			
Teacher's activities while students are reading			
Assessment			
Other...			

Figure 2 Revised interview grid

2.2. Conducting the Interviews

Wengraf suggests that indirect questions are better than direct questions, and non-question interventions are better than indirect questions (p. 63). Asking: "What is your attitude towards extensive reading?" is less likely to get useful results than asking a question such as "How did you feel when asked to use these books in your classroom?" or "Why did you do that?" in response to a description of classroom practice. In general, questions can ask about behaviour, experience, feelings, knowledge, sensory events, demographics, opinions or values, in the past, in the present and in the future (Wengraf: 79). Questions can ask about chronology: "When did that happen?" Statements can ask for more detail: "Tell me more about that. That's very interesting."

Steering the respondent in free conversation may reveal even more. For example, the investigator can:

1. make a statement based on what the speaker has said
2. provide for the respondent to ask a question
3. give a signal of receiving the respondent's message, without taking the floor
4. say nothing; but provide an appreciative silence, waiting to be filled by the respondent (Wengraf: 200 citing Dillon, 1990; Patton, 1990; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

In addition, the investigator can provide reinforcement and encouragement such as:

"...I think a lot of really useful things are coming out of what you're saying"

"I really appreciate your willingness to express your feelings"

"I know that was a difficult question and I really appreciate your working with it because what you said was very meaningful and came out very clearly" (Wengraf: 200 citing Dillon, 1990)

Teacher A: I don't know if that answers your question very accurately.

Investigator: Yeah, it does in lots of ways.

Wengraf states "The main function of the interviewer in semi-structured—largely improvisatory—interviewing is to listen carefully to the responses of the informant so that the

improvisations will be appropriate to both the theory questions and central research question, but also to the unfolding development of the interview itself' (p. 202) He goes on to give thirteen obstacles to listening. These include practical issues such as focusing too much on reading questions and writing notes. Many of the obstacles cluster around the ego of the interviewer, such as when he/she is tempted to judge, argue, advise, make comparisons with themselves or identify with the ideas being aired. The most dangerous of all, Wengraf avers, is probably "being right".

McCracken also identifies several issues in interview methodology: the investigator as instrument, the obtrusive/unobtrusive balance, manufacturing distance between the investigator and the material, the questionnaire and the relationship between investigator and respondent.

"One of the most effective [ways of imaginative reconstruction] requires the investigator to treat the respondent's views and strange propositions as if they were simply and utterly true... once these ideas have been properly 'entertained' the investigator can ask: 'What does the world look like when I hold these things to be true.'" (McCracken: 20)

McCracken warns, "the investigator must not engage in ... 'active listening'... 'read' the hidden meaning of the speech and 'play it back'", warning this is "likely to be almost complete destruction of good data." (McCracken: 21) "It is important that the investigator allow the respondent to tell his or her story in his or her own terms" (McCracken: 22). These terms will reveal a great deal about the respondent's opinions and attitudes, which are likely to provide many of the answers to the research question.

2.3. Analysing Interviews

McCracken warns that investigators working in their own culture and in their own field "carry with them a large number of assumptions that can create a treacherous sense of familiarity." (22) "For analytic purposes, it is necessary to capture not just ideas but also the context in which these ideas occur." (McCracken: 25)

2.4. Who do they think we are?

A critical question in interviewing is "who does the respondent think the investigator is?" (McCracken: 25). In this study, the respondents were all colleagues of the investigators. This could lead to a distortion of what the respondents say, as they try to please the investigator, impress them with theoretical knowledge, or give the "correct" answers to the questions. For example, Teacher A spoke at length about research literature, citing six different theorists. He may have done this because he was more familiar than the other interviewees with the interests and aims of the researchers as proponents of Extensive Reading.

3. Results

The comments of three teachers interviewed are summarised below. Their responses have been categorised into three areas: attitudes, classroom practice and assessment. In all areas, the responses of the three respondents differed considerably.

3.1 Attitudes

Teacher A began almost immediately to refer not only to theoretical literature supportive of extensive reading but also to a conference workshop he had recently attended run by a well-known advocate of extensive reading in the EFL classroom. In Teacher A's mind, the two most salient features of extensive reading were that it was categorically different to intensive reading and that it was imperative that students enjoyed it. Clearly, Teacher A had internalized many of the precepts that have come to be associated with ER in EFL in the last decade.²

The fact that he encourages students to avoid dictionary use so as not to 'interrupt the flow' suggests a familiarity with the concept of 'flow' developed by Csikszentmihalyi and applied by Krashen in his advocacy of reading for pleasure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, cited by Krashen, 2004, p. 29).

The predominately positive attitude of this teacher to ER is neatly encapsulated by his use of the term 'sales pitch' to refer to his introductory orientation. That he believes it is worth devoting class time to giving his students a better understanding of ER is in itself an indication of the value he attaches to this kind of reading. But the fact that he also feels bound to try to 'sell' the idea suggests genuine enthusiasm. It was also interesting that Teacher A viewed the ER component of the course as an attempt to inculcate a life-long love of reading in students. Indeed, he even harboured regrets at having emphasized that students should read as much as possible, fearing this amounted to an act of sabotage in that it may have led students to feel that they were reading to fulfil an academic requirement rather than reading purely for the pleasure of reading (Krashen, 1994 and 2004b).

Some of the reasons for this zeal undoubtedly lie in this teacher's professional background as a high school teacher. He spoke, for instance, about his experience in Canada with SSR, USSR and DEAR initiatives in the secondary sector, where the goal was unequivocally that of nurturing a lasting love of reading for its own sake. Equally important, though, were his much earlier memories from his own schooldays of reading groups and an enthusiastic teacher-reader in grade eight.

Teacher B's attitudes to ER run a gamut from perplexity to frustration; and although he never actually expressed any hostility towards ER, his sentiments could fairly be termed noncommittal. Unlike Teacher A, Teacher B exhibited no interest in the ideas behind ER and made no reference to any research literature on the subject. His perception of his situation seemed to be that he had been presented by his employers with a brief in which he had no particular stake and which left him rather with the problem of how best to turn to advantage a slice of class time which he felt

was being wasted. He clearly believed that 'just reading' was an ineffective use of class time and that this time could be better spent on the more urgent task of practicing speaking, commenting that the students 'have never had an emphasis on speaking and listening - it's tough to skip over the most fundamental parts of a language and go to the hardest parts'. In sharp contrast to Teacher A, this teacher did not have a positive recollection of reading in his own education and remembered 'cheating' on reading comprehension exercises by scanning for the answers instead of reading the text first as he was supposed to do.

Teacher C certainly did not think ER was a waste of time, though he was evidently concerned that the way the programme has been run so far has meant that some students have felt frustrated and dissatisfied. Most especially, he showed that he had thought hard about how to make ER more motivating for his students. Many of the suggestions that came out of this interview indicated that this teacher was keen to offer his students a structured learning experience in which they would acquire skills that could be immediately applied. Such approaches are likely to be very motivating for teacher and student alike, and it may be difficult to reconcile the long-term and very gradual process of ER-based language acquisition with the more gratifying and transparent skills-building approach.

3.2. Introducing ER

Teacher A recalled very clearly the principal ideas contained in his introductory 'sales pitch'. He stresses to students that they should try to avoid consulting dictionaries as far as possible and that they should abandon any book which they find heavy going.

Teacher B introduced the ER programme by first negotiating with the students to decide how much time to devote to reading at the beginning of each lesson. Teacher B admitted that he was rather bewildered by extensive reading, and that his students, as second years who had done ER in the first year, knew more than he did. His initial reaction towards reading in class was negative, and he asked students whether they thought twenty minutes was too long, just right, or not enough. The majority of students voted that twenty minutes was appropriate.

The only specific recollection that Teacher C had about the way he had introduced ER to his students in the course orientation session was that he had told them about the reading target, the number of words that students were required to read to gain the maximum score. He clearly felt dissatisfied with the introduction to ER provided by the textbook and remarked that it would be more helpful both to present the students with some more digestible justification for the inclusion of ER ('one or two solid statements' as opposed, presumably, to the rather discursive and intimidating paragraphs in the textbook), and to do more to motivate them to read, rather than simply setting targets for them.

3.3. Classroom Practice and Activities

Teacher A explained that he now makes a conscious effort to promote ER in his classrooms. (He frequently had recourse to the metaphor of ‘selling’ or ‘marketing’.) One of the ways he does this is to present himself as a model reader by bringing novels, newspapers or journals that he himself is reading into the classroom. He also uses the 20 minutes allocated for ER at the beginning of each lesson to go around the class talking to students about what they are reading. In the future, he intends to continue to focus on the ‘pleasure principle’, and to this end will aim to ‘minimize the [...] scholastic, formal features’.

Teacher B was initially bewildered by the 20-minute reading period because he felt that it rendered him redundant as a teacher: ‘it just seemed like a big waste of time’. His very resourceful response to this crisis was to use the time to conduct one-on-one interviews with students in an adjacent room. He prepared 20 questions, to which the students were asked to prepare answers; and these questions formed the basis of interviews lasting between 4 and 5 minutes. The questions were of a general nature and not related to the reading activity. The interviews made it possible to assess the students’ English language ability. However, the students did not always read at the beginning of the lesson and the activity was sometimes postponed until the end, which also meant that there was sometimes no time to read. And in the second term, the pressures involved in ensuring that the students did not fall behind with their essay writing projects meant, at least up until the time of the interview in the 10th week, that there had been no chance at all for the students to read in class. In this regard, Teacher B also made a very astute comment concerning what he saw as the massive discrepancy in this semester between the notion of reading for pleasure and the arduous task of writing the two extended essays required by the course. His suggestion that there should be more ‘writing for fun’ is one which we feel would be worth serious consideration.

The books were laid out on a desk at the front of the room. It was typical perhaps of this teacher who seemed so concerned with making the best use of the time available that he was unhappy with the way that students often have to queue to fill out the library borrowing sheets. In the current system, students must write their name and the book they have borrowed on a sign-out sheet. When they come to return the book, they must find where they wrote that book, and check it off as returned. This can be very time-consuming. In addition to this borrowing system, there are two alternative paper systems by which the students keep a record of what they have read. The ‘book reports’ consist of two sides of A4 with two forms on each side, into which students write details of what they have read, including responses. In the other system, the ‘book records’, students simply write the book they have read, the word count, and an indication of how much they enjoyed it and how easy it was. This single side of A4 eventually becomes a list of all the books that the student has read during the course. Teacher B proposed giving each student their own sign-out sheet, combining the library system and book recording system into one, which he

would give out at the beginning of the lesson, and collect at the end. This would seem to be a very workable solution and also provide an easier means for teachers to monitor the progress of each student.

Teacher B wrote comments on the students' reading records such as 'Keep up the good work'. But feedback in general, both to individuals and to the class as a whole, seems to have consisted mostly of encouragement to read a greater quantity.

Teacher B recommended that the books be kept in the faculty library rather than brought to the classroom, thus allowing students to borrow and return books outside class time.

Like Teacher B, Teacher C also used the 20 minutes allotted to ER to engage the students in general conversation ('interpersonal topics'), at least in the first year, although in this case the goal was more one of 'rapport building' than assessment. He felt that this might have had the effect of trivialising ER as he interrupted the students' reading, but nonetheless he believed that it was important to exploit this rare opportunity to chat to students on a one-to-one basis. In the second semester of teaching the course, however, he modified his approach and also asked the students how their reading was progressing. This focus on what they were reading, and how much they had read, he thought, may have been a contributing factor in the higher reading scores of these students.

Teacher C considered it unreasonable to expect students to be able to formulate an L2 response to a written narrative. On the other hand, he suggested that more structured speaking activities such as reading aloud from the graded readers or using the books as a source of texts for dictation practice would be helpful. He also advocated activities focusing on reading speed and recognized an urgent need to teach specific reading skills such as skimming and scanning, knowing when to skip a word and how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context: 'An important reading skill is to have the ability to skip a word, to guess a word in context [...] I think students do skip words, but they're almost psychologically disturbed [when they do].'

As in Teacher A and Teacher B's interviews, the issue of paperwork came up, and Teacher C too found that the proliferation of sign-out sheets became difficult to manage.

Another suggestion that teacher C made was that students should be encouraged to borrow books between lessons, and not just in class. Evidently other teachers recommend their students do this, and he notices students going in and out of the room where the books are kept.

3. 4. Assessment

One consequence of Teacher A's commitment to the principle that students should enjoy reading, and continue to enjoy it beyond the timeframe of the course, was that he abandoned the book report system that teachers had been asked to employ in the first year of the Comprehensive English programme. He saw the requirement to write book reports as an imposition, a mechanical and 'mindless' chore that detracted from the enjoyment of reading. Another issue which this

teacher brought up concerned the question of whether it was better to assess students on the basis of the number of words or the number of books they read. The procedure adopted in the first year of the course was to count the books. But in the second year, teachers have been instructed instead to ask students to keep a tally of the number of words they have read, in part because of the huge difference in length of the books available, some sixteen pages long, others over one hundred. Teacher A noted that at least one writer-researcher prefers to focus on books because the sense of achievement that results is greater. Perhaps the most significant manifestation of this teacher's commitment to student enjoyment and life-long learning appeared in his concern that any assessment of ER might prove detrimental. He cited the recognition in the same writer researcher that '[...] assessment and evaluation have a very negative effect on reading.'

As the first semester progressed, Teacher B became increasingly alarmed that students' grades would suffer because they had read so little. After he had drawn the students' attention to this problem, their reading records indicated that they were reading far more than previously, although the teacher admits that he had no way of knowing if students were really reading as much as they claimed. He recognized that he could have gone around the room asking students about their reading to check whether or not they were being honest. However, he decided that he did not wish 'to be the reading police'. Many other teachers probably feel a similar reluctance to question students' integrity and this question touches on one of the fundamental problems with assessment. Without requiring students to present the teacher with regular oral or written feedback, it is indeed very difficult to know if they have actually read the number of words they claim to have read, and the three teachers all alluded to this problem. On the other hand, if students are to read the quantity that is likely to yield results, it is impractical, and may be highly demotivating, for the teacher to elicit sufficient feedback.

Like Teacher A, Teacher C also chose to abandon the book reports, but because they were too insubstantial rather than because they were too onerous. The report forms were designed to encourage very brief written responses. Teacher C, however, considered that some of his students' one-sentence declarations were so vague as to be meaningless, and he would have welcomed the opportunity to teach the students how to formulate a more sustained written response. This would be part of a more qualitative style of assessment that might include, for instance, requiring the students to 'go into depth about one book that had particularly moved them', or else give 'a mini-presentation in groups about their favourite book'.

Teacher C thought that some students were de-motivated by the word-count target because it seemed unattainable. Rather than the current system, in which a student earns 1% of their grade by reading 10,000 words (and hence a student who has struggled to read 3 books totalling 8,000 words would still have a score of zero), he suggested awarding 100 points for every word, which would give a greater and more immediate sense of achievement.

Another idea emerging from this segment of the interview was that it might be more motivating

for students if, instead of simply recording the number of words they had read, they could gradually construct a visual representation of their reading. Teacher C noted that there might be models for such an approach in the kinds of graphic imagery employed in the latest online user interfaces and that part of the attraction of social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace is that they allow users to build up a record of their 'stats'. Another idea discussed was that of how to set attainable targets. For some students at the beginning of the semester this might mean finishing one book, while for others, by the end of the semester, it may mean reading hundreds of thousands of words. One solution suggested was that of inviting students to set their own short-term targets.

4. Implications for Curriculum Development

On the basis of these interviews, the following possibilities can be considered for broad implementation in the Extensive Reading programme.

Introduction

The course books should be revised to make introductions to Extensive reading more interactive, including questions and feedback activities, instead of just text. Teachers may also benefit from a more formal introduction to the theories and practice of ER than is currently offered.

Paperwork

The borrowing sheets and library sheets can be combined, so that each student has one sheet of paper recording all essential information, given out by the teacher at the beginning of the lesson and collected at the end.

Assessment

The current assessment system is clearly problematic. Some teachers see it as being at odds with the principles of extensive reading, and many certainly believe it is unreliable and therefore unfair. There appear to be two conflicting agendas underlying the current approach to assessment. The first concerns the need for a record of what students have read, both so that the students themselves are rewarded by a sense of their own achievement and so that the institution is able to demonstrate a connection between quantifiable levels of input and improvements in the students' English ability. Secondly, there is the institutional requirement to give each student a grade. The simplest solution may be to continue with some kind of book recording system, but in such a way that the numbers of books or words read have no bearing on a students' final grade. The ER grading component could instead come from activities based on the books, and on comprehension or reading speed tests (some of which could be taken online).

Another enhancement might involve designing a system which will set progressive reading targets for students or allow them to set their own targets. The fundamental requirement is that reading goals should motivate students rather than intimidate them. An example might be as follows:

Within the first three weeks: Finish first book.

Within the first two months: Finish five books.

By the end of the first semester: Finish 10 books.

Over the vacation: Finish 5 books, etc.

An online recording system is currently being developed. On this system it will be possible for word counts to be calculated automatically. Students will be able to access the system from their own computers, or ideally mobile phones, to record when they have finished a book. The logistics of data entry within the classroom have yet to be worked out. Such a system could include graphic components showing students a visual representation of the number of words they have read, as well as giving recommendations of books to read, based on what students have previously enjoyed reading.

Activities

A range of activities should be made available to teachers and students that will enhance the students' experience of ER. Reading groups could be started, perhaps in selected classes with selected students. Students could be required to give an expanded response to one book each semester that would be assessed qualitatively. Due care and attention would be needed to ensure that students are provided with appropriate models and scaffolding, and that the response expected is within students' abilities.

5. Future Research

The interview is clearly a powerful tool, not only in research, but also in the implementation and development of a curriculum. Although the interviews were carefully structured and designed to explore how teachers were coping with just one specific area of the curriculum, the conversations sometimes strayed into other territory. These digressions were often very illuminating. Teacher B, for instance, gave a detailed account of the way he dealt with the quiz activity in the fourth semester, and his approach seemed so successful that we are now considering incorporating it into subsequent editions of the course book.

There is a need for further interviews with teachers, not only on the subject of ER, but also on a range of issues concerning staff and curriculum development. Rather than providing neat answers to a research question, these interviews have indicated several topics, some of which are outlined below.

The learning process

The responses have demonstrated how different teachers have different attitudes towards ER, and it seems likely that these attitudes have an impact that extends far beyond the ER programme since they reflect the way teachers believe students learn. Research has demonstrated that ER is an effective means of language acquisition. But if it is to be properly established in the University's curriculum, it is essential also to understand how the acquisition process is perceived among teachers. How, for example, might a teacher's own experience of language learning at school affect their attitude towards the learning habits and strategies of their students now?

A: 'There's no denying that Humans are social creatures and we learn by modelling from peers and authority figures.'

C: 'But there's a very ingrained, very laborious bottom-up word-by-word processing which is part of their whole background. Almost translating a page [...]

Using English as the classroom language

B: 'There's just so much work to do to get through those writing projects. Trying to get it explained to them without using any Japanese.'

B: 'I was going to do the *maru batsu* but then I thought just put "yes" and "no".'

B: '[I told them] write your answers in English, don't worry about your spelling. As long as it's close.'

C: 'It would be nice for them to verbalise what they're doing and verbalise the processes.'

C: 'I was speaking to a teacher in the staff room, and she said she was in touch with her students and a lot of people aren't understanding what teachers are saying in English'

Technology in the classroom: do teachers view computers as a threat or a challenge?

A: 'Now, in western societies so many teenagers are 100% non-readers. Like just text messaging or internet blogging and that's really in many ways not enhancing the love of [...] reading. I guess a lot of pedagogues in the west try to combat this internet age with actual printed material.'

C: 'If you look at how technology seems to work, everything is just visualised and user interfaces have become very important, and it's exactly the same as what everyone's doing, it's multi-sensory learning, evolving beyond a bunch of letters.'

The relationship between teachers and the institution

B: 'They've told me that this is what it is. Maybe I don't agree with this, but that's what it is. You guys are going to have to start reading and write the numbers down.'

The relationship between teachers and students

B: 'I was asking them questions, they were asking me questions [...] take away that distance'

C: 'But if they can feel they don't have that border, that boundary...'

Teaching methodology and practice

A: 'Definitely public humiliation is a great extrinsic motivator here.'

B: 'So I handed out a set of twenty questions [...] so they had to be prepared to talk about them any time, at random [...] talked to each students for 4 or 5 minutes'

B: 'I probably correct more than some teachers, and try to explain to each individual their problems ... and so that usually takes 90 minutes. Recently I've done very little standing at the front.'

C: 'If they can't mentally verbalise the words they see, they can't retain them, so I think we could do lots of activities like reading aloud'.

Classroom management

B: 'So last class, for example, I asked, who's done the topic, but hasn't finished the outline? Who's done the outline but hasn't finished the first draft? Who's done all of it? And I set them in

different sections of the room’.

B: ‘Everyone has Yes/no cards, and a b c d cards and the last one, they write it. And have it like a big quiz show, and everybody sits in groups. They can talk and get the answer, “we think the answer is...”.’

Course assessment by students

One of the interviewees suggested that it might be instructive to conduct interviews with students to investigate their attitudes towards ER. This research could evaluate how successful the orientation is and could also determine whether students are actually reading as much as they claim. Interviews of third- and fourth-year students, some time after the course has finished, might reveal whether the goal of a lifelong love of reading in English has been realised. These interviews should, of course, be conducted in the students’ native language, ideally by another student to encourage greater openness and minimize the effect of the likely tendency on the part of many students to tell the teacher what they think he or she wants to hear.

6. Conclusion

Despite our failure to answer our original question, we hope that we have at least demonstrated that interviewing teachers can, and therefore perhaps increasingly should, make a valuable contribution to staff and curriculum development. This will, of course, seem rather obvious. But we feel that it is difficult to overemphasize the need for formal instruments to enable teachers to more effectively share teaching materials and the fruits of their classroom experience. There is, to be sure, and in Japan especially, a well-established network of professional teaching organizations and publications with precisely this aim. We are acutely aware, however, that many teachers are either too busy or otherwise disinclined to find the time to package their ideas and creativity as conference presentations or journal articles.

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Notes

¹ For a recent example of a study of the effectiveness of ER in the context of Japanese university English education, see Nishizawa, Yoshioka and Itoh (2007); and for recent discussions of course design issues, see Schmidt (2007) and Rosszell (2007).

² Day and Bamford (1998) in the Cambridge Language Education series edited by Jack C. Richards, was published exactly ten years ago and contains many of the ideas mentioned by Teacher A. Perhaps not entirely coincidentally, it was also Richard Day who ran the workshop referred to.

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12/ Feb./ 2008 Accepted