

Working with Readers
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Introduction

The title of my presentation today is “Working with Readers”. According to the presentation outline, number one I will talk a little bit about the definition of extensive reading or what extensive reading is. Next, I will move on to the benefits of extensive reading. Then, I will give you the detail of what to consider before giving the student extensive reading, materials used for extensive reading. After that, I will show you the video tape of the introduction activity aiming to encourage extensive reading. Finally, we will have a discussion of what the teacher in the video tape does.

Definition of Extensive Reading

I would like to inform you why I entitle my presentation “Working with Readers”. By the word readers, I refer to 2 meanings. The first one is the students who read books in extensive reading practice. The second meaning of the word readers is “graded readers” which are used widely as reading material in extensive reading. You can choose graded readers in the market such as those from “Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Longman, Penguin and NCELTR, Macquarie University which are suitable to your particular class. In my presentation, I will discuss all the two meanings together. Please remember that when I mention the word extensive reading, it includes the possibility of using “graded readers” as a part of extensive reading.

Concerning the definition of extensive reading, I found the one given by Davis (1995) is complete. He states that extensive reading is a supplementary library program, attached to an English course. Students read for pleasure with the given time, encouragement, and entertaining materials. In reading, the students can choose as many books as they can at their own level. The pressure is reduced because there are no tests or marks given. The teacher can provide the motivation and monitoring to ensure that the maximum number of books is being read in the time available. There are two words to watch in extensive reading: “quantity” and “variety”. In extensive reading, students select the books for their attractiveness and relevance to their life. I found that the definition by Davis is a very good one that incorporates two watch words “quantity” and “variety”.

Benefits of Extensive Reading

The benefits of extensive reading are considerable. For the students who are not English native speakers and are not in English speaking community, reading can increase their exposure to the language. Research has confirmed that readers have wider active and passive vocabulary. Therefore, their knowledge of vocabulary has been increased. Nagy and Henman (1987) suggest that traditional approach of vocabulary teaching is less effective in promoting vocabulary than extensive reading. In addition, Elley (1991) shows that extensive reading can improve L2 reading performance. Other advantages of reading include gains in writing ability (Mason & Krashen, (1997).

Bell (2002) states that extensive reading **motivates learners or students to read, builds confidence with extended texts, encourages, the exploitation of textual redundancy and develops prediction skill.** In terms of reading motivation, I would like to refer back to the two watch words in Davis's definition of extensive reading "quantity" and "variety". The students are encouraged to read a variety of material on a wide range of topic and they can select what they want to read to fit their need, taste and interest. They have the freedom to stop reading the materials that fails to interest them. There are no tests after reading. As a result, they are motivated to read more.

Another benefit of extensive reading is **building confidence with extended texts.** In traditional classrooms, students read short texts. Teachers teach them vocabulary, grammatical points, reading skills and strategies. However, when these EFL students enter the university, they are required to read for academic purposes which require reading longer texts. Extensive reading such as reading graded readers help develop students' confidence and ability in facing longer texts in their university study.

Apart from building confidence with extended texts, extensive reading **provides the students the opportunity for the exploitation of textual redundancy.** Reading a great deal gives the opportunities of seeing the same words and their variations as different parts of speech. The students, then, recognize the words and understand their meaning.

The last point is that extensive reading can **facilitate the development of prediction skills.** Based on the idea of the theory of reading, the reading process is the platform for readers to predict the content of a text by using their pre-existing schema. When the reader reads extensively, they gather and store more and more information in the memory. When activated, their schema will help them to decode and interpret the message beyond the printed words.

Three Important Elements Needed to be Considered Before Giving Students Reading Assignment

From all the benefits of extensive reading, it is good to set up extensive reading programs in schools. However, before setting up the programs, I think the teacher should consider three elements: **the books, the system and the teacher.**

The Books. The teacher should look for the kind of books which are appropriate to his/her students. Determine whether there should be simplified readers, unabridged books or a mixture of both. (I will talk about simplified readers in detail later.) If your students are teenagers, books written for teenage markets or “young adult literature” are lively, interesting and appropriate while simplified classics such as “Pride and Prejudice” or “Romeo and Juliet” are dry and lack of humor.

The system. The next thing to consider is what kind of system you need to develop in order to allow the optimum use of your book collection. There must be a check-out system which can be a simple one to prevent the loss of the book.

The teacher. As a teacher, you should find the time to read what your student are reading. The teacher who can discuss with students about what they read can motivate them to read.

Graded Readers

What I have discussed so far concerned with the books, the teacher and the system. The next part of my presentation deals with graded readers. In 1920, a man named Michel West was in Bengal. At that time, India was colonized by the British Empire. English was announced an official language of India. Students had to study and use English extensively in school but they do not have much access to English such as English speakers outside the classroom. Michel West felt the best access to English was reading. However, students at low levels would not be able to read most of the things in English for English people. As a result, the notion of reading simplified readers to a particular level of difficulty became into existence. The list of frequent words was built up. West simplifies the original texts to a particular level.

Simplification

At this point, I would like to introduce you the idea of simplification. Maley (2000) examines simplification of texts in detail. Usually the simplified version is shorter than the original story. There are many ways to do it. First, vocabulary is simplified. Vocabulary simplification can be done by looking at the word availability. They are available to the native speakers of that language. If you do the count of frequency on everyday use, these words are available but the native speakers do not speak them equally frequent on each day. They are common but not frequent. To simplify the vocabulary, the number of syllables is reduced. Words with multi-syllables are replaced by shorter words. Another way of vocabulary simplification is paraphrase.

If you paraphrase the meaning of a difficult word, of course paraphrase make it longer not shorter

It is assumed that shorter words are easier or simpler. Does the assumption sound reasonable? I think it depends on your definition of the word "easier". The fact that they are frequent does not mean that they are easier. . If you open a dictionary, you will find a long entry of each frequent word. . For example, if you look up the word "take" in a dictionary, you will see more than 40 meanings of this word. Less frequent words tend to have less meaning. More frequent words are used more and get more meanings going to the words. Therefore, the writer of simplified version must keep this fact in the mind. They must make the meanings of the words clear by putting them in context.

The second type of simplification is the simplification of sentence structures. Typically, sentences are made shorter. A single clause is used to make up a sentence. You don't have many complex sentences because they are difficult. You can have tense simplification as well. The last type of simplification is discourse simplification. If you have a passive verb and reported speech which tends to be rather complex, they can be changed to active voice, dialogue or direct speech can be put in place of indirect speech. Both dialogue and direct speech is a discourse format that is easier to follow.

In conclusion, those which are simplified and those which are written simple. For the first type, existing texts are simplified. It means you take a book and write an easy version of it. For the second type those books are written simple in the first place. A new trend is writing a book at its simplest, inventive, creative and interesting so that the students can understand the language.

Advantages of Graded Readers

What I have just finished discussing is simplification which is an important characteristic of graded readers. Then, I will move to advantages of graded readers. Graded readers are widely used in extensive reading because they have several advantages.

The first advantage of graded readers is **the ease of selection or a variety on a wide range of topic**. As I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, there are many different graded readers to be selected in the market from different publishers.

Another advantage is **the ease of comprehension** Graded readers are written that they can be easily understood when readers read them at the right level of their reading competency in a foreign language. Day& Bamford (1998) discuss that the purposes of extensive reading is developing reading fluency and confidence, second language students need to read understandable materials that are basically at the *i minus one*. Day & Bamford (2002) recommend how to help beginning readers select texts. More than one or two unknown words per page may cause difficulty in understanding the overall text. Williams (1986) advise the teacher to ask what students like reading in their own language or ask the school librarian so that the teacher can pick up something that is suitable to students' interest. Hu and Nation (2000) suggest that

students must know 98% of the words in a fiction in order to understand it.

The next advantage of graded readers is they **motivate and help to build confidence**. Readers are motivated. They should be motivated when they read graded readers. You have their competence arising because of motivation. When a student read a complete book in English, he will think "Ah! I can do it." It is a motivation to read another book and go on.

The fourth advantage is that graded readers **promote learner independence**. Reading is necessary for learner independence. Students do not need to do it in a limited time or do it in a classroom. They can do it on their own when and wherever they want to do it. Graded readers encourage students to read independently.

The next advantage of graded readers is that they **provide extensive language practice**. Graded readers give you much more extended context. The things that are in textbooks are short. They do not provide students enough context. Graded readers offer students the opportunity to read the same books to meet the same kinds of sentence structure again and again. Graded readers also have a controlled grammatical and lexical load. The new language forms are repeated regularly. Consequently, students received enough reinforcement to retain the language in their long-term memory for the use in the future.

Beside providing extensive language practice, graded readers **raise cultural awareness or world knowledge of students**. Students do not know much about the world. They know only what is/are in their society or community. Extensive reading particularly graded readers open windows to the world. It is a good opportunity for the students to learn from reading.

Another advantage of graded readers is very important. They **develop the reading habit**. In the world that people are overflooded with information, students should be encouraged to read more and more to understand what they are reading. Reading plays an important role in students' life-long learning.

The last advantage of graded readers is **reading for pleasure and entertainment**. Don't ask students to do a lot of exercises. Let them read for pleasure and for entertainment. Don't give them difficult thing to read. Giving tests or marks to students to measure their comprehension may discourage them. Always tell yourself that challenge should be at the level of the task not the text. There are some other ways to measure their comprehension. It is better to give them challenging tasks to do after reading the text. For example, you can ask them to write the end of the story according to what they imagine it should be or to imagine they are a character in the story and give the reasons why that person performs a certain behavior.

Even though, **graded readers have several advantages, they have some drawbacks.** The first problem is graded readers are perceived as inauthentic texts because they are written to be easier for students. The second problem is concerned with simplification of the textbook. Simplification may not make the text or the books easier. Moreover, using frequent words to substitute some words is not necessary simplification because frequent word is semantic loaded. Simplification by simplifying sentences by removing difficult words or changing passive voice to active voice can make the language and the content more difficult to interpret because you have to take away the context that the meaning depends on.

Video Presentation

I will move to the next activity, video presentation. I would like you to look at how the teacher in the video uses his in-class teaching to guide their students to do the activities before assigning them to read graded readers from the learning resource center.

Try to find the answers for the following question.

1. How / What does he do in-class to promote his students' interest before assigning them to read graded readers?
2. Does he do it meaningfully? What is the good point in his teaching? What is the weakness?
3. If it is your own class, are you going to do it in a different way?

The presentation ends with a discussion.

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