Changing The Interaction Pattern In The ERS Lesson

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How do you usually conduct your Extensive Reading Lessons (ERS)? Do you usually give students time to select their books, then allow them time to read, then have them respond to the questions at the back of the book and then conclude the session with the students returning the books to their respective places? If this is the way you usually conduct your ERS lessons, you are not alone. Many teachers use this traditional "no sweat" approach for carrying out ERS. While the students are reading or completing their question cards, the teacher is usually walking around, ensuring that everyone is on-task or s/he could be speaking to one or two students about the books they have read or the teacher could be reading a book herself/himself. This is the way many ERS lessons are conducted. Students usually interact only with the book and maybe with the teacher in telling the teacher about what s/he has read. We can transform the interaction pattern of our ERS lessons by encouraging our readers to engage with each other about the texts that they are reading. Engaging with each other means participating in a number of different group activities which promote books and reading. Tinker Sachs (2001) has described some of the ways ERS lessons can be transformed from the ways we currently conduct them. She discusses approaches that encourage students to get in touch with their personal views and to engage more actively with books.

Literature circles have been advocated as one approach to get students talking about books (e.g. Booth, 1996). In literature circles, students in small groups of 3-5 talk about the books they have read. The books may be similar or different but it is easier to start students off with the same book or the same genre of books such as narratives. They may do a number of things such as talk about the book's title and author, discuss what has been read, talk about favourite parts of the book and why they like those parts (Booth, 1996, p. 41). Yap (2001) demonstrated in her work how commitment to literature circles can impact EFL learners' language development.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the students should know before this lesson is conducted</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tr>
<td>✦ Students should be familiar with the terms of the basic story grammar elements (setting, characters, plot, events, problems, resolution/conclusion)</td>
<td>This will provide students with the basic framework for talking about stories.</td>
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<td>✦ Students should have some awareness of the different genres of writing (narrative, adventure, biography, science fiction, horror, information books etc.)</td>
<td>Because the students usually select different books for reading in the ERS class, they need to be cognizant of the different test types to engage in the discussion.</td>
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<td>✦ Students should have some familiarity with working in groups</td>
<td>This will greatly aid the efficiency of setting-up literature circles. Students need to be aware of turn-taking and how to help and support each other in working together to complete the assignment. They should be formed in heterogeneous proficiency groups to support each other.</td>
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<td>✦ Students should have read their books before coming to the class and should be prepared to report to their group members what they have read.</td>
<td>If students have read their books prior to class, they will then have something to share.</td>
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<td>✦ Students may also make notes about their stories before coming to the group discussion.</td>
<td>It would be good if all students have some notes on their stories to start their discussions. For those especially weak language students, this will provide needed language support for them.</td>
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In the following lesson plan, you will see how a literature circles lesson was organized to facilitate second language learners’ discussion. The lesson plan was designed for students of English as a second/foreign language who were of average to below average English language proficiency and in forms 3-4 or grades 9-10. This double period lesson was developed by the writer and carried out by three secondary teachers of English as a second/foreign language with their classes in Hong Kong.

**Before The Lesson**

The table above gives you an idea of what the students should know and be able to do before this lesson can be carried out successfully.

**The Lesson - From Different Paths to Common Understandings**

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

During this lesson, students will use English to:
- Exchange information on the books they have read.
- Identify the commonalities and differences in the stories they have read.
- Negotiate and collaborate to arrive at a common understanding of how those commonalities and differences can come together in the creation of a collage about the different books they have read.
## PROCEDURES

### Part 1: Setting up the Tasks (10 - 15 minutes)

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Teacher’s Activities</th>
<th>Students’ Activities</th>
<th>Observations</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 mins</td>
<td>A brief review with students of the different types of books and what we can learn from them.</td>
<td>Students respond to the teacher’s prompts.</td>
<td>If this is not new to students then very little time needs to be spent here. It is advisable to devote more time to this in a separate lesson.</td>
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<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Elicit/define the terms common/similarities and differences. Tell with examples how different aspects of the books can be compared and contrasted.</td>
<td>Students listen and respond to teacher’s questions.</td>
<td>It might be helpful for students if the teacher used different text types here rather than only narrative texts. There are many ways diverse books can be compared and contrasted e.g. timeline, portrayal of characters - weak, strong; settings; sequence of events/stages; peaks and lows; themes - happy times, sad times, self discovery, transformations, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10 mins</td>
<td>Explain what students will do in this lesson. Show pupils a collage of ideas to exemplify.</td>
<td>Students listen and ask questions for clarification.</td>
<td>A collage is an assembly of diverse ideas, an artistic composition of different materials. See the example in Appendix A.</td>
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<td>Tell students they need to think about how their ideas can be presented visually on a chart to represent their ideas and to give information and/or pleasure to the audience about their books. They need to show the coherence and interconnectedness of their different ideas.</td>
<td>Students listen and ask questions for clarification.</td>
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### Part 2: Managing Students’ Participation and Engagement (20 minutes)

This part of the lesson is critical for the success of this lesson.

**A. Form Groups and Distribute Student Roles**

The teacher will ask students in each group to give/ select the role they want to play. Sometimes all group members will be required to play a given role or to exchange roles so that the distribution of work is fair.

1. Writer/questioner - writes the information (played by all in part 1)
2. Artist - draws the information

3. Reporter - reports the collage to classmates
4. Checker - ensures that English is spoken, checks the spelling and usage of anything written
5. Timer and tracker - keeps track of the discussion, ensures that everyone is on task, that everyone is contributing and that the work is being done within the time frame allocated.

**B. Allow Students Preparation Time**

Each student is allowed 2 minute to think about and/or review what s/he will say to the group about the book/story. Research has shown that when students are given time to prepare what they will say their performance is enhanced (Skibian 1998).
C. Distribute the Story Cards

Students will then be given the storytelling circle cards to fill in. Each student will have one or two cards and will ask his/her group mates for the information requested on the circle cards. The circle cards provide the initial scaffolding for the students who may not have sufficient language to work with. (See Appendix B for examples of story circle cards). The story circle cards also enable the students to remember and see all the bits and pieces of information which support their discussion during the creation of the collage.

D. Group Members Question and Respond

Members take turns reporting while the respective circle card holder asks the questions and makes notes on the circle card. Ensure that the students take turns to ask questions and respond. Notes should be made on the cards. Complete answers do not need to be written as this part of the lesson would take too long.

Part 3 (20 minutes)

A. Locating common themes and links

This is a very exciting part of the lesson. After the sharing, group members then place all the circle cards on the table and look for possible links, themes or commonalities across the story circle cards or within one story circle card. They identify which element(s) they want to focus on - time, characters, setting, events in the stories, climaxes, stages, themes, topics etc.

B. Representing Ideas

This is also an exciting part of the lesson. Group members now discuss ideas for representing the stories read - abstract art or something concrete, words or drawings, artifacts from the environment etc. and proceed to create their collage. Check that the students are working in English.

Part 4 (15 minutes)

A. Sharing and Appreciating Each Other’s Artistic Expression

Each group’s art work is displayed on the board or around the classroom and other students look at them and try to figure out what is being depicted. A group representative is on hand to answer questions. Alternatively, group members can tell the whole class about their collage.

B. Selecting the Most Creative Work (Optional)

After touring the art display, or hearing the reports, class members may vote for the collage that is most artistically/visually impressive or creative. Class members may also do this after class and report their findings during the next class.

C. Gathering Feedback

Survey group members on the roles they played during the discussion and ask for their feedback on the following:

- Use of English
- Cooperation
- Equal participation
- Roles played

D. Giving Feedback and Complimenting Students

Give feedback on students’ performance (e.g. language use, social skills, engagement etc.) during the class period. Also compliment students on their strengths. Ask group members to compliment each other on working so well together to complete the task. In follow-up lessons, work on helping students with their weaknesses.

Observations About This Lesson

As you can see, this is a lengthy lesson that requires close managing and facilitating of students’ learning and participation. However, the teachers who were able to carry out this lesson, spoke highly of their students’ response. One teacher commented that the students “can put their diverse ideas on a chart or paper visually. But they also need more practice in how to discuss.” Another said that “It was not easy for them but on the whole, they were able to do it, they were able to communicate.” The 84 students who participated were very positive about their experience. The majority in each class, despite having some difficulties, described their feelings as “happy, motivated and interested”. Both the teachers and the students showed a very positive
response to the lesson. Despite this, there are still some areas to work on. In using this lesson, you might want to consider the number of tasks. Some students reported in the feedback that there were too many activities and that there was insufficient time to do the different tasks properly. Teachers may want to bear this in mind and use the plan for double lessons or over three periods. Another problem was students' vocabulary level which can be addressed through more activities like reading and sharing.

Conclusion

If we want to change the ways in which we teach, long-term commitment is required. Teachers can begin to transform and change the dominant interaction patterns in their EFL/ESL ERS classrooms by developing and carrying out lessons similar to this one which allow students to share their books and responses with classmates. In so doing, we can change the mindset of many EFL/ESL learners about reading and learning in English.

Acknowledgements

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Reading List


APPENDIX A: COLLAGE (STUDENTS' PRODUCT)
APPENDIX B: STORY CIRCLE CARDS

Setting: Time and Place

Genre (Type of book)

Main Characters/Topics

What is the book about?

What is the mood of the book? (The feeling of this book. E.g., humorous, sad, scary, informative)

What is the problem to be solved?

What is the writer's point of view or purpose?

What is your opinion about this book?