Transforming Extensive Reading Lessons

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Extensive Reading (also known as ERS or the Extensive Reading Scheme) in many Hong Kong schools is viewed, organised and promoted in very narrow and limiting terms. Traditionally, ERS is erected in the selection and reading of a book followed by the completion of the relevant book card. This paper challenges the prevailing paradigm and encourages teachers to transform their ERS lessons by adopting approaches that will animate and enhance pupils' engagement with the ERS books and ultimately reap long term benefits in EFL/EIL learning. These approaches include making the aesthetic and affective dimension integral to ERS as well as the promotion and adoption of a Vygotskian social interaction framework in the structure and design of the activities. A description, examples and illustrations of the activities to punctuate the two approaches are provided for classroom practitioners.

Introduction

Every week or fortnight many secondary and primary students in Hong Kong are required to read a minimum of a book a week in the English Extensive Reading Scheme (ERS) by selecting and reading books, completing the required task cards and then repeating the cycle all over again. Somewhere in this process, they may or may not get an opportunity to spend a few moments with the teacher to talk about what they have read and done. I observed a few class periods of EERS being led by a pre-service teacher and I participated in student-teacher conferences. My observations, which were later confirmed by the student teacher and the class teacher, indicated that while virtually all the students were involved in reading or doing the activity cards, when asked simple questions about what they had read, most students had very little or nothing to offer. Students' lack of responses may have been influenced by their second language oral proficiency skills; however, their teacher felt that language was a factor for only some of the students as she believed that many students found extensive reading boring or regarded it as "just another task to be done". It appears that students in this class for various reasons were exhibiting low levels of involvement or engagement in the extensive reading programme.

The following analyses of a Form 2B video-taped ERS lesson, shown in Table 1, paint a similar picture of students' low engagement in the ERS. The analyses also show the extent to which students are actually reading.

78
This previous lesson is characterised by a great deal of student movement and chanting, which, on the video, is quite noisy and disruptive to the act of reading. While there are some students reading, there are still many students moving about and the teacher has very few meaningful interactions with the students. There is, in general, a predominance of off-task activities in this class and there are not conducive to developing a positive atmosphere for promoting reading.

From discussion with teachers, the description of the lesson given in Table 1 and the one described earlier, the prevailing atmosphere and activities characterise ERS classrooms in Hong Kong and are generally non-conducive to promoting a positive attitude for reading in English. Yu (1999, p.72), in an investigation of 400 Form 2 Hong Kong students who had participated in a two-year extensive reading programme, concluded that:

The significantly different responses of the control and experimental groups to questions concerning “Reading patterns” show clearly that students in the programme are more regular readers. On the other hand it must be noted that although 68.5% of the experimental students believed that the scheme had increased their interest in reading, the remaining 30% of the students did not feel that the scheme had made any difference. It is therefore important to investigate further to find out why it was so. Was it because the books were not interesting? Or was it because these students lacked reading strategies to help them master the skills that would help them enjoy reading?

She continued:

Another interesting finding is that despite the positive attitude the scheme had fostered in most of the experimental students towards reading, only 27% of them included “Reading in English” as a favourite pastime. (p.73)

Although pupils’ interests were aroused as a result of the scheme, 30% of the students felt that the scheme made little difference and only 27% identified reading as a favourite pastime. While it may be possible that the books were not interesting and that the students may have lacked specific reading strategies, another plausible explanation could be that the dominant activities in the extensive reading classes did little to motivate and engage the students in reading for pleasure and meaning. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide full documentation of the nature of all EERS lessons, experience and encounters with many teachers call for a need to investigate our prevailing practices in this area.

There are two broad approaches that teachers can adopt and incorporate in their extensive reading programmes to transform them and help them to become more effective and dynamic with interested and fully engaged readers. These two approaches are (1), the promotion of the aesthetic and affective side of reading and (2), the incorporation of a social interactionist framework in our activities design. In my work with secondary school teachers and the primary teachers on the Primary English Reading Project (PERP), teachers have been encouraged to adopt these and similar approaches in their EFL reading programmes.

Promoting the Aesthetic and Affective Domain

Extensive reading could be more effective in meeting its goals of developing a love for and long life interest in reading if the programme incorporated and reflected more of the aesthetic aspects of reading. The aesthetics of reading and the affective domain are interrelated as aesthetics deals with appreciation and enjoyment and the affective domain deals with our feelings, beliefs, attitudes and motivation. Day and Bamford (1998, p.21) call the “task of systematic and principled attention to the affective dimension of second language reading as ‘unfortunate’”. One of the important aspects of the affective domain is what Rosenblatt (1983, p.78) calls “the creation of a setting for personal response”. Rosenblatt sees personal response as opportunities for students to organize their “diffuse responses and formulate their views” (p.78). At the time of her first printing in the early part of the last century in 1938, Rosenblatt felt that:

PERP was a three year longitudinal investigation into the development of EFL literature-based reading programmes in selected primary schools across Hong Kong. The results of the investigation show significant positive effects on pupils’ reading behaviour. Teachers were overwhelmingly appreciative of the powerful effects of the programme and its instructional strategies.
The problem that the teacher faces first of all, then, is the creation of a situation favorable to a vital experience of literature. Unfortunately, many of the practices and much of the tone of literature teaching have precisely the opposite effect. They place a screen between the student and the book. The solution of this primary problem is therefore complicated by habitual attitudes and academic practices. The majority of English teachers still need to concentrate on this problem, for in many English classes today the instructor never even glimpses the student's personal sense of the work discussed. (p. 61)

The development and promotion of the aesthetics of reading is crucial if we want our extensive reading programmes to have long lasting impact. If students like and appreciate something and have opportunities to respond to what they have read in personally relevant ways, the chances are they will continue to read long after they have left the confines of the classroom. McKeown (1994, p.36-37) outlines several ways that teachers can promote the "enjoyment factor" some of these are given below:

- Work to instill positive beliefs by challenging students' negative beliefs;
- Create an attractive print environment that promotes reading;
- Plan a varied programme by offering a variety of genres and topics;
- Provide positive adult and student models;
- Seek parental involvement.

Other ways that the aesthetics of extensive reading can be promoted are by adopting the attitude of "no testing - no questioning". This can be done by making extensive reading less like a regular school task but more like an activity where students can relax because they are not being graded or assessed every time. Regular classroom rules and routines can be relaxed so that students feel trusted to carry out their reading programme under less vigilance and surveillance. Teachers can add to this by incorporating other mediums into the extensive reading time such as using quiet music to calm students and enhance students' receptivity. The classroom could also feature other interesting artistic expressions such as students' and professionals' art work including illustrations from extensive reading books. Many educators believe that the affective dimensions of reading deserve equal importance as the cognitive aspects (e.g. Cramer & Coyle, 1994 p.3; Day & Baward 1998 p.21-31). They feel that little attention is given to nurturing and developing these areas because teachers have to deal with the "contents" of the programme - getting the job done and giving little attention to the "how". But the main way we can promote the affective domain is by being very positive about our programmes as "positive teachers create enthusiastic readers" (Dwyer & Dwyer, 1994 p.72).

Bramford & Day (1997, p.7) believe that the primary consideration in all reading instruction should be for students to experience reading as plausible and useful. Only then will they be drawn to do the reading they must do to become fluent readers. And only then will they develop an eagerness to learn new skills to help them become better readers.

When school programmes in general and reading programmes in particular, are centered around the personal and emotional engagement of students, only then can we begin to make an impact on teaching students in personally relevant and meaningful ways.

Adopting a Social Interactionist Perspective

In addition to promoting the aesthetic and affective domain, the adoption of a dynamic constructivist and social interactionist approach to extensive reading will encourage and motivate students to read more and also promote their development in the other skill areas. Traditional approaches to extensive reading such as reading and then completing comprehension work cards or book report forms as described earlier, limit students' interaction with their peers and de-emphasize the social nature of learning. The adoption of a social interactionist or a modified Vygotskian approach (Vygotsky, 1962) will help to motivate students to work harder at the activities. Vygotsky was a Soviet psychologist who stressed the importance of the development of students' learning in conjunction with more capable adults and peers. According to Vygotsky (1978), language and thought are
developed through interaction with others. As humans we are social beings and educators can capitalise on our social nature to increase learning opportunities for pupils through the skillful grouping and the provision of adequate support in the design of instructional activities. The Book Club Program (McMahon & Raphael, 1997) is an example of a successful literacy programme that was based on the social interaction perspective. The activities involved students working with more capable peers and teachers who provided appropriate scaffolding for students’ literacy development.

When students work together, their engagement in the reading process will be increased and their environment will be developed. Environment refers to ‘the understanding a student (or teacher) has about a text, whether it is being read, written, discussed or tested’ (Langer, 1995 p.10). These environments are always ever changing and they become enriched over time when we interact and share our literacy experiences. Through integrating the skills and adopting social interactionist approaches, students can grow in environment cognitively, socially, and affectively.

Ways to Transform Extensive Reading

The main reason for transforming ERS programmes is because a programme that is dynamic and participatory is one that will have a more lasting impact on students’ reading attitudes and ultimately their reading behaviour. Virtually all students can benefit from a dynamic programme even though they may be at different reading and proficiency levels and have different interests. Such a programme could incorporate the type of activities outlined in Table 2 which are designed to increase student engagement and engagement through a social interactionist perspective. The table shows the possible time selected ERS activities could be done in a 35-45 minute ERS lesson. The teacher could select from the range of options entitled “Extending Extensive Reading” which could be done in 10-15 minutes period or if time allows, in a full 35 minute lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Type of Activity</th>
<th>The Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Selection of books</td>
<td>Students select interesting books from a wide variety of choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 20 mins</td>
<td>USSR, DEAR</td>
<td>During this time, everyone including the teacher is engaged in reading. There is no talking and there are no interruptions as everyone is reading. This is the most important aspect of extensive reading “time to read”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-15 mins</td>
<td>Extending Extensive Reading Options</td>
<td>Teachers can choose from a variety of activities to enhance and promote extended reading development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Storytelling time</td>
<td>During storytelling time the teacher may read a favourite story to the students from a big book or a story book; students may also read to the class, small groups or a friend, they may work in groups to practice reading stories together such as in modern theatre.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing time</td>
<td>During the writing time the students may engage in a variety of writing activities such as writing in response journals; filling in book report forms; writing character sketches; responding to story frames.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing time</td>
<td>During sharing time, students may share what they have read and/or written in groups or with a friend.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferencing</td>
<td>During conferencing, the teacher may chat with the students about what they have read. The teacher may ask students to read excerpts of their favourite part of the story.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Finishing -Up</td>
<td>Students complete their reading, or the activities that they are engaged in or return or exchange books.</td>
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</table>
Table 2 outlines some possible activities for a single period extensive reading lesson. However, it is better if the extended reading time covers a double period so that the teacher could organize the time more flexibly. If the extensive reading programme takes place in a single period then the teacher would need to select only one or two activities for students to carry out. More time could be accrued if pupils were allowed to select and return books before class and after class or during recesses. However, teachers should ensure that regardless of how time is trimmed, the most important element of any ERS programme is the provision of time to read. The USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) or DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time, is the core of the extensive reading programme and teachers need to ensure that students have time to do this in class as they often do not have the time outside of class or in other classes. An important characteristic of time to read is the amount of time that is allowed. As we can see from the ERS lesson analysis given earlier, this is often difficult to achieve. However, time to read every day is critical to the success of an ERS programme.

The Extended Activities

The activities outlined in table two under options are the activities for bolstering students’ interest and love for reading. The check-card activity has not been included as this is already a common place activity in extensive reading programmes especially in Hong Kong. An over-reliance on these types of “comprehension checking” activities as has been mentioned previously, can undermine students’ interest in reading as they may see reading books as a task, especially a school task that involves checking and correction. Our objective as educators is to develop in students a life-long interest in reading and its application to their daily lives by teaching them effectively and allowing environment to develop in socially interactive ways. One of the first options to achieve this is through storytelling and reading aloud.

Storytelling & Reading Aloud

Everyone loves a good storyteller and students need good role models to reap the benefits of storytelling. The teacher could help to develop a love for reading by telling the students excerpts from some of the extensive reading books or other story books and by allowing students to become storytellers too. For storytelling the teacher wants to ensure that the student:

- remembers the key parts of the story;
- includes the bits of vocabulary and phrases that make the story distinctive;
- uses props and costumes if desired;
- uses intonation, inflection, gestures, facial expression, movement and appropriate pacing to bring the story to life.

For reading aloud from the extensive reading books or other books such as big books the same principles for storytelling apply. However, for big books, the teacher can invite all the students to join in as these stories often have repetitive lines which students can read along with the teacher as well as following while s/he reads the rest of the story. It is therefore important for the teacher to use a pointer so that slower students do not lose their place in the text. In addition the teacher could allow some of the students to read to the class their favourite sections of the story or bring in outside storytellers and readers who can further motivate students. However, before storytelling or reading, it is important for the teacher to prepare the class by seating the students close together if possible so that they experience the “ communal” atmosphere of storytelling and could therefore better appreciate the story through their audience response and participation.

In addition to encouraging students to read to the whole class, an important aspect of read-aloud is having students read to each other. Paired reading aloud or storytelling, allows every child to be heard and acts as a strong motivator for improving one’s reading. Weak and strong students can

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2 For more practical ideas for developing Extensive Reading in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools see Desmond Allison and Steve Tauroro’s (1989) Developing Reading in English: Approaches and Techniques. Hong Kong: Institute of Language in Education, Education Department.
be paired so that support is given to the weaker students while the stronger students learn how to provide a good model. Students’ re-reading of stories could also be encouraged to develop fluency and again build confidence. Repeated readings to different students or the same partner increases confidence and self-esteem for the slower reader.

Another read aloud activity that builds confidence in reading is the readers’ theatre which involves the dramatic reading of scenes and poems as if one were in a radio studio. Choral reading is also another form of dramatic reading but may involve memorization. In readers’ theatre, there is no memorisation of parts but fluency is critical so students should have lots of practice with emphasis on intonation and expression. Students can also incorporate sound effects into their dramatic readings. Schiefe (1992, p.59) calls it “bringing sound and imagery to listeners through the art of oral interpretation”. Music can also be used to enhance such presentations. The Pied Piper of Hamelin (as retold by Robert Browning), a popular children’s story lends itself well to readers’ theatre as all the students can be involved and both music and sound effects can be easily incorporated.

**Writing Time**

During writing time, students can engage in a number of activities which would encourage personal response to the stories as well as promote autonomy, creative expression and the development of general writing skills. Personal response and creative expression could be encouraged through response journals or book logs. The response journal is like a diary that students write their thoughts in about the stories they have read or listened to. Depending on their level and interests, students may include pictures and drawings in their response journal. The teacher might also provide some prompts to help students get started such as these questions adapted from Angeletti (1991)

**Fig. 1. Sample questions to help students frame journal responses**

1. Is there a lot of action in your book? How does the author make it exciting?
2. If you could change the book, how would you change it?
3. How has your feeling about the book changed from the beginning to the end?
4. Does the title fit the story? Why or why not?
5. Compare the characters to yourself, family, friends, etc.
6. Is the book too long or too short? Why do you think so?
7. Would you recommend the book to others?
10. Describe a scene from your book. What would you have done if you had been there?


The main thing about the response journal is that the teacher responds to what the student has written. What is important here is that the teacher comments on the content and not necessarily the form of what the student has written as the purpose is to develop the student’s love for reading. This type of dialogue develops a wonderful bond between the teacher and the student and helps to develop the student’s confidence in reading and writing. As pupils grow in confidence, the teacher can allow them to respond to each other’s stories. Students can be paired with similar and/or different ability students for a few weeks. Parents can also be asked to read or listen to students as they read their journals and then write their responses in L1 or L2.

Personal response may also be developed through specific response questions designed for different types of ERS books. For example, for the Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett, if all the students have read the story, the following questions could be asked after students have read the description of Mary, the principal character in the book.

**Fig. 2.**

1. What does this text remind you of?
2. Do you think Mary is a happy girl? Why or why not?
3. Identify the words that are used to describe Mary. Can you think of any others?
4. What has caused Mary to be the way she is?
5. Do you know anyone who is like Mary?
6. Would you want to be Mary’s friend? Why or why not?
Story Frames

Story frames are useful for developing authorship in students. Story frame writing immerses students into the structure of the key elements of different types of stories and gives them support for eventually creating their own stories. The objective is to provide students with some support which will eventually become unnecessary as students would have acquired a framework. A simple story frame for narrative writing looks like this:

In this story the problem starts when ________

After that ________

Next ________

Then ________

The problem is solved when ________

The story ends ________

(from Cudd & Roberts, 1987, p.79)

To add the social interactionist dimension to story frame writing, students who have read the same story can work together to complete a story frame, which can then be shared with the whole class. Students can also work together to create their own frames for other types of text for which frames may not have been provided.

Letter Writing To Authors

Writing to authors helps children to become aware of the creators of text and of their own potential to become writers. In this writing activity students have an opportunity to tell the author how they feel about the story and what they like or did not like about the story, how they would change the ending for example. They also have an opportunity to find out personal things about the author and learn about his or her life. These letters can then be mailed to the publisher or directly to the authors if their addresses are available. Students may also think about writing to the illustrators of their books.

Letter Writing to Friends, Teachers, Parents

The letter writing to authors can be extended to friends, teachers and parents. Students can write letters to these people to tell them about a good book that they have read and how they feel about it. Students who have read similar stories or different stories by the same authors can also get together and create the letter. Hopefully the receivers of the letters will be inspired to write a response to the students.

Developing literary or research projects is also another extended type of writing activity that could be done in pairs or small groups. Students may be intrigued by the settings in their stories or certain periods in history for example and might want to do an extended project on it. This type of activity lends itself to a variety of genres such as adventure, biographies and information books and students may want to gather more information or find out people’s opinion about the idea through conducting a survey or interviews. Students can then prepare their report for presentation to their classmates by using multi-media or a simple visual display.

Writing time is usually seen as a solitary activity but in fact it can be an opportunity for much sharing and personal growth and development. Just as process writing supports students’ collaboration these activities mentioned here can accommodate student sharing, creating, editing and publishing. While the activities mentioned previously are more extended types of writing there are also other shorter types which also lead themselves to arrive student involvement. In these writing activities, students can work in pairs or small groups to design character mobiles of interesting characters and develop grids about interesting words or concepts in the story. For example in the story The Paper Bag Princess, a modern day fairy tale by Robert Munsch, students could be asked to create a character mobile or grid. Examples of these follow.

Character Mobile

The Paper Bag Princess

brave determined dirty faithful smart independent

85
The Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Modern Day Princesses</th>
<th>Fairy Tale Princesses</th>
<th>What do you think?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where they lived/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they wear/wore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they did</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where you saw them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are their names</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Book Reports

Book reports are the age-old forms for reporting on what one has read. Many students are bored with the same form of presentation and types of questions to which they have to respond. Teachers need to experiment as much as possible for ways to constantly present the format in challenging and motivating ways to students. For example, the standard book report form with title, author, setting, main characters etc. can be spiced-up and written as a poem, song or a rap which students can tape and submit to the teacher or share with the class. If students are artistic they can draw their interpretation of the story, create a picture board of their favourite characters or create an advertisement to advertise or "sell" their story to others. All these activities can be done in pairs or small groups to encourage discussion and ultimately develop appreciation for books.

Sharing Time

Integral to all the activities that have been described so far is an element of sharing. Sharing in the storytelling and the reading aloud as well as the writing activities enhance deeper levels of engagement and promote enjoyment. However, teachers still need to include in their schedule specific time for students to share what they have done with the other students who were not a part of the same activity. It is important that sharing is done in a atmosphere of trust and acceptance of what each person has to offer. Students need to be able to take risks without feeling threatened (John & VanLierberg, 1994 p.93)

Conferencing

Conferencing is a different kind of sharing with the teacher. During this special time the teacher needs to check students' progress in the programme. These sessions may be done individually, in pairs or in small groups. During these sessions, the students may tell the teacher about what they are reading and the teacher may ask them about their thoughts on aspects of the story. The teacher may record the students' comments to document the students' responses. During the individual conference the teacher may ask the student to read to him or her and write comments next to items on a checklist like the one below, to record the student's oral reading progress.

- reads familiar material fluently
- reads with appropriate expression
- makes corrections to preserve meaning
- observes punctuation to construct meaning
- takes risks in pronunciation
- when confronting unfamiliar words skips the word and continues to read
- re-reads the sentence
- uses context clues
- uses picture clues
- attempts to sound out
- asks another person
- looks at the word and waits to be helped

(adapted from Strickland, 1997 p.35)

86
Examples of the Possibilities of ERS Engagement

Thus far we have been discussing the types of activities that could be used to extend pupils' understanding and appreciation of texts. The following is an excerpt which illustrates "sharing time" during an ERS lesson. In this excerpt, the teacher is working with a class of boys in an upper banding school. The students are sharing their reading experiences with the whole class. The second excerpt is from a Form 2 class of lower banding pupils. In this excerpt, the teacher is working with a group of students to help them create a slogan that captures the main ideas of the stories that they have read.

Excerpt 1 Form 1 - Sharing Stories

T: What lesson have you learned from this story?
   Anybody wants to come out and share his story? No volunteer? Now, I'll call the number. OK let me see, twenty...five. Who is 257? Oh! Mark.
S: I don't want to discuss.
T: You don't want to? You have not finished the book... at least you have finished half of the book...
S: Yes.
T: How many pages have you finished?
S: 37.
T: You have finished 37 pages. How many pages are there?
S: 71.

S1: The name of this book is Treasure Tree.
T: The Treasure Tree. OK. Do you know what a treasure tree is? Yes, for those people who say yes, can you tell us what a treasure tree is? Ray, What do you understand by treasure tree. A treasure tree.
S2: Which contains some treasures, which is some valuable thing?
T: Very valuable thing. Can you give us some examples, of valuable thing?
S2: Gold.
T: Gold.
S3: Coins.
T: Coins. OK. Anymore?
S4: Diamonds. Jewels.
T: Diamonds, jewels so, they are, I mean, all valuable things. So, sit down. Tell us something about the Treasure Tree.
S1: A treasure tree is a medicine.
T: What? Can you hear?
S1: Medicine.
T: A treasure tree is a medicine. What is the word you hear?
S4: Medicine.
T: Medicine so the treasure tree is...
S1: It is in the forest... and...
T: And, what kind of medicine? What kind, the medicine is given to the sick people? How can you cure the sick people?
S1: The ill people, make well.
T: OK. It can make the sick people well, anymore?
S1: It is very difficult to find the treasure tree. It is in the forest.
T: How do people know there is a treasure tree. Any signs on the tree?
S1: Mingke is a little girl. OK. Peter's father who is a doctor asked him to find the medicine to cure Mingke.
T: So, did he manage to find the tree?
S1: Yes.
T: He gets the medicine?
S1: He gets the medicine to Peter's father.

Code: T = Teacher, S = Student

Excerpt 2: Form 2 - Developing Slogans - Group 1

(T monitors a group of 4 students.)
T: Let me correct this for you. Honestly, use the nouns (T corrects S1's slogan). Honesty is good. That's very good! A very good slogan!
S4: (S4 nods her head)
T: What is your slogan? (T marks S5. S5 shows the T her slogan) Oh, if you love a lovely dolphin...? Let's look at the storybook. Alright. (pauses) Um... a slogan only has a few words. Only a few words. Right? So, you have many words. Let's see, which words do you want to use?
S5: (silent)

3 Many thanks to Ms. Snow Kim for the use of this excerpt from her videotaped ERS lesson.
4 Many thanks to Ms. Nancy Chan for the use of this excerpt from her videotaped ERS lesson.

87
T: Let’s just have 3 or 4 words. Which words would you use?
S5: (tense)
T: You understood?
S5: Yes.
T: How many words?
S5: (counting the words of her slogan)
T: Too many words, right? So, let’s have only 4 or 5 words. So, what can we say? (T looks at the S’s notes): A lovely dolphin, where’s your story? Where is your book? (S5 shows the T her storybook)
T: What does this dolphin do? (T shows the S the cover of the book) Where’s the dolphin? Where? (S5 points to the book cover)
T: So, what does he do? (T points to the dolphin)
S5: He, he is swimming.
T: Swimming, and then?
S5: ...
T: What else?
S5: Jump out the water
T: And then? (T turns and talks to another S) Are you alright? Can you see? What else? (S4 & S5 look at the cover of the book together) Is he dreaming about the dolphin?
S5: Yes.
T: Yes. What does he do for the dolphin?
S5: I don’t know
T: You don’t know, Ok. What happens to the dolphin in the story? What happens?
S5: ...found the home
T: He found the home.
S5: Yes.
T: So, we can say “the dolphin finds a home”. That could be your slogan. (S5 nods)
T: The dolphin finds a home, right?
S5: Yes.
T: And then, how many words do we have? The - dolphin - finds - a - home. Five words. (T counts her fingers) So we have a few words, right?
S5: Yes.
T: Ok, so you write down your new slogan here. What’s your slogan? (T asks another group member)

Observations

In both of these lessons, the teachers are allowing the pupils to engage in reporting on the stories that they have read. In Excerpt 1, the teacher is fostering pupils’ vocabulary development through the pupil’s recounting of what he has read. In Excerpt 2, the teacher is trying to help students articulate the main idea of the story through the development of a slogan. Both activities invite pupils to share with others in the whole class as in Excerpt 1 or a small group as in Excerpt 2. Because the teacher is placing such a high value on the reading of the books by allocating time for sharing in various forms, the message that is imparted to pupils is that this is a valued and important activity. An obvious by-product of all this, is that students get to talk about what they have read, listen to their classmates, and share their ideas and experiences through various mediums. This is a clearly an affirmation of their reading which could develop all their language skills over time. The teachers in both excerpts provide the necessary scaffolding to help the students to communicate their ideas. This is the support given by more knowledgeable others in the social interaction perspective.

Conclusion

In a 1997 report on the feasibility of extending extensive reading in Chinese and English to all levels of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, the project team (Chourey et al, 1997) recommended that ERS be extended to all levels of primary schooling (p.s.). However, there were some reservations regarding full implementation at the secondary levels. In their interviews with secondary teachers, the researchers found that teachers maintain reservations about introducing ER at all levels was due to “the concern that there is insufficient curriculum time to accommodate anything extra” (p. 110). Literature should be placed at the heart of the classroom reading programme (Au, 1995) and the extensive reading programme should be seen as a major key for promoting literacy in the target language, not regarded as "an extra". In this paper we have explored some ways that the programme can be transformed by the adoption of a more dynamic social interactionist approach and by bringing to the
forefront, the aesthetic and affective dimensions of reading. However, before we can transform the programme, educators need to recognize the value of the programme and allow time for it in the curriculum. It needs to be envisioned first as a primary means for developing pupils' language and once this basic recognition is there, then time and attention needs to be given to making it worthwhile and meaningful to the students.

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References


