Integrating Extensive Reading into a Speaking Class Curriculum

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Abstract Extensive reading programs have become prevalent all over the world, in both ESL and EFL settings. However, the integration of extensive reading programs into listening/speaking classes still evades many curricula. This paper will discuss the advantages of implementing an extensive reading element into a speaking class. It will explain the possible benefits for the students and the teacher. After establishing the importance of extensive reading, the need for follow-up activities to the reading assignments will also be mentioned. Although there is still great debate surrounding the use of activities to promote greater student accountability of learning, this paper will attempt to show how these activities are completely necessary in an EFL situation, such as that which may be found in Japan. Finally, a set of possible activities will be featured.

スピーキングの授業における多読導入の学習効果

ランス　ブロース

要旨　世界中の ESL および EFL 環境のリーディングの授業において「多読」はよく用いられる活動の一つであるが、その一方で「多読」活動をリスニングやスピーキングの授業に取り入れる試みは今まであまりされてこなかった。そこでこの論文では、「多読」活動をスピーキングの授業に取り入れる学習効果を、学習者および指導者両方の観点から分析したい。分析する過程で、まず「多読」の学習効果について論じ、その後「多読」活動後のフォローアップ活動の重要性について言及したい。フォローアップ活動によって、学習者が自己の学習により責任を持つようになるという考え方に議論の余地はあるものの、この論文では日本のような EFL の学習環境において、いかにフォローアップ活動が必要不可欠なものかを提唱したい。そして最後にフォローアップ活動例をいくつか紹介する。

Introduction

For many native English teachers here in Japan, the opportunity to teach reading or writing courses rarely comes along. Consequently, the extensive reading approach that has received so much acclaim in the TESOL world seems almost out of reach for many of us, native English teachers, or so many of us might think. Through this paper, however, I would like to propose an integration of the extensive reading approach into the speaking/listening class curriculum. This proposal would include not only assigning minimum page requirements for the reading assignments, but also the utilization of student accountability tasks, exercises, and activities to be performed in the speaking/listening classroom.

My desire and motivation to put forth such a proposal is two-fold. Firstly, I believe that the benefits from extensive reading have gone largely unnoticed by many English teachers here in Japan, both native and non-native alike. I feel that extensive reading is most definitely an untapped resource that we, as English teachers, cannot afford to neglect any longer. So, even though I am rarely given the chance to teach reading or writing classes, I feel that there is a welcome place for extensive reading even in my speaking and listening classes. In fact, extensive reading can play a complementary role to any English teaching curriculum (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening). Secondly, the idea of requiring student accountability in the scope of extensive reading is one of many areas of debate in the TESOL world. There are some (Mason & Krashen, 1997) who would argue that the element of student accountability is completely unnecessary, and may tend to undermine the actual benefits that are supposed to be reaped from an extensive reading program. However, much of this research and ideology has come out of ESL settings. I think it is necessary to recall that the motivational student profile of many Japanese students who are currently studying in an EFL setting here in Japan is completely different from that of those who are currently studying in an ESL setting. There are motivational factors that are lacking in this EFL setting for our Japanese students (i.e., having to function in the L2 environment, etc) that if present would arguably compel students studying in an ESL setting to work harder and make more progress in their studies. In addition to this, I would propose that student accountability can/should be implemented into the curriculum of speaking/listening classes here in a Japanese EFL setting.

Through this paper, I hope to convey to the reader the importance of including an element of student accountability in the extensive reading programs here in Japan,

as they differ greatly from the programs that have been established in an ESL environment. Furthermore, I would like to shed some light on just how this may be accomplished while maintaining the integrity of the fundamentals of extensive reading which promote an unthreatening and relaxed reading environment. I believe that this can be accomplished particularly through the use of engaging and interesting activities for the students in the classroom and also by offering students autonomy and choice in the activities they wish to perform.

Establishing the Credibility of Extensive Reading

Research has shown that the positive effects of extensive reading on vocabulary acquisition, reading fluency, and writing are nothing short of miraculous (Nation, 1997; Day & Bamford, 1998). In Osaka, Japan, research was shown (Mason & Krashen, 1997) to have significantly improved students' reading comprehension where reluctant EFL students majoring in English at the university level did extensive reading for one semester. The results showed that these reluctant students who were placed well behind their comparison group counterparts at the beginning of the semester had almost completely caught up to the level of the control group by the end of the semester. In another experiment conducted by the same researcher (Mason & Krashen, 1997), extensive readers outperformed traditionally taught students at both a prestigious university and a two-year college.

In another study (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989) conducted with learners in an ESL setting in the United Kingdom, research was equally astounding. Students in the experimental group who upon pre-testing obtained scores consistently lower on both reading and writing tests than the members of their two corresponding control groups, were found upon post-testing to have surpassed their control group counterparts, obtaining consistently higher scores on both sets of tests.

A further study (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981) shows that in a book flood in Fiji primary schools, where over three hundred young students (aged 10-12 years old) were broken into three main groups; the shared book group, the silent reading group, and the control group, the students in the shared book and silent reading groups made significantly more improvement in English reading and writing proficiency than their control group counterparts. In fact, the researchers concluded that the shared book and silent reading groups were able to make approximately 15 months improvement in just 8 months.

In all four of these examples, students who were involved in the research were either learning in an ESL situation or were interested enough in English to have selected it as a university major. Also the students in all four experiments did self-selected reading with minimal accountability, writing brief summaries or comments about what they had read. In the Fiji book flood, students also had conferences with the teachers but the conferences did not require extensive student accountability. The students were required to mention whether they liked the books they read or not. There was very minimal follow-up.

Establishing the Need for Student Accountability

Clearly, the research supporting extensive reading and its benefits on reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and writing proficiency are abundant and very convincing (e.g., Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Elley, 1991; Cho and Krashen, 1994). However, there are those researchers (Mason & Krashen, 1997) who would question the strength of the approach when it is taken outside of its natural realm of ESL settings or programs which have been established for English majors or for students who are fairly motivated to learn English as a foreign language.

As a prime example of this, research (Schmidt, 1996) was conducted on non-English majors at a university in Japan in departments ranging from technology and policy management to rehabilitation and social work. The English department was responsible for educating these students but found that the motivation and proficiency levels of many of these students were lacking. In order to combat this, the department adopted a new curriculum using a self-access program, which included extensive reading. This program was created to allow students who really had few expectations of using English in the future in their work (overall rather low motivation, neither instrumental nor integrative) to study those areas of English that they found most attractive or useful. The extensive reading section of the program was first explained at a course orientation, where students were told how and where to find and check out the books for their assignments. In the first year of this experiment, there was no minimum page requirement set. The only requirement made was for students to have periodic interviews with instructors to briefly discuss the books they had read. They were also asked to write a ten-minute response to the book, which was supposed to include a one or two sentence summary of the book and then three to six sentence response to the book. Overall, the requirement of student accountability was severely

minimal as was reflected in the results.

As was previously mentioned, in the first year, there was no minimum page requirement set and only 10% of the total number of enrolled students participated, reading an average of only 139 pages over the entire school year. In the following year, there was a 50 page minimum requirement set at the beginning of the program to hopefully increase the number of pages read by the students over the year. However, the results were equally disappointing to the researcher. There was still an average participation level of 10%.

In the written report explaining the results, one of the reasons cited for the disappointing response to the extensive reading was that students could earn sufficient points during class time (even enough for As and Bs) so many felt little pressure to earn more than the minimum through outside reading. The pressure set on them to prove that they had actually completed the reading was rather weak and therefore many of them were not compelled to do it.

Furthermore, in another paper submitted by Robb (2002), the argument is made against unilaterally equating ESL students and students in Western countries with their counterparts in the Asian arena. Robb cautions, for example, that reading for reward, may be a laudable goal in ESL extensive reading programs in Western societies but that the standard may not hold true in Asian settings, where extrinsic motivation is often seen to be the basic motivating factor, instead of intrinsic motivation. He goes on to mention:

> Students in my program are not 'reading for themselves' but rather to satisfy course requirements. Surely, we hope that they will be able to read books that interest them and therefore, to some extent enjoy what they are reading, but we cannot expect that enjoyment factor alone will motivate most students to read... When there is no designated 'reading class' where the instructor can directly supervise the students, there is a very good chance that students will not do the reading unless there is a clear follow-up or tracking mechanism to hold them responsible for their work. In my department, with over 10 years of experience with extensive reading, a simple record of what has been read, or book reports that require little new information were quickly and cleverly circumvented by enterprising students (Robb, 2002: 1).

Clyde Warden and Hsiu Lin (2000) provide further insight into the difference between students studying in a Western setting and their Asian counterparts in their study of Taiwanese university students studying EFL. They hypothesized that in Taiwan, a great deal of motivation on the part of the student was due to instrumental motivation, motivation stemming from a desire to achieve something; i.e., passing a university entrance exam, getting a job, getting a raise, getting a promotion, and getting a passing grade in a class. Other researchers (Chihara & Oller, 1978; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lukmani, 1972) have also found instrumental motivation to be a major factor in research conducted in the social contexts of the Philippines, India, and Japan.

Through their research, Warden and Lin (2000) also mentioned that most of the currently published ideas of motivation are stemming from Western societies where English teaching is conducted, to a large part, in an ESL setting. They hypothesized that English teaching in Taiwan and more generally in Asia may not follow the same guidelines that this mainstream motivation research follows. Littlewood (1999) also points out that 'assumptions made about motivation in mainstream motivation research literature may not relate directly to the Asian cultural setting.'

With all these considerations taken, the lack of intrinsic motivation to learn English coupled with the strength of the extrinsic (instrumental) motivational factors in an Asian EFL setting, I would propose that student accountability be implemented directly into the extensive reading program and that grades be weighted accordingly to express the importance of this program. Without the incentive of passing grades and credits, students would most likely not complete the assigned readings.

Increasing Student Accountability Through the Use of Interesting and Engaging Activities in the Speaking/Listening Classroom

With the definite need for increased student accountability clearly cited above, I would hypothesize that this can be accomplished through the use of interesting and engaging activities in the speaking/listening classroom. All too often, instructors somehow believe that student accountability must be completed by writing a summary or response to the books read. This activity clearly is unpopular with most EFL students and tends to undermine the joy that they should be receiving from extensive reading; basically defeating one of the main purposes of the extensive reading program. I firmly believe that students will be much more receptive to completing their student accountability requirements if they are given interesting options and a chance

to choose which form or activity they would like to perform.

If these two conditions are met, I feel that three main benefits will be realized. Firstly, using the contents of extensive reading assignments and including those contents in an activity in the speaking classroom to insure student accountability will emphasize to the students the importance of completing the extensive reading assignments. Without this check, students will be more likely than not to neglect the assignment. Secondly, this in-class activity will offer the students an opportunity to further use the language that they have encountered through their readings, hopefully to promote increased acquisition of the L2. Thirdly, it will foster further increases in motivation in the students. As they become more and more excited about reading and about certain books, they will want to tell their friends about what they have read. What better way to channel that excitement, than by letting them talk about their books in English speaking class. This excitement about the books may also carry over to the other students hopefully sparking their interest in reading more. So, as one can see, the use of these activities in the classroom can have multiple benefits.

Underlying Theory of Task Based Learning (TBL) and Instructional Principles

There is one condition, however, that needs to be met in order to keep the tasks interesting and engaging enough for the students to enjoy performing them. Following the philosophy of Jane Willis, activities that are performed in the classroom should always be tasks "where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome... It is the challenge of achieving the outcome that makes TBL a motivating procedure in the classroom" (Willis, 1996).

Another important feature of TBL is that learners will be allowed to choose whatever language forms they feel would be most appropriate to successfully reach the goal of the task. To dictate the language forms that must be used would be to directly go against the basic tenets of TBL. Language is the vehicle for attaining task goals, but the emphasis is on meaning and communication, not on producing language forms correctly.

Tasks are also advantageous in that they are often done in small groups or pairs. Doing tasks in small groups or pairs allows learners to gain confidence to try to experiment with language that they may be familiar with but don't feel comfortable trying out in front of a big class. The security of a small group can welcome more

risk-taking on the part of the student to use more complex structures. This group work also forces students to communicate in real-time. Spontaneous speech is practiced through these group tasks. Furthermore, these group tasks will support those learners who are interactive or social learners, allowing them to notice how others express similar meanings. Group task work also "engages learners in using language purposefully and co-operatively, concentrating on building meaning, not just using language for display purposes" (Willis, 1996).

Through this group task there are also other points that need to be addressed to insure a successful learning opportunity for all the students. Many of the following examples of tasks will utilize one-person narrations with the audience asking questions or evaluating in some way. In this respect, it is integral that everyone in the class have a role to play. For example, in the first task (which will be explained later), one of the students will talk about his favorite extensive reader book. The stage will be set up to look like a press conference and the audience will be book critics. The student who read the book will sit on the stage and after giving a brief description of the book, will have to field questions from the audience. Everyone in the audience must ask at least one question to the author of the book. At the end, the students in the audience will have to write a book review (to be used later by the students in the class in the following year). In this respect, both the author and the book critics in the audience have a responsibility to keep everyone on task. Making sure that responsibility is placed on both the audience and the speaker is an integral part of creating a successful group task.

The role of the teacher throughout this task process is not the traditional role of master or instructor, but one of advisor, providing guidance and support along the road to success for the students. The main role of the teacher is to simply help students express more exactly what they want to say. Teachers in this TBL will generally be seen giving comments on good points that have been mentioned by the students, encouraging learner independence by waiting to be asked to help before offering one's assistance un-elicited, pointing out errors selectively-not focusing too much on form errors but more on errors that cause a breakdown of meaning, and lastly keeping students on a rough time schedule.

As a reference for teachers, the following task list adheres to the conditions set by Jane Willis and will hopefully prove to be interesting and engaging for the students.

Task Options

Task Option 1: Press Conference

Procedures

Students in the audience are all "reporters" for a school newspaper and they are going to ask questions to the "author" about the book. The author of the book may be one student or a group of students who have read the book in question. The author(s) will be seated on the stage at the front of the class. To make the presentation more interesting, the teacher might want to create the image of a press conference with a table covered with a cloth and maybe a microphone for the author to speak into.

Goal for the students in the audience

The students in the audience are going to write a book review for the other students to view (I have actually used these book reviews in following semester classes to give students a better idea about the contents and plots of the books in the extensive reading library. It saved me a lot of work because originally I had been thinking of doing it (one review for each book) by myself, but they did it for me.) Again, I have limited their reviews to only eight sentences. I think if the teacher makes the assignment too demanding that it will turn the students off to extensive reading. Also, for lower level students, it may be necessary to give them a list of possible questions to be asked through the course of the press conference.

Goal for the students who have read the book and are now acting as the author

They must answer questions about the book and be able to give the reporters in the audience enough information to sufficiently write a review of the book.

Overall, I think the fact that students in the audience have to rely on the author(s) for information to complete the assignment will compel the author(s) to have sufficiently completed their reading assignments in order to be able to give solid information to the reporters.

Task Option 2: Art Auction

Procedures

In this task, students will be creating art that will be used in an imaginary auction. Students who have created art for this option will bring their art on a designated day and the art will be posted around the room on the walls. This might be a nice activity for those students who are not particularly interested in English or public speaking but like to draw or create art.

Goals for the artist

For this activity, there will be a day when in the beginning of the class, the first 45 minutes will be set aside for this art auction. All students who have selected this option should have their art completed by that day. Students will be told that they must create a scene of the book that is most characteristic of the book and will be used in an art auction. They will also have to prepare to explain their picture. Several art critics will be asking them questions about their art.

Goals for the critics/auction-goers

The students who have not chosen this option will be given a comment sheet, which they will have to complete for each piece of art that has been brought to class that day. The comments/information that they will have to fill in are title of the book, author of the book, and the basic plot behind the scene. At the end, the audience will participate in an art auction. Each person in the audience will be given a certain amount of play money and the price range will be set, but other than that, it will be just like a regular auction. The teacher will control the bidding, but students will have to raise their hands if they want to bid higher for any given piece of art. The various pieces will be priced but not really given to the buyers. The true artists can take their own work home.

Each of the critics will be moving from painting to painting individually and asking questions to each of the artists. Also, before the auction begins, the artists will have to explain one more time briefly in front of the class. This means that the artists will be expected to explain their art several times. This works in repetition to the exercise which is always helpful in fostering fluency and acquisition.

Of course, using props may help to make the atmosphere even more realistic and interesting. This might be a nice time to have some kind of drinks or snacks for the students, so they can gaze at the pictures while sipping punch. Also, the teacher should have a small mallet or something to strike the podium when a sale has been made.

Task 3: Movie Commercial

Procedures

Students will create a TV commercial for an imaginary movie that has been created about the book that they have all read. This will be a group exercise in which students who have all read the same book can form a group. In order to insure that

students in the groups all take active part in the performance, I have limited the number of students per group to four. They will select one scene from the book that they think was most interesting and most exciting and try to make it into a movie clip that will be used as a commercial to promote the movie (or book).

Goals for the students performing the commercial

They have to act out the movie clip and present a scene that was interesting enough to entice the audience of the commercial to go to see the movie. I let the students write the script and I check it only once. I mention several times that I want them to get their point across, but a strong emphasis should not be placed on form in this task.

Goals for the students watching the commercials

Students watching the commercials have to listen carefully and enjoy the commercials. Then, at the end of the class, they have to rank the movies from those that they would most like to see to those that they would least like to see.

For this particular task I have set up a movie camera in a recording room where students come to act out their scene with props and costumes several days before the class where we are going to view the clips. Because it takes too much time during the class to rearrange the classroom and for students to put on costumes and prepare props during the actual speaking class time, I thought it would be better to let the students do their commercials and I could videotape them and edit out all the wait time and mistakes and then on one day, we could all watch the commercials consecutively in one class. Then the students would have to decide based on the commercials which movie that they would like to go to see. That would complete the goal section of the task. Students performing the commercial would have to make the commercial interesting enough to entice the viewers to go to see it and therefore to achieve their goal. Everyone in the class would have to rank the commercials in order on a worksheet from the movies that they would like to see the most to the movies that they would like to see the least. Of course, I will be giving grades to each group based on their performances. I try not to get too bogged down on grammatical forms or pronunciation. I base the grades on how well they presented the contents on the book. I tell the students these grading criteria, so they don't worry too much about the focus on form, but just getting their message across. Again, I don't want to turn them off to extensive reading by making the student accountability sections too demanding.

Task Option 4: Oral Book Reports

Procedures

Students will perform an oral book report for the audience. This task may be more appropriate for lower level students as this requires less interaction and spontaneous speech than the other tasks. Students will be told that they are going to act as "book critics" and will be presenting a book report to be used in following semester classes to introduce students to the contents of certain books in the extensive reading library.

Goals for the presenter

I ask the students to choose the book that they liked the most and would like to inform other students about. Of course, the audience will also be asking questions about details in the book that the presenter will have to answer. Preparation is necessary, but the questions will not be the focus of the task as in the Press Conference, so it will take some of the pressure off the presenter. Again, this task might well be used for slightly lower level students.

Goals for the audience

Students in the audience will have to watch the various book reports and judge which one they would most like to read. This will also entail asking questions to the presenter about points that they did not understand or maybe points that they found interesting and wanted elaboration on.

Again, as with the previous task, in the interest of time, I like to make a video of each of the oral book reports and allow the students to see them from time to time in the beginning of class. Whereas the movie clips may be interesting enough and engaging enough to hold the attention of the viewing students for the entire class period, this type of oral book report may not be so interesting. So, I usually show only one or two in the beginning of a class for three or four consecutive weeks. It is necessary to show the videos in class to emphasize the importance of completing the oral report and doing one's best, but I think to watch all of the reports in one class would be too boring.

I also keep these oral book reports and show them to the students at the beginning of the following semester. This gives the students an idea of what books are available in the extensive reading library because they are going to be doing extensive reading during the year themselves. Also, it shows the students one kind of assignment that they will have to complete during the course of the year using the content

of the extensive reading that they will be supposed to have done. So, it emphasizes the importance of completing the assignment and doing the reading properly.

Again, in completing the orals reports, I focus mainly on content and meaning, trying not to focus too much on form as that can get boring and tedious for the students. Of course, a grade is also awarded to the students based on the successful portrayal of the book. This grade is important especially in the Asian setting because as we read earlier, instrumental motivation is often the overriding factor for many students' motivational focus. The grade which I award students during these tasks is used to insure that they take the assignments seriously and understand the importance of extensive reading.

Task 5: The Parent Game

Note: Because this particular task requires that students be unfamiliar with the plots of the books in the extensive reader library, it would be best done at the beginning of the term.

Procedures

In most stories there is at least one conflict to be resolved by the characters. In this task, the presenter is going to be talking about one scene of the book in which a problem occurs. The audience is going to play parent and offer advice. If someone in the audience gives the correct advice (the same resolution as that of the book), then they will receive something like a point on a test or some other form of prize.

Goal for the child

The presenter will be called the child, the one in the story requiring assistance. The child will prepare a simple picture depicting a problem in the story. He will give a short and simple description of the problem in the story.

Goal for the parents

The students in the audience will be called the parents because they will be offering some advice to the child about how to overcome the conflict in the story. Again, the parent who gives the correct advice will receive some prize. Teachers can decide what that should be on their own. If the conflict is not completely understood by the parents they will be required to confirm with the child by questions or confirmations, in essence, negotiation of meaning.

This can be done in a relatively short amount of time. Therefore, it may be possible to do two or three of these tasks in the beginning of the class as a warm-up. It

will require the presenter to have read the books as assigned. Also, he will have to give a brief description and talk spontaneously to answer questions of confirmation during the negotiation of meaning phase. The audience will be forced to listen in order to offer the appropriate advice and get the prize.

One of the basic points of TBL is that the focus is on meaning and not so much on form. Because these activities are geared to just let students speak briefly about what they have read, focus on form is not necessary in this section of the speaking class and therefore fits quite nicely into the student accountability tasks that the students will perform. In fact, the teacher really can just let the students experiment with the language in this activity, giving little nudges of guidance from time to time only.

These are just five tasks of a possibly countless list of tasks that could be performed by students. With enough imagination, there are a number of interesting and fun ways for students to use the contents of the extensive reading assignments to not only improve their own L2 acquisition and to increase the overall motivation in the classroom, but also to help the teacher reach his goal of assuring student participation in the extensive reading assignments. It must also be noted that I usually let the students choose which activity they would like to complete. There are some students who prefer to work alone and there are tasks to accommodate their preference. On the other hand, the majority of students in my classes opt for the group work activities. These students tend to enjoy working in groups and actually find support and satisfaction from bonding with their peers. When presenting the assignments, I also try to steer away from making it sound like a "check" of their reading. It is a chance for them to spread their enthusiasm and tell their friends about a good book. Technically speaking, because one principle of extensive reading is that the student read only the books that he is interested in, all students should be interested in and excited about what they are reading, which hopefully will be evident through their presentations.

Conclusion

In a perfect world, students would complete all of the assignments that teachers assign them and learn quickly and efficiently. However, we do not live in a perfect world and as teachers of English in an EFL setting, our work gets even more difficult. Many would argue that there is virtually no need for a check of students' completion of their extensive reading assignments, but I would disagree, particularly here in an Asian EFL environment. I am sure that there are several reasons for the differences

between Western students and their Asian counterparts, but the prevalence of instrumental motivation as a major motivating factor among most Asian EFL students pushes teachers to take slightly more drastic measures to compel their students to complete their assignments properly. I have tried through the course of this paper, however, to say and show how this can be accomplished in a speaking/listening class and more importantly without much pain on the part of the student. Insuring the enjoyment and consistent reading of the students is a goal that is always maintained throughout the program and coupled with these in-class speaking activities, student enjoyment will undoubtedly help to sustain the program and spark interest in reading in English as a foreign language.

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