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Extensive Reading In The Classroom

Petulla Domenica

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EXTENSIVE READING IN THE CLASSROOM

Domenica Petulla

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IPP Advisor: Marti Anderson

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Project Reader _____

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore the advantages and benefits of extensive reading in an ESL classroom. The purpose of my paper is to further my understanding of reading in a second language and to start the process of implementing an extensive reading program for my particular teaching context. In the first half of the paper there is an overview of reading in a second language, the benefits of extensive reading and Louis M. Rosenblatt's aesthetic and efferent reading stances. The last two chapters focus on particular challenges, issues and questions I must resolve before I am able to implement extensive reading into my curriculum. I also discuss what type of activities I believe will enhance my students' extensive reading experiences.

ERIC DESCRIPTORS

English (Second Language)

Reading Skills

Reading Instruction

Reading in a Second Language

Aesthetic and Efferent reading stances

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Campus Life

The initial months on campus are extremely demanding for our international students because they are asked to perform at a high level in the classrooms, learn about our leadership program and participate in extracurricular activities. In addition to these demands, students are attempting to adjust to this new school environment and understand the various cultural differences they encounter in the classrooms and on campus, and all the while they feel very homesick. Everywhere they look they are surrounded by a foreign culture and foreign language and for many students the idea of asking for help is not an option because of their cultural background. With all of this swimming around in their minds, the international students enter class each day feeling a great deal of pressure to perform as well as their native speaker classmates.

Fortunately, the staff and faculty on campus are aware of these challenges and understand that the adjustment process takes some time. Any students who struggle with their coursework receive immediate academic support because the faculty and staff are aware of the issues they may face as they start their academic work in a new school. This is particularly true for our level one and two ELL students (students are assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest). Students who are placed in these first two levels are required to take my ESOL class, which is the first part of our ESL program. This course focuses on the following skill areas: writing clear and correct sentences, writing unified and coherent paragraphs, developing initial skills in research and journal writing. In addition to this, students do a large amount of intensive reading of a variety of texts,

and grammar instruction is addressed through the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Upon completion of my course, they take English 1 which focuses on writing essays and research papers and analyzing literary texts. These two courses take the place of their English and History classes for that particular year.

How it all began

Four years ago I started teaching at The Culver Academies, a boarding school in Northern Indiana, as a Spanish teacher. I had never worked in a boarding school, and therefore I spent my first year learning about the culture and community of this academic institution. I quickly picked up on this new lifestyle and began to make adjustments, but this process was made easier for me because I had a mentor to guide me through my first couple of years. After working hard and asking questions, I was able to absorb all the pertinent information that I would need to "survive" on campus. I had a frame of reference and the necessary tools to succeed in this system because I had the support from those around me who wanted me to achieve success. As I reflect on my first year at Culver, I think about the many academic, social and cultural challenges my ESOL students face as they first come to campus.

As I said, I was a Spanish teacher when I arrived to campus, but in the spring of 2006 I had the opportunity to meet Alex Silverman from SIT. Our ESOL and international student programs were going through their triennial review and Alex was one of our guest evaluators. I had just completed my first year at Culver when I decided to speak to the only ESOL teacher on campus about her program and my interest in working with the international students on campus. The fact that Culver makes a concerted effort to invite students from different parts of the world was one of the main

reasons I was drawn to it. As a Spanish teacher, I have traveled quite a bit and I felt excited about the prospect of working alongside students from different corners of the globe. I could easily identify with their fears, excitement and love of learning because of my past experiences. It took only a short but intense conversation with Alex and Cathy, the director of international student programs at Culver, to convince me that I was ready to explore the world of becoming an ESOL teacher.

It has been three years now since I started the process and I have had the chance to work with some very amazing students on campus. As I began to reflect on my IPP (Independent Professional Project), I realized that my focus should be on the work that I believe still needs to be done in my classroom. Some people may view their IPP as a final project, but for me this work has allowed me to read research and reflect on how I can refocus some of my energy in the classroom to help improve my students' learning experiences. Throughout this process I have come to realize how strongly I feel about reading and the impact a strong reading program can provide my students not only in the academic arena, but in their personal lives. Teaching my students how to read and write have been my key concerns, and with this vision I believe they have grown as learners. However, these skills are not limited to the academic world. The idea that we read and write only for our teachers is absurd. Many of my students have not explored the simple enjoyment and pleasure that comes with reading and writing for themselves. They have missed out on the personal satisfaction that comes from choosing to read a book simply because it interests them and not because it is a mandatory assignment. This type of oversight is dangerous and harmful to any student's education.

Even though the focus of my IPP work is on extensive reading, I believe that it is difficult to separate reading from writing or speaking. Once you enter the world of reading for pleasure, it is hard to contain your enthusiasm. There is a sense of urgency to share with those around you. Your imagination, emotions and past experiences have been awoken and you need to express all your thoughts. As I think back on my personal reading experiences, I remember the excitement flowing through me as I spoke a million miles an hour to my brothers, friends or parents about what I had just read. But the moment became more intense when I spoke with others who had read the same book. For me it felt as if I had met a kindred spirit and that we shared a special connection and knowledge that no one else could understand because they had not traveled to the 18th century in Jane Austen's novels or Gabriel Garcia Marquez's magical realism.

In its purest and most natural form, reading for me is an escape from my world, an opportunity to travel to the past or a chance to discover an unknown and magical place. The excitement and pleasure I have lived through because of reading has been such an amazing gift that I have allowed myself to indulge in over the years. But this did not just happen overnight. Somewhere along the way I was given the space to read for myself. I had the opportunity to discover my interests and passions and then I was given free rein to pursue those paths. As I think back to my childhood I can't seem to identify any clear memories of what games I played or where I went on weekends, but I do remember my mother buying me books, and spending time in the library each summer so I could check out books. I believe that these happy and positive memories played an important role in making me a lifelong reader. To this day, I cannot walk by a bookstore without slowing down or going in to check out what they have.

These personal experiences have led me to think about my students and the reading experiences I am helping them live through, and I must admit that I am not in a place where I would like to be. At the moment, there is not enough reading for personal enjoyment nor are there enough opportunities for them to select their own reading material. Even though I am teaching my students *how* to read, I am not showing them how amazing it is to *be* a reader. There is a huge difference in the type of interaction readers have when they choose to read a certain novel and when it is assigned by a teacher so the class can discuss, dissect and analyze each page, character and plot development. Each reading experience carries a certain weight in importance, but one should not be relegated as less important or necessary.

In order to better understand the benefits and impact that extensive reading can have in an ESOL classroom, I chose to revisit certain key topics in regards to reading. The second chapter is a brief overview of reading in a second language as it identifies the characteristics of fluent readers and what a language learner must master in order to be successful when reading in a second language. The third chapter explores Rosenblatt's reading stances, the aesthetic and efferent mindset when approaching a text. Then chapter four looks at why incorporating extensive reading into my curriculum will be beneficial. The final two chapters explore some issues, challenges and practicalities I must face and resolve if I would like to implement extensive reading into my classroom.

CHAPTER 2

READING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Identify the characteristics of fluent readers.
- Examine the challenges of reading in a second language.

One of my favorite pastimes is to sit and read a book. On the surface reading a book seems so easy and enjoyable, but I don't believe that many people realize how much is at work to complete this process. How many times have I seen these words and read about these themes, experiences and genres? How often do I lose myself in the reading experience because I identify with a character or take pleasure in the adventure of the protagonist? As a native English speaker, I usually don't think a great deal about these strategies and life experiences because they are ingrained in me and are automatic. But as an ESOL teacher, I can't avoid asking myself how my international students must feel as they approach a text. I have no doubt that many approach their reading assignments with fear, trepidation and at times contempt. All of the strategies which I possess and which make my experience seem so simple are traits and qualities of a fluent reader. However, the reading experience for learners of English is full of challenges and frustrating experiences that may lead them to give up or devalue the importance that reading plays in developing their language skills.

The questions that I then pose to myself are: what are the qualities and traits of a fluent reader? What are the critical skills that my students need to obtain if they hope to

achieve any measurable amount of success? In Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom, Bamford and Day highlight some of the skills that fluent readers possess which new readers need to develop. According to Bamford and Day, English language learners must possess a basic knowledge of vocabulary and build upon their sight vocabulary, and in addition to this they must approach a text with "linguistic, world and topical knowledge" (16-19). If they possess these skills they should be able to read successfully. Along with this description, Patricia Carrell and Joan Eisterold describe reading as a skill that "depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world (556). Carrell goes on to say that "fluent reading presumes prior recognition knowledge of the vocabulary of the text" (335). It would seem that these are the reading skills which allow fluent readers to interact with the text and create meaning without any interruptions because they are not slowed down by bottom-up or top-down processing skills. Fluent readers approach a text with a wide range of reading strategies and experiences as well as a clear sense of what and why they are reading. Furthermore, these skills are ones that have been worked on diligently for a long period of time with the appropriate texts and support which have allowed the readers to develop and strengthen their skills and reading processes (Grabe, 378-379).

Having an awareness of these qualities is very important; however, we must not assume that reading is taught or emphasized in the same way around the world. There are cultural and social mindsets and expectations that our students bring to the classroom which also impact how they approach a text. What does reading mean to a student from Taiwan? How important is the written word versus the spoken one? Is reading viewed as a skill to attain practical information? What roles do literature and reading for pleasure

play in our students' native countries? In any given ESL class an instructor may have students who have never had access to a library or who come from communities in which there were low literacy rates. From a social perspective, a student may enter a classroom with very different expectations in regards to reading and how a text is used as an instructional resource (Grabe 389). All of these issues have a large impact on readers especially when they approach a text in which an author assumes that their reader brings with them with a certain amount of background knowledge about a particular theme or topic (Carrell and Eisterold, 564). It is our awareness of our students' cultural backgrounds that will allow us to mediate any misinterpretations or reading errors. Another hurdle we face as reading instructors is that as our students come from a variety of backgrounds, each one will approach the same text with very different ideas and attitudes. Some, for example, may place a great deal of importance on historical and factual texts and view poetry and certain literature as unnecessary. Here, the challenge is not a linguistic or content problem, but rather, a different cultural and social perspective that will require students some time to adjust their viewpoint and adapt a new reading stance.

As we can see, the simple act of reading is not at all simple. There are a variety of processes and skills needed in order to access the information in a text. Readers are receiving a large amount of input whereby they use their knowledge of the language and world to interpret an author's ideas. As readers interact with the text, they construct meaning and gives meaning to the text by approaching it with their own background knowledge or *schema* (Carrell 332-333, Carrell and Eisterold 559). The theory behind background knowledge or *schemata* proposes that fluent readers must be able to use their

bottom-up (data-driven) and top-down (concept-driven) processing skills at the same time in order to successfully comprehend a text. Therefore, readers approach a text with these skills and their ability to comprehend a text relies on the type of schema (background knowledge) they bring to it. As students read they decide what type of schema to access, and this allows them to comprehend and interpret the author's ideas (Carrell 333).

So then, what implications does this have for our English language learners? Very simply put, the possibilities for misinterpretation and misunderstanding seem extraordinary. As I discussed in the first part of the chapter, our students must develop their linguistic skills in addition to their general knowledge of the world and the various cultural and social components that surround them. It seems that in order to reach a level of fluency, students must continually work on building up their schema as a way of strengthening their reading skills. In turn, as reading instructors we must maintain a keen sense of awareness and focus as we guide our students in their learning journey. At the start of this chapter I reflected on how fluent readers interact with a text and I highlighted the importance of developing and supporting reading skills over a long period of time. If we would like our students to become effective readers, then we need to provide them with a variety of reading opportunities and instruction. Grabe states, "students learn to read by reading" (396). I could not agree more with his view on this particular matter. Now it is a question of what type of reading experience would be most beneficial for students hoping to develop this challenging skill.

Conclusion

Raising our own awareness of how a person reads can lead us to discover how to best approach our students needs. Working with students who come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds means that they bring own particular views on education and learning. Ultimately, if we would like to facilitate and improve our students' opportunities to learn a second language, we must take this all into consideration as we help our students develop their reading skills.

CHAPTER 3

ROSENBLATT: AESTHETIC READING

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Define efferent and aesthetic reading according to Louise Rosenblatt.
- Explore the importance of aesthetic reading in an ESL classroom.

"Please make sure to answer the following discussion questions after reading the short story."

"Once you have read the chapter, please write a summary of the main events."

"Take notes on the character, plot and conflict in the story and be prepared to answer questions and take a quiz on what you have read."

These are only a few of the messages that my students hear on any given day when they are assigned a reading for homework. It would seem to them that reading is not only a painful process, but it is an assignment that must be tested and evaluated because there is a "correct answer" that needs to be uncovered. At what point in their learning journey do my students experience literature for the sake of enjoyment and pleasure? As I now venture to reflect on this question, I realize that as their ESOL instructor, I have neglected certain aspects of reading. My focus and attention has been on developing reading and writing skills. I have had tunnel vision when it comes to reading because I have wanted to prepare my students as best as possible for their mainstream classes. My vision and outlook has been geared towards their short-term needs and I have felt a strong impulse to evaluate and measure their understanding of a

given task or assignment. These intensive reading activities have yielded positive results, but the fact remains that my students are not reading enough outside of the classroom. They are not pursuing any independent reading once they leave the class and this has had an impact on the rate of the development of their language skills. As I reflected on this situation, I came across some readings from Louise Rosenblatt in which she discusses the power of literature and the different reading stances a reader can take when approaching a text.

Rosenblatt explains that reading is a transaction between the reader and the text whereby the reader interacts with the author's words in a personal manner. She goes on to say that a readers bring their past history, experiences, feelings and knowledge of the world as frameworks that they can apply to each reading. As the reading process starts, readers selectively focus on particular details and attempts to construct meaning from the text. If their expectations are not met as they read, experienced readers make adjustments as they interact with the text until they are able to extract the information or desirable meaning from the article, poem or narrative (*Literature*, 26-7). She also asserts that as readers approach a text, they have a certain mindset which guides their reading and allows them to enter a text with a specific purpose so that they can search for specific information, facts or details. This type of "narrow" reading allows readers to push away any distracting information that does not serve the purpose so that they can take away the information they are seeking. Rosenblatt defines this reading stance as *efferent* because the reader is only concerned with "carrying away" specific information to satisfy an external demand or need (*Literary*, 269). In this type of reading, the reader will use the

information from the text to complete a task, such as building a desk, completing a list of literary questions or cooking a meal.

Most of the reading that my students do falls into the efferent reading stance. They have been trained to approach reading as a task that requires them to search out details, facts and examples and use them to answer questions as a way to demonstrate that they understood what they read or to prove that they have indeed completed the reading assignment. Even though these types of activities and tasks are important for my students, I have not given enough importance to the *aesthetic* reading stance which allows readers to live through and experience and savor the text from their own unique personal perspective. It is in this space, where they can feel, hear and experience the author's world in such a personal way that allows them to bring the text to life in a particular way that is much more meaningful. It is through their reactions and emotions that they are able to live through the literary experience, and this transaction tends to be much more powerful and provides readers with a much richer and deeper reading of the text (*Literary*, 33, 35). This particular approach to reading should not be overlooked or viewed as lesser than the efferent mindset. The act of evoking a text and using one's life experiences, history and views to help construct meaning requires a great deal of cognitive skill. As readers begin to enter the literary work, they begin to become aware of their relationship with the text and it is during this time that they focus all of their attention to the words and images the author is attempting to convey. In contrast, when readers approach a text from an efferent reading stance, they will be drawn to words and images that only satisfy the completion of a particular task that demands they read the text. In an aesthetic reading experience readers take each word with a careful eye, so that

they can see, hear and feel the world that the author is attempting to communicate and share with them (*Reader*, 29).

It is this last point discussed by Rosenblatt in her work that captures my attention. As a lifelong reader, I have had the pleasure of entering the literary world of authors such as Jane Austen or J.K Rowling only to find myself immersed in the drama of a character's life or savoring moments of adventure and discovery in worlds that I have come across through a character's eyes. As Rosenblatt states, "literature may enable us to exercise our senses more intensely and more fully than we otherwise have time or opportunity to. Through literature we may enjoy the beauty or the grandeur of nature and the exotic splendor of scenes in far distant lands" (*Literature*, 36). I view this as a part of a student's education, growth and development into adulthood. Many adolescents should have the opportunity to experience the various facets of life and different viewpoints that reflect how we are all unique. The act of discovery is an important part of growing and must be encouraged and fostered in the classroom. For Rosenblatt, literature offers students the amazing opportunity to discover worlds, cultures, people, societies and themselves if they are provided the space and text to start their journey (*Literary*, 272).

Recognizing the importance of aesthetic reading is the first step towards implementation, but one needs to be very careful about how this type of reading should be presented in the class. As instructors, we have a tendency to follow up readings with activities and assessments that check for comprehension, but Rosenblatt warns us that this then changes the purpose of the reading into an efferent exercise and not an aesthetic one (*Literary*, 276). If we are truly committed to offering our students personal reading experiences which will allow them to construct meaning through the use of their own

personal history and knowledge, then we must create a space for this type of reading experience. As our students gain more confidence and feel more comfortable with this reading experience they will begin to question and respond to the literary works in a meaningful authentic manner. As their instructors, we can help guide them in this process by avoiding questions that seek out facts about form and specific content, instead providing them with the space to share and express their reactions, discoveries and questions in a more open format. It should be our goal to foster dialogue and analysis of literature, but in a way that is much more open and not as rigid and predictable (*Literary*, 276). This last point can be challenging because for many teachers there is a natural tendency to check our students' comprehension, but this is not the underlying principle in aesthetic reading. In order to be successful in developing students' aesthetic reading skills, we must be very clear about what type of reading exercise we would like them to do. If we are attempting to create lifelong readers, then we must be prepared to change how we approach our discussions and follow-up activities. We must provide students with opportunities to share their reactions, opinions and interpretations of the text in a more open and student-centered format. If students are shown that reading can be a personal, meaningful exercise, then we will have succeeded in opening the door to exciting new worlds that they may have never had the chance to explore and discover.

Conclusion

Somewhere along the way, as teachers we have lost sight of the power personal reading can have on our students' learning process. Making room for aesthetic reading will strengthen a reading program and most likely improve our students reading abilities so that they can perform at a higher level when working on intensive reading.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTENSIVE READING IN THE CLASSROOM

The rather curious situation has arisen whereby, despite universal acceptance of the view that one becomes a good reader through reading, reading lessons, where most time is actually spent on reading (as opposed to discussion, answering questions, etc.) are relatively rare.

- Chris Moran and Eddie Williams (1993, 66)

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Explore the benefits of incorporating an extensive reading program.
- Understand the impact ER has on vocabulary development.

In the previous chapters, I briefly explored reading in a second language and the importance of approaching a text with an *aesthetic* reading mindset, and now I would like to discuss the benefits an extensive reading program can provide English language learners. I believe that students learn to read by reading (Grabe, 396) and therefore I believe that an extensive reading program will help my students become fluent readers. With the addition of this reading program my students will more fully develop their reading skills, explore new worlds, increase their knowledge of the world and create strong reading habits for the future. As instructors we need to recognize that our students must be presented with a well-balanced approach to reading, one in which choice and reading for pleasure play critical roles. Including extensive reading into a curriculum will not lead to the complete abandonment of intensive reading, but it signifies a change in mindset and focus where each approach has its place in the classroom. Intensive reading allows students and teachers to read shorter texts with a great deal of attention and detail

to language, format of the narrative and the structure of genres. All of these components and skills are invaluable because they help students learn about literature and writing so that they can identify these traits on their own in future texts. In contrast to this, extensive reading asks students and teachers to read a large amount of self-selected material and the focus is placed on general understanding of the overall text and messages. The focus shifts from the word or sentence level in extensive reading because now students are asked to read self-selected texts that fall well into their linguistic skill range (Day and Bamford, 1997). Each of these approaches is invaluable to readers and both must be utilized if we wish to help our students develop into strong, fluent readers of English (Renandya and Jacobs, 296).

Once again, if we would like to support our students in their learning journey as they work towards fluency we must look at the following benefits that come from implementing an extensive reading program. In order to achieve fluency, students must develop a strong base of sight vocabulary because it will allow them to become very familiar with particular words. Many fluent readers seem to read with ease because they have highly developed sight vocabulary which they recognize immediately (automatically), and this in turn decreases the possibility of any linguistic distractions (Day and Bamford, 12-13, 16-17; Renandya and Jacobs 299). In order to provide students with this opportunity to strengthen and grow their sight vocabulary, we must offer them ample level-appropriate reading material. However, this must be done with the understanding that students choose their own text.

It is not enough to work on sight vocabulary, but extensive reading also allows students to expand their knowledge of general vocabulary. Grabe states that "fluent

readers need a massive receptive vocabulary that is rapidly, accurately and automatically accessed" (1988, 63). If this is an attribute a fluent reader possesses, then what barriers do our international students face when reading? It is with extensive reading that we can assist our learners to build up their receptive vocabulary base so that they can achieve some measureable sense of success when reading in English. Many of us who have studied a foreign language understand the important role vocabulary knowledge occupies in the learning process. According to Nagy and Herman, "incidental learning of words during reading may be the easiest and single most powerful means of promoting large-scale vocabulary growth" (27). Even though this particular statement is in reference to first language acquisition, Bamford and Day explain that from "a cognitive point of view there is no essential difference between first and second language reading" (17). From their perspective, in both instances the reader must have a very strong and ample vocabulary base in order to achieve fluency (Day and Bamford, 17). For those of us who work with beginner and lower-intermediate students, the issue then becomes a matter of providing material in which the instances of unknown words is very low for the reader. Ideally, this means that in an extensive reading program students should read texts at an *i minus 1* (*i* represents the students language level) level so that readers can build up their sight vocabulary and learn new words (Day and Bamford, 16). Extensive reading programs call for a large amount of reading which provides students with multiple opportunities to come across familiar words repeatedly. The more familiar the general and sight vocabulary, the easier and more automatic the reading process will become for our students. This is an important step in strengthening their reading skills which will lead them to become fluent readers (Day and Bamford, 18).

One final benefit that comes about from extensive reading is the opportunity we provide our students to develop a lifelong habit whereby they can learn about the world and themselves. It has always been my belief that part of the learning journey is to have as many new life experiences as possible. Louise Rosenblatt has explored the power reading can have for students if they are provided the space to create their own meaning and connections through literature. It is in these personal quiet reading moments where young readers discover the life and energy that a text can reveal to them, if they choose to open themselves up to the pleasure of reading. It is not surprising to find that once readers discover reading, they will feel compelled to discuss, share and respond to what they have read (Lesesne, 63). As instructors we may feel compelled to assess and evaluate our students as soon as we notice their eagerness to share, but we must resist the temptation. The fact that our students are reading a book is the ultimate goal of a good extensive reading program (Atwell, 17). We can continue to foster and encourage our students' exploration of the literary world by allowing them time to read and share their enthusiasm in what they are reading with their classmates. Offering students the space to use their voice can only deepen their appreciation and understanding of reading for pleasure.

As students become more empowered as readers their confidence and personal motivation will fuel their curiosity to continue their reading journey. This is a key component to keep in mind because by offering our students this new reading venue they will be able to work on strengthening their background knowledge as they are exposed to a wide range of reading topics and texts. For many ELL students, building up their personal reading experiences and strengthening their base of knowledge will help them

read more challenging academic texts. Fluent readers are constantly accessing *schemata* (Grabe, 1986, p. 35) to assist them in their reading process. As a reading and writing teacher, I believe that teaching my students to feel ownership over their own learning is just as important as any other lesson I can teach. I know that my students will learn how to read, but my fear is that I will not teach my students to be readers once they leave the classroom. This is a skill that they must carry with them when they leave my classroom because it will permit them to continue to flourish as learners, but it will also enrich their lives.

Ultimately we would like to help our students become readers who are capable of working through a text quickly and with ease so that they can comprehend whatever they are asked to or choose to read. In order to prepare our students to achieve this kind of reading success, we must provide them with a large number of reading opportunities. And yet, this is not enough. The material must be easy, interesting and self-selected if we would like to encourage independent, extensive reading (Renandya and Jacobs, 296-7). This new approach to reading requires the instructor to step away being a central figure in the reading process, which is better suited for intensive reading activities, and move into a more participatory role. This new role will allow us to serve as guides as we explain the benefits of extensive reading and become readers ourselves (Renandya and Jacobs, 300).

Conclusion

Extensive reading makes sense, but why aren't we all doing it? Exposing our students to a wide range of literary texts and genres provides these English language learners with a plethora of opportunities to deepen their understanding of the language, culture and vocabulary. Incorporating ER can only enhance and enrich our students' learning.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION: GETTING STARTED

The purpose of this chapter is to address the following questions:

- When and where should students read?
- What type of literature should be purchased to start an ER program?
- Should students be allowed to use dictionaries as they read?
- How can students be placed into the appropriate level?
- Why is it important to include an orientation for the extensive reading program?

Identifying the need for an extensive reading program is an important step in addressing the needs of my students. Now, the challenge of building a solid program begins. In order for this to be successful in the classroom, I must have the support of my school and enough material to embark on this reading journey. In all honesty, this seems like a very daunting and overwhelming task to take on as a fairly new ESOL teacher. But I suppose the most important thing to remember is that I am starting the process, and adjustments can be made as I gain more experience. There is always some fear and trepidation when you venture into a new arena where you are unsure of so many variables that you cannot control. As I start the new school year, I must be prepared to address certain questions and issues as I begin to set up an extensive reading program.

Books

In all the literature I have read about extensive reading, each author discusses the importance of having a wide variety of reading material because it is the foundation of a

successful reading program. After all, students will enjoy reading if they are allowed to choose from a diverse selection of reading material. Being able to provide this to my students the first year poses a problem, because I cannot automatically provide them a library with hundreds of books. This, however, does not have to be an insurmountable obstacle if I make my goals known to those with whom I work. My solution to this challenge has a variety of possibilities. Recently, our school librarian has begun working on collecting young adult literature and ordering literature for language learners for our international students. We both identified this need on our own and I was extremely excited to discuss with her my ideas about implementing an extensive reading program for this upcoming fall semester. By the start of the year, we should have approximately 55 graded readers from *Penguin Readers* and *Oxford Bookworm Series*, and in addition to this, my department is allowing me to purchase approximately 20-25 graded readers for my classroom. My goal is to build up a small library for the classroom which can supplement the materials in the school library. In our collection we will have texts that range from level 2 through 5, and I also will be making use of the public library in town which has a very strong children's and young adult section, in addition to a small collection of *Oxford Bookworm Series* readers.

I have made the decision that most of my students would benefit a great deal from quality language learner literature to start the program because most of my students come in with low to mid-level intermediate language skills. It is critical that I provide my students with material that they find engaging, but it must be level appropriate and well written. These texts must be written in a clear and accessible language so that second language learners are able to interact with the text with minimal challenges or difficulties

(Day and Bamford, 64-65). As an ESOL teacher, I witness the low self-confidence and motivation that many students have as they approach a reading task. These negative feelings towards reading only worsen with each assignment because they are faced with genres, syntax, vocabulary and contexts that are unfamiliar or inaccessible to them due to their language skills. Paul Nation and Karen Ming-tzu discuss the importance of providing students with the reading opportunities to encounter high frequency words by using graded readers, so that students can become strong, fluent and confident readers of a second language (374-375). In order for me to help my students reach their true reading potential, I must allow them to have the space and time in which they can experiment and live through some positive reading experiences. As students gain confidence in their skills, they will have a more positive attitude and many will begin to feel more comfortable in taking risks when it comes to reading a more challenging book on a topic which they find appealing and fascinating.

When and where will students read?

Ensuring that my students have a variety of appropriate reading material is just the first step among many if I would like to establish a successful extensive reading program. Given the fact that I am the only ESOL teacher and I usually have a small number of students, I will be able to add this new component into the existing course. This however brings up some interesting questions. How often will students read? Will we do extensive reading in class or just for homework? How many books should students read? How do I place students at a certain level? Do I allow dictionary use? How will I keep track of what students read? And the final concern I have is how I will present this new reading program to my students so that they understand what I expect

from them (Day and Bamford, 83). As you can see, there seems to be an endless amount of questions, concerns and issues that need to be addressed before taking this program into the classroom.

At the start of this process I reflected on my work as an ESOL teacher and I recognized that my students needed to have positive and pleasurable reading experiences. Through extensive reading I believe that my students' language development will flourish; however, they must have the opportunity and support to read self-selected material every day. The question of how much and how often students should read has been one that I have had to analyze carefully. In their article "Graded Readers and Vocabulary", Paul Nation and Karen Wang Ming-tza argue that students "need to read a minimum of five books at each level and need to work their way through the levels. This reading needs to be done at a fairly intensive rate of around a book per week. This will ensure that learners meet words again before they have forgotten their previous meeting with the words" (374-5). If I would like to foster and develop strong reading habits, improve my students' sight and general vocabulary knowledge and strengthen their reading skills, then I believe that they should read on their own each day for about thirty minutes. Therefore, my students will be asked to take their books back to their rooms each night and read. Initially, this will be their only reading assignment. I do not want to assign intensive reading assignments at the start of the course because I would like the students to develop a sense of what it means to read for pleasure so that they can develop a personal connection with their early reading experiences in our class.

In addition to reading on their own, I will be incorporating silent reading in the classroom twice a week. It is important for me to establish how crucial this personal

reading time is in my students' education. Including extensive reading into our daily schedule will help strengthen the program and foster a stable and structured learning environment for my new readers. In order to ensure complete participation, students will be notified each week of the extensive reading days so that they come to class with the appropriate mindset and with their books. It will be extremely important for me to be as transparent and clear on our daily lessons so that when students enter class they know what is expected of them. By placing a great deal of attention on extensive reading at the start of the course, students will view it as an essential component of the course and the learning process and not just as something we do on the side as an extra reading exercise. They will view it as an integral part of how they will be able to improve their English.

At the start of the program I will provide students with a reading record form where they will keep track of how many pages and how much time they have spent reading each night. This record will help me monitor their reading pace and notice if there are any reading level or interest issues that I should address with an individual. As I am the only ESOL teacher, I have complete control over what the course should look like, and this allows me a certain level of freedom to experiment with how much reading I can introduce into the actual class day. Also, it will be very important for me to be a visible participant in this reading program as I start the school year which means that I need to make sure to have my own books ready for our silent reading time. My participation will serve as an example so that I can show them step by step what my expectations are for this type of reading. On a personal level my participation will allow me to take up reading again, a pastime that I have neglected in the past few years.

Dictionary Usage

For many of my students the idea of not using a dictionary as they read will seem very strange and go against everything they have learned about reading. It will be very important for me to present a strong and clear case as to why we will not use them for extensive reading. If they are to become fluent readers, they must learn either to ignore unknown words or to guess their meaning in a context. This is important because they need to be able to recognize that not every word needs to be translated in order to grasp the meaning of a text. Also, if I were to allow dictionaries, students would not be able to work on increasing their reading pace because they would constantly disrupt their reading flow. One of the main goals of extensive reading is to reinforce and strengthen students' sight vocabulary reading skills in such a way that they can automatically recognize words and not have to slow down to figure out their meaning. This is a skill which fluent readers possess and which facilitates their reading process (Day and Bamford, 93).

Ultimately, I would like to help my students develop the habit of responding personally to a text and create their own meaning through this interaction without the presence of a looming academic task awaiting them as they finish reading. It is important for them to experience reading as its own reward because so much of what they do focuses on intensive reading and analysis of the text. Their extensive reading will differ from their other reading assignments. They will have the opportunity to work with easier texts, which do not require the use of a dictionary if they are placed at the appropriate level, and they will have the freedom to choose any book they find interesting and appealing. With time and experience students will be able to fully understand and appreciate the mechanics of each reading approach.

Level Placement

One way of avoiding dictionary use is to place students at the appropriate reading level. In order for students to take advantage of extensive reading they must read a large amount of easy and interesting material (*i minus I*). My placement procedure for the class will be done in the following manner. During the first week of class I will provide students with a short reading sample from the various levels (2-5) and ask them to highlight or mark on each page the words they do not know. Each student will be assigned to a specific level based on the amount of words they have marked on each text. They should not have more than 2-3 unknown words per page. Identifying the appropriate level is critical to the success I would like my students to feel as they work on building fluency and avoid feeling frustrated (Day and Bamford, 109).

Student orientation

Each year I have the opportunity to work with a group of students who are eager to learn and put forth their best effort to learn English. They are faced with many academic challenges and therefore they come to class with a sense of urgency. My first year teaching English was a challenge, but I soon realized that my students were ready to read, write and complete any assignment I asked them to do. Even though this seemed like a dream scenario to me for my first year teaching, I have come to learn how students can benefit from understanding the reason why we do certain activities in class. Allowing students to understand my thought process and my goals for a particular task has made an impact on how my students learn. It is important for them to understand that each task or assignment is designed to work on particular language skills which will help them improve and develop into stronger learners. If I would like to help my students

become fluent readers and develop a habit of reading for pleasure, then my expectations need to be clear. However, it will not be enough to present them with a list of my expectations and a definition of extensive reading. The work I plan to do with my class at the start of the year must be revisited throughout the remainder of the course.

Before I ask my students to delve into extensive reading, I would like to explore their personal opinions on what it means to read and how they feel about reading in a second language. This personal discovery and exploration will allow me to uncover any negative attitudes or cultural barriers that may affect my students' acceptance of this type of reading experience (Nuttall, 29-30). Most of my students will probably accept my justification for implementing this reading program and not question it because of their cultural background, but this is not enough. If I hope to teach my students to be autonomous and fluent readers, I must provide them with the time to experience the benefits of this type of reading. In order to achieve these goals, I must be aware of certain roadblocks.

To assume that most of my students understand the reading process and have the same strong beliefs towards it as I do would be very irresponsible of me. Some of my students come from a background where reading and memorizing a text is valued a great deal more than analyzing and questioning the author's ideas. Others view reading as an exercise to practice grammar or learn about history or science, but they have very little experience with fiction or poetry. There are still others who come from backgrounds where the spoken word is valued a great deal more (Nuttall, 31). So how do I, in a short few months, consolidate all these different viewpoints and convince my students that

reading can open up new worlds and experiences, and at the same time improve their language skills?

In order to address this challenge, I must present my students with a clear overview of extensive reading. Students need to understand how this type of reading differs from other reading experiences, why it is important and what they will be doing (Day and Bamford, 120). Having an orientation program at the start of the course will allow me to address the importance of the program and what they will be asked to do. I plan to use three days at the start of the course to discuss and present this new reading component. Many of the activities will focus on issues of reading, personal experiences with reading, the differences between intensive and extensive reading and the benefits of an ER program. Even though the orientation process is meant to help students understand what we will be doing throughout the course, it will also allow me to observe and assess more closely my students' language skill levels in reading, writing and speaking. These activities will also demonstrate to my students how our class will run on a daily basis. For some, the shift from a more teacher-centered/lecture class to more student involvement may take some practice and adjustments. During these first few informative lessons I would like to help my students explore and reflect on their past reading experiences, their background in education and the ideas/concerns/opinions they have about reading in their native language and in English.

On the first day of orientation students will be asked to think about their own personal reading experiences from their previous schools.

Personal reading experiences

1. What are your first memories of reading?
2. Did anyone read to you? If so, who? If not, why not?
3. What kinds of things did they read?
4. Where did this reading take place?
5. What kinds of things did you enjoy most?
6. Do you still enjoy reading these kinds of things today? If not, how has your reading changed?
7. What types of reading have been most important to you?
8. What role does reading play in your life now (for enjoyment/fun, for school, etc.)?

In order to take advantage of this activity, students will prepare their answers the previous night before sharing and discussing them with the class. This will alleviate some of the stress and fear some may have about speaking up and sharing their ideas spontaneously. This will be a starting point for me to take a quick snapshot of how their personal reading background/experiences have been shaped. Also, this first short sharing/discussion exercise will allow me to demonstrate how they will be expected to participate in class discussions. Following this exercise, I will share my own personal reading history and allow students the opportunity to ask me some questions about my background. Then I would like to further explore the topic with the short reflective text "Exploring Reading", in which the students will have time to reflect on their own reading journey thus far in their lives (Day and Bamford, "Extensive Reading Activities" 14-15). This short reading presents some very interesting personal and reflective questions about reading. As a final assignment to this first day of orientation, each student will be asked

to take into consideration the questions, the discussion and the reading we have done and write a journal entry. It will be an open response so that I can see where their thoughts, opinions and concerns lie concerning this skill.

The second day in the orientation process will focus on the English reading experiences they had before coming to Culver. All of our students come with many years of English study, and I would like to explore the culture of the classroom and the dynamics of the student and teacher relationship. The following questions will be given to students (Day and Bamford, "Extensive Reading Activities" 17):

Reading in English

1. How much do you like reading in English? Explain.
2. What do you find difficult about reading in English?
3. Do you spend any time reading for pleasure each week? How much?
4. Describe what you think makes a good book interesting.
5. What kinds of books do you like to read? (sports, adventure, mystery, etc.)
6. Did you learn how to read English in class with your teacher? Describe what your reading experiences were like in the class. (discussion, translation, answer questions, etc.)

As we begin our second day discussion I would like to draw students' attention on the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their classmates. I find that most of my students feel more comfortable talking about themselves and where they come from which is a great confidence booster for the quiet students. During this sharing period, I will act as the scribe and take notes for everyone to look over, so that we can identify some of the main concerns and issues students have towards reading. Once we finish this sharing exercise, I will describe in greater detail what type of reading experiences they

will have in our class. Most likely, a majority of students will have had some intensive reading experience, and I will therefore start to discuss the traits and benefits of this type of reading. However, it will not be enough just to discuss the concept, so I will have students read, "My Name" by Sandra Cisneros and answer some text and vocabulary questions. Throughout the entire orientation process I would like to include an experiential component to the lesson for my students as a way of making the concepts seem more tangible and concrete.

On the third day of orientation I will present students with my extensive reading goals. Once we have read through these goals, I would like them to share their reaction to them. This may be challenging for some of my quieter students, so I will ask students to think about what stands out, which goals seem the most interesting or how they feel about a particular goal. Most likely they will have some questions or concerns about this type of reading, and it will be at this time that I will present students with a short text about extensive reading. As they read this short text, I will ask them to mark or highlight all the characteristics of ER so we can compare it to our list of intensive reading descriptions.

Extensive Reading Goals

1. You must read a book a week.
2. Do not read a book that does not interest you.
3. If you start reading a book that you don't like, you **HAVE THE RIGHT** to stop reading it and find a new one.
4. Keep a record of when and how much you read each day on your record sheet.
5. You must find a quiet and comfortable place to read for the whole time in and out of class because understanding what you read requires you to concentrate and think.

6. The book you read should be easy, interesting and enjoyable.
7. DO NOT USE A DICTIONARY while you read.
8. HAVE FUN!

(Adapted from Nancie Atwell, 116-7)

Following this presentation, I will hand out short graded reader texts to each student and ask them to read each one quietly and mark all the new, unknown words. Before discussing how our extensive reading program will work, I would like to have students reflect on the texts they just read. I would like them to compare this reading experience to the intensive reading of "My Name" by Sandra Cisneros. I will ask them to think about whether these readings were easier or harder, how they felt as they read and if they think they can explain in 1-2 sentences what they just read. Once again, I will ask them to reflect on these questions for a few minutes to ensure maximum participation. As students share their opinions, I will be taking notes on their observations. Finally, I would like to wrap-up this part of the lesson by asking my students to help me complete a chart which compares extensive and intensive reading. The following chart will be placed on the board and will be used to end our discussion on the two reading approaches. I will ask students to help me fill out the chart so that we use this visual aid to simplify the principal differences of each reading style (Welch, 1998).

Extensive	Reading	Intensive
	Purpose	
	Level	
	Amount	

	Speed	
--	-------	--

For homework that night they write a journal entry about extensive reading. For example, they talk about what they understand about this type of reading, express their opinion about this new reading approach or use this time to question and voice any doubts they have about extensive reading. Once again, this will provide me some insight into how well they have processed the day's lesson, what aspects of the reading program may not be clear and whether or not my students still feel confused about what it is they will be doing.

Immediately following the orientation we will spend class time doing the following:

- choosing level-appropriate books;
- learning how to track their reading progress;
- learning how to check out books from the classroom library;
- discussing why no dictionaries will be used for extensive reading;
- reiterating the goals of extensive reading.

I envision coming across other issues and questions as I work with my class. I will be journaling on a regular basis this year so that I can assess how well orientation and the remainder of the program have progressed. It will be very important for me to be flexible and open to changes that may come up as I start this first year. My outlook will be one of learning as I go and maintaining a positive attitude as I promote reading to my students.

Conclusion

Before introducing extensive reading into the classroom, we need to think through our goals and expectations. However, it is equally important to share this information with our students. They need to understand and buy into extensive reading, and therefore, exposing our students to some of the research and benefits of the program is necessary.

CHAPTER 6

EXTENSIVE READING ACTIVITIES

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Explore various activities that can be used to evaluate and assess students' reading performance.

As teachers, we are trained to assess our students as a way of checking what they have learned from their coursework. It seems ingrained in my mind that if I hand out a reading, then I must have some sort of follow-up activity to check the students' vocabulary and comprehension of the text. But this is exactly the opposite of what extensive reading and an aesthetic reading stance ask of a reader. In my three years as an ESOL teacher, I have spent countless hours designing lessons and assigning reading and writing activities, many of which have been very labor intensive, both for my students and for me. So, how can I break this routine and habit as I enter a different reading atmosphere and perspective? By choosing to expand my students' learning experience and widening my teaching lens, I have made a commitment which will need to be strengthened and reinforced frequently. It will be very important for me to place the extensive reading goals and expectations in a very visible place in our classroom, so that I can refer to them each day as we work on our extensive reading. Students will grow accustomed to thinking about this different, but equally important reading approach. These visual aids will also serve as a good reminder to me that I ultimately hope to instill a passion for reading and develop fluent readers. As long as I keep these in my mind, I

feel confident that the projects and assignments we work on in class will enhance their reading experiences.

The following activities come from Julian Bamford and Richard Day's book, Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language. Initially these will be the activities that will be used, but as part of the program, I will be asking for feedback from students to ensure that these activities are adding to their reading experiences. My goal is to avoid the traditional intensive reading exercises we do each day because I would like to clearly define for my students the differences between the two reading approaches, both of which are necessary when learning a second language. Therefore, if a particular activity seems to be receiving negative feedback it will be removed and replaced with a more appealing one with the help of my students.

Students will be asked to read each night for homework, which means they will have to keep track of how much they read. It is important for them to understand that extensive reading will be part of their daily work, whether in class or outside of it, which means they will also have to keep track of what they read. Students will be asked to organize their records in folders and bring them to class each day. This simple record will help me see how quickly they are working through a text. If a student seems to be lagging behind, he/she may not be interested in the book which means I should encourage him/her to drop this book and pick one that is more interesting. If the level is too difficult, then I can guide the student to an easier and more accessible reading level. It will also facilitate my informal conversations with my students on days when we have quiet reading days. I can use these charts to check with their progress and attitude towards what they are reading (56-7).

Reading Record

Title	Author	Level	Date	# of pages read

It will be very important to help students build ownership and feel empowered by their reading experiences. Students will be asked to rate a book once they have completed it in a very simple and quick manner. All they have to do is go to the end of the book and use a very straight-forward rating system to help future readers decide if this is a good book to choose. They will also have the option of writing a comment if they feel strongly about what they read. An added bonus to this system is that I will have immediate feedback from students as to how they are reacting to certain genres and authors. At the end of the school year, I will use these comments to think about what new books we should order for the library. It is a simple exercise that involves the student in the extensive reading process and plants the seed in their minds that their opinions and responses to reading can have an impact on others.

Good
OK
Didn't like it.

Even though I would like students to gain a sense of independence and not feel like they will be assessed on every book they have read, I do feel it is important to have one-on-one conversations or interviews with them. As soon as I notice that students have had the opportunity to read a few books, I will set up time in class or after class to conduct my interviews. Students will be given a list of possible talking points that they can prepare on their own and they will be able to choose the book they would like to discuss with me, but on the day of the interview they must not use any notes to discuss these topics. The following questions are a sample of what I will hand out to students (Day and Bamford, 84-85).

Book interview

1. What is the book about?
2. How did you feel when you finished the book?
3. Who was your favorite character? Explain.
4. What was the most interesting part of the book?
5. What did you think about when you read the book?
6. Would you recommend this book? Explain.

This type of exercise will be very helpful to students who are shy and timid about speaking up in class. During this process students will be able work on their speaking skills and get accustomed to sharing their opinions and providing their own personal responses to a text, all of which are skills they need to have for their mainstream classes. Also, through these individual meetings, I will be able to gauge their interests, motivation and attitude towards what they are reading.

In addition to sharing their ideas with me, students will be asked to have brief book talks with their classmates each week. This will give them an opportunity to

continue practicing their speaking skills in small groups. Once again, students will be asked in their mainstream classes to work cooperatively and share their ideas with their classmates as they work on more challenging texts. This type of activity will help boost their confidence and prove to them that they are capable of discussing a story and offering their opinion about it. Each student will be paired up and he/she will share some of the following information about his/her book (99-100):

- when and where the story takes place;
- who the characters are and what are they like;
- what happened in the story;
- what he/she liked the best/least;
- what he/she would change about the book;
- if they have experienced something similar to what happened in the story;
- what they learned from reading the book;
- if this is a book he/she would recommend with explanation.

As a follow-up to this activity, I will ask students to journal about how it felt to share their ideas, what was easy or hard for them and what they would do differently next time. The second part of their journal should focus on their role as the listener. I would like them to share what they learned about the book, if their partner explained the story well, and if not, what he/she should do differently for the next time.

Using poster presentations is another interesting extensive reading exercise that will allow students to have ownership of the books they are reading and share their responses and experiences. This is an activity that can be used after the reading program has been in place for a few weeks because students will have read a variety of books. In

order to provide students with an example, I will bring into class a poster I have designed on one of the books I have read. We will also discuss what makes a good poster and what the students should avoid when doing this type of activity (108-109). Once we have established the poster guidelines and expectations, each student will be assigned a specific day to present his/her poster to the class. Depending on the number students I have in class, I will spread out the presentations over a span of 2-3 days. As a wrap-up, students will be asked to journal about their experience as participants. I would like to receive their feedback and have them share with me which posters they found most interesting and why.

One final sharing activity that I would like to implement once the reading program has been established is a weekly reading blog. Rather than ask students to keep a traditional journal about their reading experiences, students will be given time to post their ideas online. In addition to this, they will be asked to read and respond to what their classmates have written. These postings will be based on prompts that I will assign to provide my students with an open forum to write about what they are reading and how much they are enjoying their books. At times we will use this class page to post book reviews so that the rest of the class can use their classmates' recommendations to choose a book (110, 144-146, 153).

Throughout the course, students will be asked to provide feedback on the various extensive reading activities. I would like to avoid using comprehension questions, summary reports, traditional oral reports and vocabulary exercises because the students will be working on these activities each week as we work on our intensive reading texts. If there is a negative response to any of the activities mentioned above, we will have a

class discussion about why this activity does not work well and what type of activity the students would prefer to do. The extensive reading portion of the class needs to be clearly defined in such a way that the students can experience the true differences in the efferent and aesthetic reading stances. I believe that through the students' responses and feedback, I will be able to make adjustments to the extensive reading program that will address the interests and needs of my students. In addition to this feedback system, I would like the students to evaluate the program as a whole and provide me with suggestions and comments about their extensive reading experiences. The following questions will provide me with a quick snapshot of how students feel about reading and their experience with extensive reading. Students will also be given an opportunity to write a short narrative in their journal so that they can reflect on their extensive reading experiences.

Evaluation: Extensive Reading

1. Do you feel that reading has helped you improve your English language skills?
2. Has your attitude about reading changed?
3. Have you learned more about the culture and people through your reading?
4. Do you like to read for pleasure now?
5. Do you understand the difference between reading for pleasure and academic reading?
6. Do you know how to find a book in a library that interests you and that is the correct reading level for you?
7. Do you need to use a dictionary every time you pick up a book to read?
8. Can you guess the meaning of new words when you are reading?
9. Would you like to read some books in English for pleasure during the summer?

10. Do you think that extensive reading should be a part of the ESOL and English 1 classes?

(Day and Bamford, 158-9)

After reading over each evaluation, I will sit down and discuss with my colleague, Cathy Tulungun and our campus librarian, Susan Freymiller the information I have collected. It will be important for us to look over how effective the program was implemented, which texts/genres are the most/least popular and what changes we should make to strengthen the program for future classes. Each of us feels very strongly about the positive impact reading can have on learning a second language, and therefore we will work towards presenting and sharing our experiences with our colleagues on campus. By doing this, the remainder of the faculty can begin to understand the learning challenges and issues our students face and the type of academic support they need to receive from us in the classroom.

Conclusion

Once we have made the distinction between intensive and extensive reading to our students, we must also develop activities that are different. These activities are meant to develop and encourage our students to become independent and fluent readers. The focus of extensive reading is to develop and foster personal reading experiences, and therefore, the follow-up exercises should strive to achieve the same goals.

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