

Integrating Xreading into class time using post-reading tasks

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Abstract. The Xreading website provides students with access to an extensive virtual library of graded readers. Teachers can then use it to keep track of which titles the students access, the total number of words they read, their reading speed, and also whether they have completed post-reading quizzes. However, an overreliance on monitoring student progress entirely outside of class using word targets or quizzes can potentially be circumnavigated by reluctant students who dislike reading regularly. This paper will share how the teacher integrated short creative post-reading tasks into the weekly digital reading assignment of a compulsory English language class in an attempt to ensure students were engaging with the stories and reading regularly. It was found that the tasks enabled students to interact and discuss their reading with their classmates and also helped demonstrate the value and importance of extensive reading to students by further integrating it into class time.

Keywords: extensive reading, Xreading.

1. Introduction

Xreading provides a complete digital solution to the implementation of an Extensive Reading (ER) programme. For an annual subscription, the students can access a substantial virtual library of graded readers, and teachers can monitor the books they have read, word counts, reading speeds, and ability to answer comprehension quizzes via Xreading's Learner Management System (LMS). This resource helps solve many of the long standing issues with setting up an effective ER programme, mainly stocking and managing a library with a sufficient range and number of readers, and being able to monitor whether the students are actually doing the assigned volume of reading. However, the convenience of assigning and tracking

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reading outside of class using the Xreading LMS means ER is often relegated to exclusively a homework assignment unless the teacher finds useful ways to integrate it back into class time. Robb and Kano (2013) describe this approach as additive ER, when the reading occurs entirely outside of class and places the least burden on the teacher. However, what they label as replacement ER, that substitutes alternative class activities to further integrate ER into lessons, could potentially be the most beneficial approach for students (Bamford & Day, 2004).

Integrating ER into class time seeks to reinforce to students the value of reading, as well as the importance of completing the activity regularly. It also has many added benefits through establishing a reading community that can engage and interact with others regarding the titles they have read (van Amelsvoort, 2017). If ER is reduced to a homework task, then students might choose to engage with it only at a superficial level. For example, Xreading can be avoided by flipping through pages to reach the required word count whilst keeping within the target reading speed, or by choosing books based on movies they have seen to make the quizzes easier.

Furthermore, although it may be the case that quizzes are a useful method for testing reading completion that do not create more work for the instructor (Robb, 2015) and do not necessarily detract from reading enjoyment (Stoeckel, Reagan, & Hann, 2012), there are many more interesting and useful ways students can be challenged in post-reading tasks (Bamford & Day, 2004; Harrold, 2020). This paper will introduce a variety of short creative post-reading tasks that can be used to supplement and enhance Xreading by giving the students something to share in class, and also act as an additional tool for teachers to monitor whether the reading has actually been done. The tasks were chosen to be shorter and easier to complete than a book report and less repetitive than writing a weekly summary, whilst at the same time more interesting and engaging by requiring some creativity or imagination from the students. The tasks are split into two types: those done outside of class individually then shared in the next lesson, and those completed in class as a group having read the same book.

2. Participants and tasks

The class involved were first-year university students enrolled in a compulsory Reading and Writing class for all majors, studying at approximately Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) B1 level, who met for one 90-minute session each week over a 15-week semester. Based on the curriculum, students were expected to read at least 60,000 words monitored using

the Xreading LMS. This target was broken down into a weekly reading goal, with students given the additional requirement of completing ten post-reading tasks over the course of the semester. These tasks had previously been trialled with books from a physical library (Harrold, 2020). In addition to the individual tasks, at three points in the semester students were assigned the same book to read for homework then completed a group task based on the assigned text.

2.1. Individual tasks

The class were provided with a list of 15 short post-reading tasks (Harrold, 2020):

- write a summary of the story;
- write a paragraph describing your favourite character;
- draw a picture of your favourite scene and write a caption to describe it;
- write an alternative ending, showing how the story could have finished differently;
- write a letter to a character;
- write three questions you would like to ask the author about the story;
- choose a gift you would like to give to a character and explain your reasons why;
- write a paragraph describing the setting of the book;
- compare examples of the culture in the story with your own country;
- write a diary entry from the perspective of one of the characters;
- draw a diagram showing the relationship between different characters in the book;
- choose your favourite line in the story, then write it in full using quotation marks (“...”) and explain why you like it;
- make a movie poster for the book and choose actors to play each character;

- create a short comic book strip about the book; and
- create a timeline with details of key events in the story.

Students were provided with a reading journal handout with space for ten tasks (see Figure 1 for an example) to be completed over ten weeks. The teacher then explained how to complete it and provided the students with examples of each task. The students were asked to choose a different task to complete each week about one of the books they had read, and then bring their journal to share with classmates in the next lesson.

Figure 1. Reading task template

Title:		Publisher:	
Genre:		Author:	
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★		Level:	
Date complete: __/__/__			
#			
Activity Number	 <p>Colour in the stars to give the story a score out of 5.</p>		

2.2. Whole class tasks

Xreading enables all students to be assigned the same book to read. The whole class can read the same title, or each group can be assigned a different title. This can either be done inside of class or outside of class and enables a whole new variety of post-reading tasks to be completed as a group. The teacher decided to utilise this approach three times in the semester, once at the start of class when introducing students to Xreading for the first time, once in the middle, then again at the end of the semester after all the individual post-reading tasks had been completed. Students were once again provided with some autonomy in choosing which group task they would complete and were then expected to share it with the rest of the class at the end of the lesson. Group tasks were as below:

- write a script and act out your favourite scene from the story;
- create a prequel to the story, in which you describe what could have previously happened;
- create a sequel to the story, to continue on what might happen next;
- create a new character for the story;
- switch the genre of the story (e.g. romance to horror); and
- research information about the life of the author.

3. Discussion

The teacher monitored student usage of Xreading using the LMS and checked the completion of post-reading tasks. It was observed that the tasks provided creative and useful ways to reintegrate Xreading back into class time by allowing students to interact and discuss what they had been reading. Having a physical resource to show in class was a useful way for the teacher to track and remind the more reluctant readers. The individual tasks gave the teacher an easy platform to ask students follow up questions about their reading and identify those who were not reading regularly. The individual tasks could easily be shared with a partner or group without taking up much class time. Whole class activities required a greater allocation of class time but had many added benefits as they made reading a shared experience which allowed students to question and extend their understanding through collaboration and discussion. This interaction then produced both a written and oral outcome. The teacher found these tasks helped to establish reading as habitual behaviour amongst students and reinforced its value and importance as a component of the course that students were expected to complete to the best of their abilities.

4. Conclusions

The Xreading system is a useful digital resource that provides an extensive library of graded readers with an inbuilt LMS that makes tracking and monitoring students' progress easy for the teacher. However, the convenience of using this platform outside of class time has meant ER is often reduced entirely to a homework task.

This paper has hoped to introduce creative ways to reintegrate ER back into class time, not only to assist the teacher in monitoring students, but also to allow them to share their reading experiences and demonstrate the importance and value of ER as an integral part of the curriculum.

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