
Reading for pleasure: more than just a distant possibility?

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Abstract: Much has been written about the importance of extensive reading for the development of language fluency, yet it is not often an activity of choice by students as a means of improving language learning. Many of my multi-level (elementary-intermediate) Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) students reported that they did not have a reading for pleasure habit in either their first language or in English as an additional language. Reviewing the small collection of language learner literature available in the local library, and in our community AMEP resource room, and reflecting on the highly scaffolded reading activities being done in my classroom, the latter should have come as no surprise. To address these shortcomings, extensive reading became an integral part of our classroom learning in the final ten-week term of 2012, a holiday reading program was offered and “my” extensive reading approach was further developed in term one of 2013 to encourage a reading for pleasure habit. Classroom-based action research conducted on these initiatives, using systematic teacher observation, naturalistic data collection methods and computer-generated activity reports revealed that, given explicit instruction on extensive reading, on how to choose books at the right level for easy reading, and access to a wide selection of books, students improve their reading proficiency and enjoy extensive reading as a classroom activity while some continue to enjoy reading when there is no classroom imperative to do so.

Keywords: extensive reading approach, Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE), meaning-focused input, fluency development

Introduction

“One of the pioneers of language teaching”, Harold Palmer (as cited in Day & Bamford, 1998) describes extensive reading as “rapidly reading book after book” with the reader’s attention on meaning, not language, for the real-world purpose of obtaining pleasure and information as well as for language study (5). One of

the founders of the methodology of extensive reading, Michael West (as cited in Day & Bamford, 1998) describes extensive reading as “supplementary” reading to encourage “the reading habit” (New York City Board of Education 1931 Syllabus) [NYCBE], 1948) (as cited in Day & Bamford, 1998: 6). Extensive reading is in contrast to the three other styles of reading of skimming, scanning and intensive reading (6).

Reading a book for pleasure and information requires automaticity; that is, automatic word recognition (Day & Bamford, 1998: 16). This automatic word recognition can only occur when a text contains a small number of unknown words; so ideally the text contains Krashen’s “i minus 1” vocabulary and syntactic structures (16-17). “Without fluent, automatic word recognition, too great a burden is placed on readers’ working memory, leaving too few cognitive resources to devote to text comprehension” (Nation & Bonesteel, 2011: 2). Hu and Nation (2000) suggest that only 2% of running words should be unknown to allow for reasonable comprehension (423). Nation suggests that “learners should be reading graded readers at a level which is much easier than the level they would normally read at to gain meaning-focused input” (2009: 140). To develop reading fluency, learners need to read texts in which all the language items, topics and discourse structures are for the most part familiar (Nation, 1996:10). Extensive reading thus requires a large quantity of books and materials that are easy for students, and students need the skill of being able to choose suitable books. This was recently confirmed in Claridge’s (2012) two-year study following the reading progress of 39 learners of English in a tertiary college in New Zealand (4).

Claridge (2012) reports her students usually chose books above their reading proficiency level, so found reading difficult and derived little pleasure from their reading. In contrast, the student in the study who consistently chose books at or below her level of reading proficiency had a positive attitude about reading and was a regular reader while extensive reading remained a requirement of the class (8-9).

Therefore, students require the skill of choosing books at the right level and interest in order to develop a reading for pleasure habit. In addition, extensive reading activities need to be done inside as well as outside the classroom to encourage learners to read for pleasure (Widodo, 2008: 75). Teachers need to model and read with students in class and demonstrate how to read for meaning (Clarity, 2007).

Although it is attested in the literature that “extensive reading has the potential to help English language learners become better readers and make improvements in other aspects of their English skills” (Ono, Day & Harsch, 2004: 12), an approach to teaching that includes extensive reading is not explicitly highlighted or catered for in course books. Course book units of study rarely, if ever, include extensive reading from level-specific reading texts; that is, texts that would be easy for the learner to read. Therefore, the reading done in the classroom tends to be a scaffolded activity, very different to reading for pleasure.

For example, in my multi-level AMEP CSWE classroom, many of the texts read, including some taken from CSWE course books, are at or above Krashen’s “i + 1”, the level required for further language acquisition, and the level slightly above the student’s current level of competence. Hence, this kind of classroom reading needs to be highly scaffolded in order for students to gain meaning. As Yang and Wilson (2006) warn:

“We need to ensure that we, as teachers, are not reading on behalf of the students in our reading classes. Our pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading exercises can sometimes provide so much support that the students do not really have to read the text at all.” (367)

There is thus a clear need for reading activities that include materials where all the language items are familiar, with a meaning focus. This encourages fluency development (Nation, 1996: 10).

The research

As the literature clearly indicates, in order to give students an opportunity to develop a reading for pleasure habit, extensive reading should be an integral part of the learning program. I felt that, in my class, there was a need for greater attention to be allocated to meaning-focused reading activities, to modelling how to read for pleasure, and how to choose suitable books and reading materials. With the motivation to promote extensive reading, and give my learners an opportunity to read for pleasure, I adopted an “emerging” extensive reading approach in my classroom that was the basis of the action research cycle. Action research was employed as this approach to research would afford me the opportunity to investigate my teaching practice, and apply the knowledge gained, as a way of improving the quality of the teaching and learning experience while allowing me to “generate a context-specific” means of encouraging my learners to become readers in English

(Perrett, 2003: 2). Such an approach was also the most practical for me as a teacher-researcher working in a community setting and, for the most part, working autonomously.

Considering the cycles of action research as detailed by Van Lier (1994) - including goal setting, planning, action, observation, reflection and revision - as the teacher-researcher, my goal was to give learners an opportunity to become readers in English as an additional language. With the goal determined, the research included: reviewing the literature on extensive reading and extensive reading practices; designing and then teaching classroom reading lessons and providing out-of-class reading activities accordingly; systematically observing and documenting the lessons and the outcomes of the lessons and reading activities; modifying the extensive reading approach based on findings and feedback; reflecting on how to enhance the lessons in light of learner feedback and further literature review; and, further refining the emerging extensive reading approach as the cycle progressed. To this end, the research was done in three stages including: the pilot study in the last ten-week term of 2012; the seven-week holiday reading program study; and the further study in the first ten-week term of 2013. The pilot study was based on my initial literature review, and I surmised that my extensive reading approach should:

- promote the benefits of extensive reading;
- make a large quantity of books available at the appropriate level for easy, enjoyable reading;
- model how to read for meaning and judge if a book was at the right level for easy reading;
- include extensive reading in and outside the classroom; and
- include a balance of scaffolded and non-scaffolded reading texts in the learning program.

Background of the learners

As outlined in the abstract, the learners in the study were students enrolled in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Certificates in Spoken and Written English 2–3 (CSWE) class, an elementary to intermediate level class. The learners in my multi-level CSWE class were from the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe, ranged in age from their early twenties to early fifties and had educational backgrounds ranging from three years of formal education to tertiary education in their home or another country.

The AMEP is the English language settlement program that provides 510 hours of English instruction to migrants and refugees

who have just arrived in Australia. A CSWE course book, based on the language competencies of the Certificates in Spoken and Written English and settlement needs, is provided to the students, but use of the book for classroom learning is the teacher's prerogative. I regularly use the course book once or twice a week in my 15-hour per week, five days a week, full-time class, although some of the texts can be quite difficult for my multi-level group of learners who have quite varied English language and, more specifically, reading abilities in English.

As part of my teaching of learning-how-to learn skills, the learners complete a survey over a one-week period, in their first week of class, on what they did each day of that week in their free time (other than homework) to improve their English learning. This survey was conducted in term three of 2012 and in term four of 2012, the term in which the action research was commenced. Through this survey and the usual class discussion on the survey results, I discovered four of 35 students read for pleasure in their first language. Only one student in my two multi-level CSWE classes, in semester two 2012, reported that they read in English outside of class. All the other students said they liked doing other things, such as watching game shows, children's shows, TV dramas and news, or films on TV, and one student reported, 'I like learning by speaking'. This was impetus for me to reflect on, and change, the reading activities I did in my classroom to make reading for pleasure a real possibility for these learners.

Stage 1: The pilot study (Term four 2012)

For the final ten-week term of my full-time multi-level AMEP class in 2012, the 16 students in my class were given an opportunity to do extensive reading using a commercially available Internet reading program called *Raz-Kids*.

In the first week of term, I introduced the students to the possible benefits of extensive reading as highlighted in Ono et al. (2004), as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Why read?

Do you have 15 minutes or more a day you could spend on reading for fun? ... YES!

Reading for pleasure can help you improve your English in many ways. Reading for enjoyment can help you:

- ✓ Improve your reading
 - ✓ Build your vocabulary
 - ✓ Increase your understanding of words that you already know
 - ✓ Improve your writing
 - ✓ Improve your speaking
 - ✓ Improve your spelling
 - ✓ Improve your general knowledge
 - ✓ Enjoy reading even more
 - ✓ Increase your motivation to study English
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Reading for fun means: Always enjoy your reading, always read easy books and read books you like more than once! (Put away your dictionary and stop reading books you don't like!)

Did you know?
'The more you read,
the better you get at it;
the better you get at it,
the more you like it;
and the more you like it,
the more you do it.'

(Trelease, as cited in Baker, 2007: 11)

Read: Books you have at home or borrow from the library
Books from the internet: <http://raz-kids.com>

For the reading resource, I chose the Raz-Kids reading program because it had been recommended to me at the Community Languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages (CLESOL) Conference in October 2012 by high school teachers using it in New Zealand. In the absence of libraries and resource rooms of multi-levelled readers that my students can borrow, the Raz-Kids reading program seemed very suitable. The Raz-Kids program provides on-line books in a range of genres and text types written to 27 levels of reading difficulty (Klein, 2007). Once students are placed in their appropriate level, they can choose from a wide selection of books (approximately 40 titles per level) and can progress to the next levels as they continue to read and have success. Students can also elect to read books at other levels as well.

This reading program has many benefits, including being able to listen and read with illustrations and animation to aid comprehension, and the interactive comprehension questions that follow. In addition, as the target audience for the books is school-aged children (K-6), each page has fewer words per page than many post-beginner ESL readers, which could help achieve the goal of effortless reading. The benefits for me as teacher and researcher were that it was very reasonably priced (this project was self-funded), and could be used over an extended period. Also, student reading progress could be tracked, as class and individual activity reports can be generated at any time. In addition, books can be photocopied for use in class or for students who do not have the internet. Possible drawbacks are that the English used is American and it was not written for adult learners of English as an additional language.

As well as promoting the benefits of easy reading, and giving the students access to a wide range of books, we did extensive reading activities each week using the Raz-Kids reading program books and the students were encouraged to do extensive reading outside of class in addition to their daily homework. Four of the 16 students did not have the internet at home, so were unable to do the extra reading unless they used the internet at the local library. In class, I used a data projector to demonstrate how students could log onto the reading program, select a book, read or read and listen to a book, and answer a short set of comprehension questions about the book, as provided by the internet reading program.

Different books at different levels were chosen throughout the term for in-class whole of class reading, so students could experience what reading a book at the 'right level' and the 'wrong level' felt like. I demonstrated how to guess new words from the accompanying illustrations and text and how to judge if the reading was at the right level by checking that there were only one or two unknown words on each page. I read aloud to the students and modelled how to do sustained silent reading (SSR). In class, we read for meaning and discussed the books as a class, upon completion of the reading. Students also did in-class SSR with photocopied Raz-Kids books at their level a few times in the term, but this was ad hoc and not a regular part of the learning program.

Each student was placed at a level I decided would be easy for them, with the goal being almost effortless reading. The reading level was selected based on my intuitive knowledge of each student's reading ability. The 16 students in the class ranged in

level from G – M. As detailed in the Raz-Kids program, the levels are based on average sentence length and word frequency as well as sentence complexity, predictability, number of words per page, concept load and topic familiarity (Reading A-Z, 2013). For example, one *H* level reader has a word count of 202 over 12 pages, while one *K* level reader has a word count of 486 over 16 pages.

Stage 1: Data collection for the pilot study

Data collection methods included: students' responses to a survey on what they did each day outside of class in the first week of term to improve their learning; teacher notes on the class discussion about the survey and about students' reading habits; teacher observation and notes on the in-class extensive reading activities; and computer-generated class activity reports on the internet books read by each student outside of class.

Data collection methods and analysis for the entire three stages of the action research cycle were naturalistic and descriptive in nature. Systematic teacher observation, reflection and note-taking on classroom practices, and student feedback noted from class discussions, were the basis of further action implementing the summer reading program, and the emerging extensive reading approach in the classroom, as detailed in the final stage of the research cycle and "patterns in the data were identified to build an interpretation from the information collected" (Farrel, 2007: 94, 98).

Stage 1: Outcomes of the pilot study

At the beginning of the term the students were enthusiastic about having many books at the right level they could also read at home. They particularly liked the fact that they could listen as they read. My observation of the in-class reading activities was that the students enjoyed the whole of class reading of the internet books and discussing the books we had read. Students said they enjoyed the variety of books in the internet program. Particular favourites were biographies, 'how-to' books, and the well-known fairy tales, many of these being available at different levels. They also said they liked to spend time in class reading books at their level during the SSR sessions. Little scaffolding was required for these reading sessions and the emphasis was on reading for enjoyment and information.

The class activity reports revealed that in the ten-week term, four students were very active readers outside of class. These four students read and listened to more than 40 books as well as re-read books four or five times. Three of these progressed to the next level, thus improving their reading proficiency. Another two students were active readers, reading more than 20 books. The other ten students read between zero and 12 books. All of the very active and active students were students at a pre-intermediate to intermediate level. All but one had the internet at home. Several students asked individually if they could continue to read the books from the internet after they completed the term.

From this initial foray into reading for pleasure, it was apparent from my observations of the in-class reading, our class discussions on the reading activities, and the class activity reports on the internet reading that students did outside of class, that students were interested in reading for pleasure in the classroom and many were interested in extensive reading outside the classroom, if given the opportunity. I also noted from the pilot study, that some students would need to be provided paper copies of books if they were to be given an opportunity to read for pleasure, as three of the four students who did not have the internet at home were not regular readers outside of class. I therefore offered a seven-week summer holiday extensive reading program with the three goals of the reading program being to:

- promote extensive reading;
- provide many books (internet and paper) at the right level for easy reading; and
- allow learners to experience what it “feels like” to read easy books as a means of improving their language learning in their holiday away from the classroom.

Stage 2: The holiday reading program study

The holiday reading program was offered to two CSWE multi-level classes. Nineteen students signed up for the program, 12 from my class of 16 and the other seven from another class of 15. The week prior to the summer holiday, I held an information session with the students. They were given a one-page cloze test and reading tests at a range of Raz-Kid levels to determine their “i minus 1” reading level. Approximate reading levels were first determined by their CSWE level.

In the information session, the students were introduced to the Raz-Kids program that they would have access to during the

holiday period. For the 12 students who were part of the pilot study in the final term of 2012, this served as a review session. All 19 participants were given a handout about the benefits of reading for pleasure, similar to the one I had used in the final term of 2012 and as detailed in Figure 1. They were also given a reading log in which they could note the books they read each day, the time they spent reading, whether or not they liked the book on a scale of one to four and the difficulty of the book, also on a scale of one to four. Upon completion of the program, they were also asked to record how many books they read, if they enjoyed the reading, what their favourite book was, and why the book was their favourite.

The students were given four readers from the AMEP resource library (some titles were the same as those which could be found in the local library) that I assessed were just below their level of reading proficiency. The students were also given photocopies of three books at their level from the Raz-Kids reading program; again so they could read even if they did not want to read using the internet. This was done both to accommodate the five students who did not have the internet at home and to give students the opportunity to read a paper book and books that were available at their local library or from their AMEP teachers. The pilot study had revealed that ten of 16 students did not actively use the internet program, so providing paper books was essential. Financial constraints, and the limited supply of appropriate level graded readers, prevented me from providing more paper books for the summer reading program.

As with the pilot study class, I demonstrated how to use the internet site to read, to read and listen and also how to do the short comprehension exercise after their reading. I asked the students to trial the reading at home before the school term was completed, so that any technical issues could be dealt with before they started their holiday. Students were given my phone number so that if they experienced any difficulties they could contact me. To accommodate the five participants who had no internet, we met at the local library on two consecutive Tuesdays in the first two weeks of the summer holiday, to ensure they could use the program.

Stage 2: Data collection for the holiday reading program study

Data collection methods included student reading logs, class activity reports on the seven weeks of internet book reading and two group interviews conducted in the first week of term one of 2013, when AMEP English studies resumed.

Stage 2: Outcomes of the holiday reading program study

Of the 19 students who participated in the summer reading program, seven, including two who had finished their AMEP course in 2012, completed their reading logs. Nine students participated in the group interviews at the beginning of term one 2013, including four of the seven who completed the reading log. The other ten participants left the AMEP for a variety of reasons; including pregnancy, moving interstate, getting a job or changing to a different English program. The reading progress of the seven who completed the log was analysed using their logs and the Raz-Kids generated activity reports. The other 12 students' progress was analysed solely using the activity reports.

From the classroom activity report it was noted that three students were very active in their reading of books on the internet. That is, they read and understood enough books to go up one or two levels. These were the same pre-intermediate to intermediate level students who had been active in term four 2012. Eleven other students were active, in that they read more than 10 internet books during the summer reading program, as well as reading the paper books they had been given. Five of these students were not students who were part of the pilot study. It was also noted from the activity reports that many of the books the pre-intermediate to intermediate level students chose were just read, but the elementary to pre-intermediate students almost exclusively chose to read and listen to books when using the Raz program. The audio support gave the less confident readers reading support. Also, students read the same book four or five times, often not on the same day and not always because they had not answered the comprehension questions correctly. In addition, it was noted that few students chose books outside their assigned level, but when they chose books at a higher level, they did not continue to read them, but quickly went back to reading at the easier level.

All seven students who completed the reading log were either very active or active readers during the program. They reported that the reading of the internet and paper books was very easy, easy or a little hard, and that the books they read they really liked, liked or thought were okay. One student, who read 25 internet books, stated that she enjoyed reading because "the books were funny". She also wrote that she could "get more vocabulary and grammar". A student who read 57 books, four of which were graded readers, wrote "I enjoy very much. Because I can learn a lot of new words and new knowledge or make me relax from the

job”. Another student, who read 19 books, including 15 from the internet, two of the paper books I provided and two from the library, reported that the books she got from the library were too difficult. The other books she liked and could read easily. This student was one of the five elementary to pre-intermediate students in the summer program who were active readers. She was the only student of the seven who completed the reading log to find books from the library and she was one of the five students who did not have the internet.

When I discussed the books with the students in the two group interview sessions, they reported they enjoyed reading the books on the internet because they could listen to them too. They said this helped them to understand new words and also helped them to practise pronunciation. One student commented, “Some of the words childish, and I need other vocabulary for working”. These nine students reported that they had also read the readers and photocopied books I had selected for them. They reported liking the books and that the books had been easy to read. The students who took part in the group interviews also said that they needed assistance in choosing books to read, and they liked it when the teacher recommended and gave them books to read.

Based on the outcomes of the pilot study and the summer reading program, my extensive reading approach was further expanded to include:

- weekly rather than intermittent sustained silent reading;
- providing language learner literature (readers) upon request as well as the internet reading for outside of class reading; and
- a book selection activity to practice the skill of choosing a book at the right level and of interest for reading for pleasure

Stage 3: The term one 2013 study

Students were again introduced to the possible benefits of reading for pleasure and classroom activities included modelled reading of easy books, sustained silent reading and selecting suitable books to read. Based on the interest shown by students in the 2012 pilot study, sustained silent reading became a 30-minute weekly activity in my 15 hours/week multi-level class. The out-of-print easy to read short stories titled, *George and Nina* and *Jeff and Lisa* were used for these sessions. Students progressed through the stories at their own pace and answered four comprehension questions at the end of each story before reading another story. In the final four weeks of term, a selection of 30 graded readers were obtained from the

city AMEP campus. These were used for in-class reading and could also be borrowed. This was only achieved by “borrowing” books from class sets of readers, as I decided that, as Day and Bamford (1998) stated, having a selection of different books is “far more valuable and flexible” than using a set of readers for an extensive reading approach (133). As well as the graded readers, students could continue to use the Raz-Kids reading program for reading outside of class, but we did not use the internet reading in class as done previously.

At the beginning of the term, I also advised the students that I could give them graded readers upon request. The two students in this term who do not have the internet, and said they wanted to be active readers, were given photocopied books from the reading program and graded readers, upon request.

Based on the input from the summer reading program, the emerging extensive reading approach needed to include activities to develop the skill of choosing appropriate books. While the students in the summer reading program said they liked it when the teacher recommended and gave them books, there was a need for them to be able to choose suitable books on their own. As one student discovered in the summer reading program, choosing a book from the library that can be read easily is not easy. As Claridge (2012) states, learners “may not find it easy to recognise what is easy” (4).

Also, the levelling of ESL graded readers can be misleading. For example, some graded readers are graded as being ‘post-beginner to intermediate’, a fairly big range. Upon reviewing these readers, I judged some to be unsuitable for pleasure reading for my elementary to intermediate level students. The readers had few illustrations, a high density of text per page and contained many words I intuitively thought would be new to my students. In addition, beginner level books, some with cartoon-like layouts and some low frequency words that would be difficult to guess, could not be read effortlessly. This said, ultimately it is up to the reader to decide if a book could or could not be read for pleasure.

To assist students in developing the skill of choosing an appropriate book, an activity was created and trialled using the criteria as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: How to choose a good book to read (a pairwork activity)

1	Select a book from the book box with a front cover that attracts either you or your partner. Write down the title of the book in the chart. (Discuss 2-8 with your partner and fill in your chart.)
2	Read the title. Look at the front and back cover. Does it sound interesting?
3	Open to the first page of the story. (This is not usually on page 1!) Check to see how many words are on the first page of the story. Does it look like too few words (too easy), not too many (OK, easy to read), or too many (looks difficult to read).
4	Read the first 2-3 paragraphs of the story to yourself (silent reading). Can you read them easily?
5	Does the book sound interesting to you?
6	Read the first page of the story and count how many words are 'new' to you. (There should only be a few new words, and you should be able to understand the story even if you don't understand some of the words.)
7	Are there pictures, definitions of 'new words' (a glossary), and/or a CD that could help you understand the story?
8	Is the book going to be easy to read? Do you want to read the book?

1 Book Title	2 Read the title and front/back cover. Does the book sound interesting? *YES *MAYBE *NO	3 How many words/page? *Too few *Not too many *Too many	4 Read the first 2-3 paragraphs of the story. Are they: *Very easy *Easy *OK *Not easy
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<p>5 Does the book sound interesting?</p> <p>*YES</p> <p>*MAYBE</p> <p>*NO</p>	<p>6 Read the first page of the story.</p> <p>How many new words are there?</p>	<p>7 Does the book have pictures, a glossary, or a CD?</p> <p>Pictures: Yes No</p> <p>Glossary: Yes No</p> <p>CD: Yes No</p>	<p>8 Is the book going to be easy to read?</p> <p>*YES</p> <p>*NO</p> <p>Do I want to read the book?</p> <p>*YES</p> <p>*NO</p>
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After you have reviewed 4 or 5 books, talk about what kind of books you like to read.

Do you like to read a story in one sitting? Short stories.

Do you like to read ‘chapter books’ that might take one or two weeks to finish?

Do you like fiction, biographies/autobiographies, history, mysteries, horror stories, romance, fairy tales, ‘how to’ books, science, books based on a movie you have seen?

You can take one of these books home and when you’ve finished, borrow another one.

Stage 3: Data collection for the term one 2013 study

Systematic teacher observation, reflection and note-taking on in-class extensive reading activities, volunteer-teacher observation, students discussion about these activities, and the class activity reports on the outside of class internet reading, all informed the emerging extensive reading approach in term one of 2013.

Stage 3: Outcomes of the term one 2013 study

From my observation of the weekly SSR, the students seemed engaged and focused. Chow and Chou’s (2000) literature review affirms that students develop more positive attitudes towards reading after SSR programs. During the SSR time in class, the students were able to read and enjoy the short stories that ranged from being not too difficult to very easy to read. Because students were reading at their own pace, some were able to read one or two stories in the 30-minute SSR session and others were able to read four or five. The higher level, pre-intermediate to intermediate

students, upon completion of the stories in the easier book (*George and Nina*) in weeks' two and three, read stories from the other book of ten short stories (*Jeff and Lisa*). In the final four weeks of class, students read books from the graded reader box.

As observed and noted by the volunteer teacher, who supervised the "how to choose a good book" activity with the eight pre-intermediate to intermediate students in my class, the students were very animated and engaged in the process of determining a book's suitability for pleasure reading. In the 45-minute session, each pair rated five to six books. The volunteer teacher reported there was a lot of discussion. From reading the first two to three paragraphs, the students rated the books to be very easy, easy, okay or not easy to read. Two books that one pair rated as having too many words per page and not going to be easy to read, they still wanted to read, because the stories sounded so interesting (*A Town Like Alice, Wandering Girl*). At the end of the activity, seven of the eight asked to take a book home. They argued over who would take *Shumdog Millionaire* home as they had seen or knew about the film. A day after the activity, one student returned his book to me finished and selected another book from the book box.

The pairwork book selection activity was also very animated within the group of seven elementary to pre-intermediate students. In their 45-minute session, they rated about five books and they worked in a pair with a pre-intermediate to intermediate level student who had previously done the selection activity. After their selection activity, all the students were given class time to do SSR of one of the books they selected as being interesting and easy to read. Observing this session, I also talked to each student briefly about the book they were reading. An elementary level student reading a book I thought might be a bit difficult said, "No, the words are easy, pronunciation difficult". Three other elementary level students seemed to be using their dictionaries quite a lot while they were reading their book; however, when asked about their book, they said they wanted to continue reading.

Students used the same criteria outlined in Table 1 to select books to read from the local library in the ninth week of term. In the 30-minute time period given for the activity, all the students selected three or four books from the library that they thought they wanted to read. Several of the intermediate level students indicated that they wanted to read a book they judged to have too many words per page, and had more than five new words per page; books from the general library collection and not from the ESL

section. While I would not recommend such books for easy reading, student interest in the library books was not dampened by teacher intervention in this case, as the primary goal of the extensive reading approach was to spark an interest in reading out of class. Ultimately, reading for pleasure is about a student choosing what, when and how much they want to read (Ono et al., 2004).

In the final weeks of the term student interest in reading was great. With the book box sitting in the middle of the classroom and students free to borrow books at any time, books were being taken home and read every night by all the pre-intermediate to intermediate students and by some of the elementary to pre-intermediate students. Students recommended books to each other and encouraged their classmates to select certain books. One student, when recommended by another to read *Wandering Girl*, responded that it didn't look interesting, but when told it was a true story about an Aboriginal girl, she wanted to borrow it and said, "I love true stories!"

When students finished class work or tests earlier than the others, they took a book from the box and read. One student, who had been an active reader during the pilot study and the summer reading program, finished seven books in the final four weeks of class. Students asked their classmates to finish books quickly when they wanted to read them, as there was only one copy of most of the books. The book selection activities and discussions that followed highlighted three important missing elements in the emerging extensive reading approach. These elements were:

- having class time for students to talk with each other about books they wanted to read and books they had read:
- having a selection of books always available for student in-class reading and borrowing for out-of-class reading; and
- practising the skill of choosing a suitable book for easy reading, not only from the classroom readers but from the students' local library collection.

Both stage two and three of the action research cycle confirmed that students need guidance in how to make book choices independent of their teacher (Day & Bamford, 2002: 139).

The class activity report for the term indicated that six of the 16 students had read ten books or more on the internet, two of these students having participated in the summer reading program. Also, one of the very active readers from term four and the summer

reading program, who finished her AMEP hours at the end of term four, was continuing to read books on the internet. Two other students, who do not have the internet at home, were actively reading the graded readers they were given upon request as well as the ones they had chosen from the reader selection activity.

The most striking observation I can make about this emerging extensive reading approach in term one of 2013 is that, in choosing and reading easy (and sometimes very easy) books in and out of class, with themes of relevance and interest to them, whether it be *How to Grow Tomatoes*, *A Man of Vision*, *Learner Driver* or *A Snag Free Barbie*, AMEP students at an elementary to intermediate level of English as an additional language can have, as Nation and Bonesteel (2011) describe, an “authentic reading experience”. That is they smile, they laugh, they wonder or they say to themselves, “Oh, that’s how you do it.” (1) Including reading for pleasure activities in the classroom heightens learner engagement and clearly demonstrates to the student that reading and learning can be struggle and dictionary free.

Discussion of the overall findings

Over the three-stage research cycle, learners in my two CSWE classes and the summer reading program had an opportunity to become readers and, given an opportunity to read a variety of level-appropriate reading materials, some chose to read (Day & Bamford, 2002: 137). The pattern that emerged was that some learners (six or more in each stage), particularly learners who were at the pre-intermediate to intermediate level, actively read for pleasure and language learning and read without audio support outside of class when provided with a wide selection of books to read at the right level. A few learners at the elementary to pre-intermediate level read some books and chose to read and listen outside of class.

Students who actively read using the internet reading program improved their reading ability as demonstrated by the class activity reports in that they were able to progress one or more levels. These same students were also those who regularly requested books and borrowed books from the book box when that was made available in the last four weeks of the research cycle. After practising the skill of selecting an ‘easy’ book to read, more students at lower reading levels chose to read outside of class and seemed enthusiastic about reading the books they chose. Learner choice is certainly an important aspect of an extensive reading program, given that the

learner has the skill to choose a text “they expect to understand, to enjoy or to learn from” (Day & Bamford, 2002: 137).

In the classroom, teacher observation and notes on the two ten-week terms of the research cycle indicated that, when I modelled good reading for meaning-making practices, this can ‘scaffold’ the reading for pleasure process for the learners (Yang & Wilson, 2006: 368). Thus learners can experience what it means to enjoy and learn by reading books that are easy and they soon learn that “reading is its own reward” (Day & Bamford, 2002: 138).

Although this was a very small scale study, because my AMEP CSWE classes were quite typical of many AMEP classes, I believe an extensive reading approach would complement the competency-based learning of the CSWE as extensive reading is “a very important way of providing meaning focused input” (Nation, 2011: 3). In addition, while it is difficult to say that the amount my learners read in fact qualifies as the “rapidly reading of book after book” Palmer (as cited in Day & Bamford, 1998) describes as “extensive reading”, the students who were active and very active readers improved their reading proficiency and could be said to be on their way towards developing a reading for pleasure habit. The less active readers may still be getting benefits from their reading, as simply reading a book a week is quoted as being “probably the minimum amount of reading necessary to achieve the benefits of extensive reading” (Day & Bamford, 2002: 138). Further study of a longitudinal nature is warranted to discover whether or not a reading for pleasure habit once established continues after classroom learning ceases, and I would like to continue classroom-based research to ascertain how I can further support my less confident AMEP readers to become readers.

Conclusion

This action research cycle has confirmed that, for many students, choosing and reading easy and very easy books can be very pleasurable, as well as beneficial to their reading fluency, and can encourage a reading for pleasure habit. For this to happen, extensive reading needs to be a classroom activity and books need to be provided to students, at least initially, for students to experience what it is like to read for enjoyment and how it can assist with language learning. (In my teaching situation, this provision of reading materials was only possible through the use of an inexpensive internet reading program and borrowing ESL readers for the research project.)

Good extensive reading practices need to be modelled and practised in class on an on-going basis and easy reading should be an integral part of classroom learning. Students need the skill and opportunity to choose the appropriate level and interesting books to read. Carefully chosen books that are easy to read can be enjoyed by intermediate students and enable them to improve their reading proficiency. Students at an elementary level may find it difficult to read for pleasure, but they may well persist if they are given interesting and easy books to read, with an audio recording to aid comprehension, and they begin to develop the skill of choosing suitable reading materials. Provided all these, extensive reading may become more than just a distant possibility.

Epilogue

As Van Lier (1994) points out, action research is never quite finished (34). With an extensive reading approach continuing to emerge as I write this, the only elementary student who became a reader and continued to be a reader throughout the action research cycle, is continuing to read in term two of 2013. This student is exiting the AMEP program and wrote about a book she chose from the book selection activity in term two 2013: "When I finished reading the story, I felt happy. I felt happy because I understand well."

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