

The core principles of extensive reading in an EAP writing context

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In the first part of the discussion forum on extensive reading (ER) in *Reading in a Foreign Language* (April 2015 issue), many scholars in the field shared views regarding the core features to be considered when implementing ER, frequently referring to Day and Bamford's (1998, 2002) top 10 principles for teaching ER. This discussion piece approaches ER's core features and the 10 principles from a slightly different perspective by considering how they apply in an English-for-Academic-Purposes (EAP) writing context.

In line with the theme of this special issue of *RFL*, reading and writing connections, we hope this discussion will draw the attention of ER practitioners and educators to the possibility of expanding the application of ER, particularly to an academic writing context. The principles discussed here may or may not be directly applicable to different educational settings or other language learning contexts. However, we believe this discussion of ER in an EAP writing program will not only provide better understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of ER as a pedagogic tool for learning second language (L2) writing, but also suggest what principles we, as ER practitioners, need to consider when implementing ER in an EAP writing context, and why. Much of our argument in this discussion piece is based on the first author's insights from her dissertation data (Park, 2015), which were collected in three classes she taught over three semesters. The second author observed Park's classes.

Implementation of ER in an EAP Writing Course

The first author of this paper implemented ER in three sections of an intermediate-level writing course designed for international students at a university in the United States. The primary goal of this writing course is to help students improve their general and academic writing ability in order to support their smooth transition to an academic environment. The 75-minute course meets twice a week for one semester (16 weeks).

In the study, the first 20 minutes of the class were assigned to ER. Reading was done individually and silently for 15 minutes, and it was followed by five minutes of pair or whole class discussion, which utilized students' writing assignments completed at home. Specifically, in an attempt to closely integrate ER and writing, students were required to write about the book that they were reading for 10 minutes before coming to class (henceforth, this activity is called 'the 10-minute writing'). Students were given handouts that provided a variety of writing topics in an effort to help them reflect on their reading from different perspectives as well as to

encourage diverse writing practices, such as summarizing, describing, analyzing, arguing, and being creative. In addition to the 10-minute writing, students recorded their reading progress on a book recording form, filling in book titles, pages read, and reading time along with a brief evaluation of the books they read (for more details, see Park 2015).

The idea of implementing ER in this EAP writing course was based on several scholars' positive views of integrating reading and writing in L2 instruction (e.g., Grabe, 2003; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). In line with a suggestion made by Grabe, we believed that instruction based on the interconnection between reading and writing could be made more effective by combining ER with constant writing practice. Hedgcock and Ferris also supported the integration of ER in (reading-) writing courses, arguing that students will be more motivated to practice and improve their writing when reading is integrated—providing a topical basis for writing—if the material is self-selected. In fact, in Park's (2015) dissertation, she was able to empirically show the students' development in different areas of L2 writing (such as content, organization, and language use) after a semester of ER experience. In this discussion piece, we want to re-emphasize that ER can be effectively incorporated into writing courses as a springboard for facilitating students' writing improvement and to discuss practical concerns about which principles of ER are essential in making this integration more meaningful.

Essential Elements of ER in an EAP Writing Context

This section argues that five (out of 10 from Day & Bamford's [1998, 2002]) principles are particularly crucial in incorporating ER into an EAP writing class. In the next section, an additional factor that served an important role in making a more meaningful connection between ER and writing is also discussed.

Principles #1 and #2: A Variety of Easy Reading Materials

Day and Bamford (1998) argued that easy access to interesting books at a comfortable level is an essential element for teachers to consider when implementing ER. Similarly, Stoller (2015) commented that challenging books might frustrate students and negatively affect their motivation to read further. In line with these claims, we also argue that reading materials for ER should be easy, even in an EAP context. The students in Park's (2015) study reported that one of the most important reasons that they remained engaged in ER during the semester was that the books were well within their reading levels. Students said that stress-free reading helped them to better comprehend their books, which made reading more enjoyable; this feeling, in turn, seemed to make writing easier for them (see Nuttall, 2005, on the 'virtuous cycle of reading'). In other words, it may be that because the students were able to understand the stories clearly, they had less difficulty in responding to the writing topics for the 10-minute writing assignments.

Critics often question the usefulness of using easy materials, arguing that simplified or adapted texts such as graded readers lack the richness of the originals, and that such modified texts are neither natural nor pedagogically sound. However, as Day (2004) asserted, the issue of materials should be discussed in light of 'appropriateness', because using materials appropriate to students' linguistic level—not just for reading, but also for class activities, tasks, and exercises—

is of more importance than authenticity. The students in Park's (2015) study did not seem to be concerned about authenticity, but they did care about whether the content was interesting enough to command and keep their attention.

The results of Park's (2015) study also showed that the students had a wide range of topical interests, from romance and science fiction to biographies. Whereas some of the students had a strong preference for certain genres or stories and checked out similar types of books throughout the semester, others wanted to read as great a diversity of texts as they could. In either case, it was clear that the more books available, the better for the students. Although, as noted by Macalister (2015), ER can be implemented without having a wide range of materials available for students, a small selection might not support students' ongoing engagement with the books, particularly when they have to write about them. As recent ER studies (e.g., de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok, 2013; Ro, under review) suggest, the fact that students who participate in ER demonstrate distinctive individual preferences indicates that a well-equipped class library containing a wide range of books should be a prerequisite if the goal is to maintain student motivation not only to read but also to write.

Principle #3: Freedom to Choose Reading Materials

Closely related to students' wide-ranging topical interests, the freedom to choose their reading materials was another feature of ER that the students in Park's (2015) study appreciated. When they select their own books, students are more likely to become emotionally attached to what they read, and, as Yamashita (2015) pointed out, "greater affective involvement stimulates cognitive processes such as focused attention and facilitates comprehension of what we are reading" (p. 172). A student in Park's study further talked about how reading books she enjoyed affected her experience of writing; this student liked to read books in English that she had already read and enjoyed in her native language. The student commented that having freedom to choose books not only lessened her anxiety but also supported her motivation to write. By choosing the particular books that she already knew, she was able to reduce the difficulty and increase the enjoyment not only of reading but also of writing. In this regard, the freedom to choose is a particularly important element to be considered when implementing ER in a writing context, where students are required to reflect and to reproduce their thoughts and understandings of their reading materials in a written format. Reading what they want lets students enjoy the practice of writing about what they read. It is worth noting once again that writing about what they are interested in, or know well from reading, can relieve students' anxiety about writing in the L2; and, as the student comment above makes clear, writing about ER materials was less stressful and more enjoyable than writing about academic writing.

Principle #9: The Teacher's Role

In Park's (2015) study, given that most of the students had never engaged in ER before, a brief workshop on ER was provided at the beginning of the semester to help students better understand the purpose of including reading in their writing class. The workshop covered various topics including background of the ER approach and choosing appropriate reading materials; for example, the teacher showed in detail how to make use of book covers, book blurbs, or random pages when selecting books. In addition, the teacher attempted to help the students see the merit

of integrating the two pedagogic practices of reading and writing. Because the course was an academic writing class, it was thought that the students might not immediately appreciate the reasoning behind including ER. For this reason, and to encourage students' participation, the teacher explicitly discussed how and why ER could be expected to facilitate writing development and contribute to overall gains in language learning.

One of the important goals of ER is to help students build a life-long reading habit (Day & Bamford, 1998; Jacobs & Farrell, 2012; Rodrigo, Greenberg, and Segal, 2014; Takase, 2007); the role of teachers' guidance in this process should not be underestimated. Park (2015) found in her classes that it was helpful for her to guide each individual student's reading pace and interests throughout the semester in order to prepare the students to take charge of their own reading. Moreover, she found that the book recording form and the 10-minute writing served as useful tools in this process by allowing her to know a) what individual students were reading and b) how much time they spent involved in ER and on the 10-minute writing. With this information, she was able to customize her teaching and ER practices (e.g., 10-minute writing topics) in her classes throughout the semester. It is also worth noting that despite the workshop and guidance, students tended to rely on the teacher's opinion in their book selection at the beginning of the semester. However, they became more self-reliant over time, seeking out books on their own topical interests and becoming more confident that they knew what factors to consider when selecting books. This observation implies that there is a large time commitment required to reach the point where students feel comfortable with it, even with a teacher's help.

Principle #10: Teacher Modeling

The importance of the teacher's role has been little emphasized in the ER literature (Macalister, 2010). However, in Park's classes, we observed that the teacher can establish a model of reading to help the students grasp what engagement with reading looks like (Day & Bamford, 1998). The second author, as an observer of the classes, noted how teacher modeling affected students' participation in ER. Though there were instances when students seemed a bit distracted during the sustained silent reading time, most of the students seemed engaged with their reading (eyes on the book moving left to right and line by line) during in-class ER. Even the times when some students were distracted did not seem to last very long, as everyone else, including the teacher, was silently reading. The community of reading practice that both the teacher and students co-constructed seems to have facilitated the ability of the students to read persistently during the reading time throughout the semester.

Additional Elements of ER in an EAP Writing Context

In-class ER Time

The co-construction of the community of reading practice that was created by the teacher and students during in-class ER time was an element that played an essential role in keeping students interested in reading in Park's classes. In-class reading time is not directly mentioned in the 10 principles established by Day and Bamford (1998, 2002), but it is relevant to the ninth principle. ER is often assigned as an out-of-class activity in the form of homework assignments (see Robb

& Kano, 2013). However, setting a certain amount of time aside for in-class reading was crucial in this writing class because it provided a smooth transition to the 10-minute writing sharing time that followed. Talking about their books or what they wrote in their 10-minute writing assignments in pairs or groups following individual ER allowed students to increase not only their engagement in writing, but also their participation in class. Through this practice, they also learned what kinds of books their classmates were reading, which sometimes motivated those who did not have much interest in reading by sparking their interest in stories read by their classmates. Therefore, within the time allowed by the curriculum, assigning a certain amount of class time for ER is a practice that teachers and practitioners should consider in order to promote student participation as well as to create more meaningful pedagogic connections between reading and writing.

What Should Teachers Do?

One of the important factors for teachers to consider in incorporating ER into an EAP writing classroom is how to design the curriculum in a way that can facilitate development as well as students' engagement with reading and writing. Many ER studies have shown that reading a large amount of easy materials for a prolonged time can facilitate learning in various areas such as vocabulary, reading fluency, and grammar. Park (2015) and other related studies on ER in writing contexts (e.g., Lee & Hsu, 2009; Tsang, 1996) have also shown that ER can have positive impacts on writing development. We believe, along with Yamashita (2015), that students can learn more when they are emotionally engaged with their reading and when they do associated writing activities. We argue that the factors we have discussed in this paper are among the most important elements to consider when integrating ER in an EAP writing context: a) materials that the students can read easily, b) a wide variety of reading resources available for the students, c) the freedom of students to choose their own books, d) teachers' guidance and orientation, e) teacher modeling, f) in-class ER time, and, in addition, g) a reading-associated writing activity such as the 10-minute writing. We also believe that through implementing continuous practices of ER and associated low-stress writing activities both in and outside of class, it is possible to create an environment in which students can see the close connection between the two literacy skills and thus appreciate the value of integrating the two kinds of practices, which in turn may promote the development of life-long reading and writing habits.

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