



CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.

Teaching Reading: An Extensive Reading Approach

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This is the fourth and final article on the teaching of reading to students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The articles provide descriptions of the four most common ways in which EFL reading is generally taught. I describe the prominent features of the four approaches, and discuss their strengths and weaknesses.

The first article discussed *grammar translation*; the second focused on *comprehension questions and language work*; and the third article described a skills and strategies approach. Each of these three approaches, I claim, may not help students become fluent readers in English.

This final article describes an extensive reading approach. An extensive reading approach aims to get students reading in the English language and liking it. For a comprehensive introduction to extensive reading, see Day and Bamford (1998). Also, Bamford and Day (2003) contains 106 extensive reading activities.

Extensive reading is an approach that sees reading not merely as translation or as a skill, but as an activity that students do for a variety of personal, social or academic reasons. Extensive reading can be blended into any EFL curriculum, regardless of that curriculum's methodology or approach. For example, programs which utilize a skills and strategies approach can add extensive reading without modifying existing goals and objectives. Extensive reading complements a curriculum because, while helping the program achieve its objectives of teaching students to read and pass examinations, it broadens those objectives and improves students' attitude toward achieving them.

In extensive reading, students read large quantities of easy material in the language they are learning. They read for general, overall meaning and for information and enjoyment. Students select their own reading material, and are encouraged to stop reading if it is not interesting or if it is too hard; they are also encouraged to expand their *reading comfort zone*-the range of materials that can be read easily and with confidence.

Reading a large amount of easy material has a vital role to play in learning to read fluently. Firstly, it helps move students away from word-by-word processing of text, encouraging them instead to go for the general meaning of what they read, ignoring (rather than worrying about) any details they do not fully understand. Secondly, by meeting the same patterns of letters, words and combinations of words again and again, students process them more quickly and accurately and thus develop a *sight vocabulary* (words that are recognized automatically). Consequently, students increase their reading speed and confidence, and can give more attention to working out the overall meaning of what they are reading.

Good things happen when EFL students read extensively. Studies show that they not only become fluent readers, they learn a lot of new words and expand their understanding of words they knew before. In addition, they write better, and their listening and speaking abilities

improve. And perhaps the best result from numerous studies is that students develop positive attitudes toward reading and increased motivation to study English.

Most EFL teachers must, first and foremost, make sure that their students do well in their courses and pass the required examinations. But a teacher can, at the same time, achieve the broader goal of helping students become English readers by making sure that they have access to easy, interesting reading materials. This is the beginning of reaching beginning readers because it allows students to discover that they can actually read English and enjoy it. The more students read and the more they enjoy it, the more likely it is that they will become students who both can and do read in English.

At the same time, extensive reading supports all aspects of an English-language program. To borrow Colin Davis' words, "Any ESL, EFL, or L1 classroom will be poorer for the lack of an extensive reading programme of some kind, and will be unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programme were present" (1995, p. 335).

References

- Bamford, J. & Day, R. R. (eds.). (2003). *Extensive reading activities for teaching language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, C. (1995). Extensive reading: An expensive extravagance? *ELT Journal*, 49, 4, pp. 329-36.
- Day, R. R. and J. Bamford. 1998. *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don't forget to write us with any comments you might have. Mahalo!

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