



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.

Extensive Reading and the EFL Curriculum

Richard R. Day

An EFL teacher approached me with a question about extensive reading. She said she wanted to have her high school students read extensively, but she did not know how to do this. “There is no room in the curriculum, she said. “My students take classes the entire day, every day of the week.” She asked if there were any way at all she could use extensive reading.

What I told that EFL teacher is the basis of this article, the second of a series of articles on extensive reading. The focus of the first article was the nature of extensive reading. Future articles will cover such topics as ordering books and setting up a library, and activities.

Extensive reading is based on the well-established premise that we learn to read by reading. This is true for learning to read our first language as well as foreign languages. In teaching foreign language reading, an extensive reading approach allows students to read, read, and read some more.

The benefits of extensive reading are well established. Students who read a lot develop positive attitudes toward reading and increased motivation to study the foreign language. They become fluent readers, increase their vocabulary, and become better writers. It also helps to increase listening and speaking abilities.

In my work with extensive reading, I have determined that there are three ways on putting extensive reading into the EFL curriculum:

- A separate course
- Part of an existing course
- As an after-school activity (e.g., a club)

A Separate Course

The ideal way to integrate extensive reading into the EFL curriculum is through a separate, stand-alone extensive reading course in which students read both in-class and out-of-class. Also, students do activities, in- and out-of-class, that build on the reading they do. Bamford and Day (2003) is a collection of 106 extensive reading activities.

Realistically, however, for the majority of EFL situations, a new course is impossible. There is simply too much to do already. There is no way that a new course can be put into the EFL curriculum.

As Part of an Existing Course

This possibility involves incorporating a certain amount of extensive reading into a course already in the curriculum, regardless of the content of that course (e.g., reading, writing, speaking). The reading that the students do can either be required or voluntary.

Required Reading

This can be accomplished by establishing *reading targets*. Reading targets can be set by requiring that students read a certain number of books or pages per week or semester. Or a reading target can be time: Students have to read a certain number of hours a week or semester.

For example, in a grammar-translation class, the teacher explains the benefits of extensive reading and how to go about it, and then explains the requirement (e.g., reading one easy book per week). The teacher also makes sure students understand that they will be graded on or given credit for the extensive reading assignments.

One way to grade students on their extensive reading is to set a scale of credit in relation to the reading targets. For example, students who read 15 books a semester could have 15 points added to their final grade.

Voluntary Reading

If there is simply no way whatsoever that class or homework time can be given to extensive reading, then teachers might consider making it an optional part of their EFL courses. To encourage their students to read, teachers can tell them about the rewards of extensive reading (e.g., they will enjoy it; their reading will improve; they will increase the size of their vocabulary). The teacher would then encourage the students to read on their own, according to their interests and for their enjoyment, and the teacher would keep a record of this reading. Students need to understand that the extra reading is optional and not a formal part of the course. At the same time, teachers might give extra credit that might influence a student's final grade, if the student were on the borderline between, say, a B and a C.

As an After-School Activity

The third possibility for adding extensive reading to an EFL program is through an extra-curricular reading club. It is organized and conducted like other after-school clubs. A teacher is in charge; it meets after school and is open to anyone taking EFL courses. If suitable reading materials are not available and need to be purchased, students might be asked to pay a membership fee.

To help create and maintain motivation and interest, I suggest that there be regular reading activities and goals. For example, members might meet once or twice a week to give oral reports on books they have individually read. In addition, they might all read copies of the same book silently and individually, and then, as a group, discuss it chapter by chapter and help each other with the meaning of difficult words. The club can also organize regular reading marathons in which each student aims to read a certain number of pages during a set period of time.

Conclusion

Above all, most EFL teachers must make sure that their students do well in their courses and pass the required examinations. At the same time, however, teachers can help their students



become English readers by making sure that they have access to easy, interesting reading materials. 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.

Reference

Bamford, J. & Day, R. R. (Eds.). (2003). *Extensive reading activities for teaching language*. 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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