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SOME PRINCIPLES OF EXTENSIVE READING

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ABSTRACT

At the present time, reforms in the sphere of higher education in the country are being carried out under the leadership of the President. We can see this as an example of the adoption and implementation of the Strategy of Action on the five priority directions of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021.

Keywords: education, ability, country, development

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, Ray Williams discussed his top ten principles for teaching foreign language reading. He used his top ten to begin his reading seminars by asking participants to evaluate them and add new ones. His purpose, Williams wrote, was to get teachers to examine their own beliefs. The article had its desired impact on us. Now, years later, they remain as stimulating as when we first read them. Consider, for example, his first two principles:

In the absence of interesting texts, very little is possible.

The primary activity of a reading lesson should be learners reading texts--not listening to the teacher, not reading comprehension questions, not writing answers to comprehension questions, not discussing the content of the text (1986: 42).

METHODOLOGY

Williams' top ten principles relate primarily to one approach to the teaching of reading and intensive reading. We would like to extend the discussion to extensive reading. Extensive reading, apart from its impact on language and reading ability, can be a key to unlocking the all-important taste for foreign language reading among students. After all, teaching reading to students without such a taste is, as Eskey (1995), nicely phrased it, like teaching swimming strokes to people who hate the water.

In the same spirit as Williams, we offer our top ten principles for teaching extensive reading as a tool for professional development.[2] These are what we believe are the basic ingredients of extensive reading. We encourage teachers to use them as a way to examine their beliefs about reading in general and extensive reading in particular,

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and the ways they teach foreign language reading. We posit these ten principles in the hopes that others will consider them and react to them.

RESULTS

1. *The reading material is easy.* This clearly separates extensive reading from other approaches to teaching foreign language reading. For extensive reading to be possible and for it to have the desired results, texts must be well within the learners' reading competence in the foreign language. In helping beginning readers select texts that are well within their reading comfort zone, more than one or two unknown words per page might make the text too difficult for overall understanding. Intermediate learners might use the rule of hand -- no more than five difficult words per page. Human and Nation (2000) suggest that learners must know at least 98% of the words in a fiction text for unassisted understanding.

It follows that, for extensive reading, all but advanced learners probably require texts written or adapted with the linguistic and knowledge constraints of language learners in mind. In discussing first language reading development, Fry observes that "Beginning readers do better with easier materials" (1991: 8). This is all the more true with extensive reading because learners read independently, without the help of a teacher. Those teaching English are fortunate that the art of writing in English for language learners is well-developed: a great variety of high-quality language learner literature is published for learners of all ability levels (see Hill's best picks, 1998, and survey review, 2001).

The use of easy material is controversial. There is still a pervasive view that, to accustom students to real-world reading, real-world texts should be used for extensive reading. This is to confuse the means with the end, and paradoxically to rob students of exactly the material they need to progress to the goal of reading real-world texts. For students to be motivated to read more and study more, and to be able to ladder up as their foreign language and reading skills improve, they must be reading texts that reflect their language ability -- texts they find easy and enjoyable at every step of the way.

A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available. The success of extensive reading depends largely on enticing students to read. To awaken or encourage a desire to read, the texts made available should ideally be as varied as the learners who read them and the purposes for which they want to read. Books, magazines, newspapers, fiction, non-fiction, texts that inform, texts that entertain, general, specialized, light, serious. For an inside track on finding what your

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students are interested in reading, follow Williams' advice: "Ask them what they like reading in their own language, peer over their shoulders in the library, ask the school librarian..." (1986: 42).

DISCUSSION

Varied reading material not only encourages reading, it also encourages a flexible approach to reading. Learners are led to read for different reasons (e.g., entertainment; information; passing the time) and, consequently, in different ways (e.g., skimming; scanning; more careful reading).

3. *Learners choose what they want to read.* The principle of freedom of choice means that learners can select texts as they do in their own language, that is, they can choose texts they expect to understand, to enjoy or to learn from. Correlative to this principle, learners are also free, indeed encouraged, to stop reading anything they find to be too difficult, or that turns out not to be of interest.

What Henry noticed about her L1 non-reading undergraduates is no less true in foreign language reading: "my students needed to read for themselves, not for me" (1995: 6). For students used to working with textbooks and teacher-selected texts, the freedom to choose reading material (and freedom to stop reading) may be a crucial step in experiencing foreign language reading as something personal.

Further, although there may be a class or homework assignment, extensive reading puts the student in charge in other important ways. As Henry observes, "compliance means reading books, but other than that, the purposes and pleasures to which students put their reading are entirely their own" (p. 69). This encourages students to become responsible for their own learning. Samuels, in discussing first language reading, claims that "unless we phase out the teacher and phase in the learner, many of our students will fail to become independent because throughout their education they were always placed in a dependent role -- dependent on the teacher" (1991: 17).

4. *Learners read as much as possible.* This is the "extensive" of extensive reading, made possible by the previous principles. The most critical element in learning to read is the amount of time spent actually reading. While most reading teachers agree with this, it may be the case that their students are not being given the opportunity or incentive to read, read, and read some more.

There is no upper limit to the amount of reading that can be done, but a book a week is probably the minimum amount of reading necessary to achieve the benefits of extensive reading and to establish a reading habit. This is a realistic target for learners

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of all proficiency levels, as books written for beginners and low-intermediate learners are very short.

5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding. In an extensive reading approach, learners are encouraged to read for the same kinds of reasons and in the same ways as the general population of first-language readers. This sets extensive reading apart from usual classroom practice on the one hand, and reading for academic purposes on the other. One hundred percent comprehension, indeed, any particular objective level of comprehension, is not a goal. In terms of reading outcomes, the focus shifts away from comprehension achieved or knowledge gained and towards the reader's personal experience.

CONCLUSION

A reader's interaction with a text derives from the purpose for reading. In extensive reading, the learner's goal is sufficient understanding to fulfill a particular reading purpose, for example, the obtaining of information, the enjoyment of a story, or the passing of time.

The learners' experience of reading the text is at the center of the extensive reading experience, just as it is in reading in everyday life. For this reason, extensive reading is not usually followed by comprehension questions. It is an experience complete in itself.

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