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978-0-521-56829-6 - Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom

Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford

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# Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo,  
Delhi

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521568296](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521568296)

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First published 1998

7th printing 2007

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Day, Richard R.

Extensive reading in the second language classroom / Richard Day  
and Julian Bamford.

p. cm.

“Bibliography of language learner literature in English” : p.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-56073-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-56829-6 paperback

1. Language and languages – Study and teaching. 2. Reading.

I. Bamford, Julian. II. Title.

P53.75.D39 1997

97-24481

418'.4'07–dc21

CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-56073-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-56829-6 paperback

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To the late Dr. Shigekazu Fukuyama

To Terry and Leanne Day, and Marion and  
Vincent Bamford

And to Harold Palmer and Michael West, the  
parents of second language extensive reading  
in modern times

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## *Series editor's preface*

Although a number of useful books are available on the teaching of reading in a second or foreign language, this is the first book to focus specifically on the nature of extensive reading and the development of extensive reading programs in foreign and second language teaching. Richard Day and Julian Bamford offer an informed and practical analysis of the nature and scope of extensive reading, argue convincingly for the need to give greater attention to extensive reading in language teaching, and provide a valuable guide to developing an effective extensive reading program within a second or foreign language curriculum.

In developing their rationale for extensive reading, the authors review a comprehensive body of research that demonstrates the benefits that can accrue from extensive reading. These benefits include not only the obvious improvements in students' reading skills and reading speed but changes in their general language proficiency and in their attitudes toward reading and language learning. For many language students, the ability to engage in fluent reading and to read both for important information and for pleasure is perhaps the most valuable benefit they will gain from language study; hence it is crucial that such an outcome is planned for in language teaching rather than left to chance.

The authors demonstrate, however, that there is far more to extensive reading than simply providing materials. They analyze the factors that need to be considered in planning and implementing a program, and how such a program can be effectively organized and administered. Detailed guidance is given concerning how to integrate extensive reading into the second or foreign language curriculum, what the goals for such activities are, what resources and planning are needed, the criteria for choosing suitable reading texts, how to evaluate the program, and important factors to consider in the day-to-day management of a program.

The authors emphasize that although extensive reading is a student-centered and student-managed activity – since students choose what, when,

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and how to read – teachers have a crucial role to play in ensuring the success of the program. Teachers need a thorough understanding of the nature of second language reading, of the nature of extensive reading materials, and of the strategies for developing reading skills and a love of reading through extensive reading.

*Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* provides a comprehensive and stimulating account of these and other important issues in extensive reading and will be a valuable resource both for classroom teachers and for teacher educators preparing novice teachers for careers in second and foreign language teaching.

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Students are unsure of what they have read; they feel that they do not have sufficient language to say what they want to say. They hesitate to admit that they are not sure what they just read. They are apprehensive about being evaluated by the teacher and their peers. They elect to sit silently and wait for the teacher to ask questions or for other students to speak.

This is a description of what Jo Ann Aebersold and Mary Lee Field (1997, p. 116) call “the world of real L2/FL reading classes.” But students learning to read a second language do not have to act like that. Rather, they can be enthusiastic and confident about reading, and can leave the second language reading course as independent and lifelong readers in the target language.

This book can help make such a transformation possible. Although it is a book about the teaching and learning of reading in a second language, it differs from most books on the subject because of its focus – extensive reading. The purpose of this book is to provide a theoretical and pedagogical foundation for the premise that extensive reading should be an integral part of reading instruction in the second language classroom.

Extensive reading is an approach to the teaching and learning of second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence. Extensive reading, however, is not just a matter of submerging students in a bath of print. As Albert Harris and Edward Sipay observe, “It takes superior materials, clever teachers who love to read themselves, time, and effort to develop the reading habit” (1990, p. 655).

The benefits of such an instructional approach are wide-ranging. If set up and carried out appropriately, extensive reading not only helps students learn to read in the second language, but also leads them to enjoy reading.

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This encourages them to continue reading long after formal study of the second language is over. In addition, extensive reading, at the very least, consolidates students' learning of the second language and, at best, increases their proficiency. For all these reasons, we are firm advocates of the inclusion of extensive reading in *any* second language reading program.

Second languages are learned by different people for different reasons. Although these differences are important in some contexts, we see extensive reading as useful to anyone who reads or intends to read a second language. We also see extensive reading as appropriate for both a *second language* context – where the target language is learned in a community of its speakers, such as learning English in the United States – and a *foreign language* context, in which the target language is learned where that language is not spoken, such as learning English in Japan. For convenience, throughout the book we use the term *second language* to include both a second and a foreign language learning environment. When the term *foreign* is used, it is to refer specifically to a foreign language learning context.

An extensive reading approach does not assume that the students have any particular level of ability in the target language. In our view, extensive reading is appropriate at all stages of language learning; it is never too early – or too late – to learn to read a second language. At the same time, an extensive reading approach has nothing particular to offer the prereading stages of learning to read. Therefore, in this book it is assumed that students are already literate in their first languages and that they know the written form of the second language.

The book has three major sections. Part I provides a theoretical foundation for extensive reading. Part II is a critical examination of materials development in second language reading. Part III presents and discusses the practical aspects of conducting an extensive reading program.

Although we believe that extensive reading should be a part of every second language reading program, it is not our intention to evangelize. Rather, we present an alternative or additional way of approaching the teaching of reading. We are not so naive as to believe that an extensive reading approach can turn all students into independent, fluent readers. However, if used appropriately, an extensive reading approach can considerably improve second language reading instruction and the chances that students will enjoy reading in the second language. It would be an unusual extensive reading class that fit the description of the typical L2/FL reading class described by Aebersold and Field.

We would like to express our appreciation to Jack Richards, the editor of the series in which this book appears, for his encouragement and support; to David Hill and the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading for making

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available their research in the form of the bibliography in the Appendix; to Steven Brown, Marc Helgesen, David Hill, Ted Plaister, Joyce Taniguchi, Roberta Welch, and Cambridge's anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript; to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the CILT Library in London and their staff; to Judy Davis for her work on the index; and to Mary Vaughn and Mary Carson at Cambridge University Press. We are particularly grateful to editor Olive Collen and copy editor David Thorstad for their exceptional work on the manuscript.

We hope that the ideas presented in this book will stimulate readers to reflect on their own second language reading experiences, both as teachers and as students. We also hope that readers will enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Richard R. Day  
Julian Bamford