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Editorial

Welcome to issue 60 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters relating to learning teaching and assessment within Cambridge English Language Assessment.

This issue presents the research undertaken within the 2014 English Australia/Cambridge English Language Assessment Action Research in ELICOS Program, which supports teachers working in English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS) sector in Australia. The background and rationale of the action research program are described by Katherine Brandon, the former Professional Support and Development Officer at English Australia. Following that, the key academic reference person for the program, Professor Anne Burns, explains how the programme evolved over the past five years.

Next, five funded projects are presented by the teacher-researchers who participated in the 2014 program. The common themes are improving reading skills and increasing engagement with reading.

The first two papers focus on extensive reading in English as a foreign language. Keogh and Smith, the recipients of English Australia/Cambridge English Award for Action Research in 2014, set out to encourage extensive reading among their students. They incorporated students' existing reading habits into their extensive reading program. This informed the selection of reading materials and the choice of Facebook as an online platform for the provision of reading materials, and for promoting discussion among students. As a result of the intervention, students became more engaged readers, which was reflected in the number of out-of-class reading tasks they completed as well as an increased interest and enthusiasm with which they approached in-class reading activities. This testifies to the value of the student-driven approach adopted by the authors.

In order to increase their students' motivation for extensive reading, Schoep and Wood built their interventions on two key principles: removing demotivating factors and introducing motivating strategies. To address the former, they improved students' perceptions of reading, increased the availability of reading materials, provided classroom time for extensive reading, controlled text difficulty and taught their students to reduce the use of dictionary. The motivating strategies included getting students to set reading goals and to monitor their own progress against those goals, as well as providing a purpose for reading and a variety of reading materials to choose from. Their intervention was successful in changing the students' perceptions of reading for the better, and students became extensive readers who read with enjoyment, confidence and independence. It also led to the development of a reading community, with students sharing their reading experiences.

The following two papers investigate critical reading. The goal of Sleeman and Ryan's action research intervention was

to increase students' engagement with reading and improve their critical reading skills. The authors found that the use of authentic materials (such as news), students' free choice of reading material and Facebook as an alternative reading medium allowed students to better engage with reading activities. Facebook provided a collaborative online forum, and as such, it allowed students to read with a social purpose and share opinions on a topic. This, along with in-class activities, helped increase engagement with texts and improve students' critical reading skills. The authors highlight the usefulness of Facebook in developing critical reading skills, as well as students' enthusiasm for harnessing social media as a learning tool. However, they also caution about a few issues with online communication, such as anxiety due to the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Alexander and Onslow-Mato used authentic and graded authentic texts as well as multimodal materials (e.g. videos, pictures and texts) to encourage a critical approach to a text. As a result of their intervention, their students became more critical readers engaging actively in discussions and asking more critical questions. The critical reading tasks had a positive effect on their university study as they reported feeling confident and able to take on the heavy reading load of their course. The authors also found that graded authentic language texts were more motivating to students than non-graded authentic texts and that students' buy-in is essential. The latter was achieved by developing students' awareness of the usefulness of critical reading as well as through the use of multimodal material and scaffolded tasks.

Last but not least, Clarke investigates how a learning management system, Moodle, can help in the development of independent reading skills among students of English for Academic Purposes. As part of her online independent reading program, students carried out individual and collaborative online reading activities, chose their reading materials and also reflected on their learning experiences in a reading journal. She found that by the end of the last cycle of the programme, her students became more independent readers who could monitor and assess their progress. As such, they also became more collaborative with each other. The author managed to find a balance between providing enough scaffolding in Moodle, on the one hand, and opportunities for students to develop independence, on the other. The issue concludes with an update on the *Studies in Language Testing* (SiLT) series.

Due to the success of this action research program, Cambridge English has recently launched a similar programme with English UK. The papers written as part of this programme will appear in *Research Notes* 61. We hope that this issue, along with issues 44, 48 and 53, 56 and 58, which also present action research, inspires teachers to become involved with research.

The English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Program: Background and rationale

KATHERINE BRANDON ENGLISH AUSTRALIA, NEW SOUTH WALES

English Australia

English Australia is the professional association for over 120 member institutions that offer English language intensive courses for overseas students (known as ELICOS) in Australia. Member colleges are found in major cities as well as regional centres around the country and range from publicly funded as well as private institutions attached to universities, vocational colleges and high schools, to branches of international English language schools through to stand-alone private providers. Member colleges offer a wide range of courses, including General English, English for Academic Purposes and preparation for proficiency exams, such as the Cambridge English suite and *IELTS*. English Australia is also the peak representative body for ELICOS, promoting the interests of more than 270 accredited ELICOS providers in Australia.

The strategic direction of the association is guided by a 14-member board of elected member delegates and the association's operations are implemented by a secretariat led by an Executive Director and including a full-time Professional Support & Development Officer (PSDO).

The PSDO works to provide professional support for staff in member colleges through managing a number of initiatives including:

- a national conference, the English Australia Conference, held in September each year
- the Action Research in ELICOS Program (sponsored by Cambridge English Language Assessment)
- *Guides to Best Practice in ELICOS*, collated from member contribution
- twice-yearly publication of a peer-reviewed journal: the *English Australia Journal*
- professional development events at branches in Australian states
- annual English Australia awards.

For more information on English Australia and ELICOS, please go to www.englishaustralia.com.au

Background to the Action Research in ELICOS Program

The Action Research in ELICOS Program featured in this issue has the following goals:

- to equip teachers with the skills to enable them to explore and address identified teaching challenges in the context of Australian ELICOS
- to share outcomes of this research in the form of presentations at local events and at the annual

English Australia Conference, as well as through publication.

The program was inspired by action research funded by the then Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs through its Adult Migrant English Programme from the early 1990s. A pilot program, developed by English Australia and funded by Cambridge English Language Assessment, was implemented in 2010 with Anne Burns, Professor of TESOL at the University of New South Wales, as key reference person. The success of this program of six projects (see *Research Notes* 44, May 2011) led to funding being offered for similar programs in the years since.

In the first two years the focus of research within the program covered a broad range of topics selected by the program Reference Group, and informed by input from English Australia member colleges. However, since 2012 a single program topic has provided focus on an area of particular concern to Australian teachers, and this has added more cohesion to the projects. The 2014 program focused on teaching, learning and assessing reading, as illustrated by the teacher reports in this issue.

Program outcomes to date

After five years of the Programme, 44 teachers from city and regional English language schools in almost all states and territories in Australia have undertaken 30 projects exploring aspects of ELICOS classroom practice.

English Australia is already seeing an increase in the professionalism of Australian ELICOS through the development and increased engagement of teachers actively involved in the program as well as that of their colleagues; the development of teacher peer networks across Australia; increased teacher engagement with research and academic researchers; and more teachers furthering their formal professional development through postgraduate study. Outcomes of research projects have been published and presented widely and national and international recognition of the success of the program is growing.

In 2013, the work of Katherine Brandon (English Australia), Professor Anne Burns (University of New South Wales) and Dr Hanan Khalifa (Cambridge English) in the development and implementation of the English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Program was recognised nationally. They were awarded an International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) Award for Best Practice/Innovation in International Education for 'a ground-breaking development in international education' (see www.ieaa.org.au/what-we-do/best-practice-winners-2013). In 2014, English UK and Cambridge English

offered the first Action Research Award Scheme, modelled on the English Australia program.

The program is now into its sixth year and the 2015 program will support 12 teachers and their seven action research projects relating to aspects of teaching, learning and assessing writing in ELICOS classrooms.

The board of English Australia looks forward to seeing further increase in interest in the program and the resultant

increase in professionalism in ELICOS. English Australia would like to warmly thank Cambridge English, in particular Drs Hanan Khalifa and Fiona Barker and the team at the Research and Validation Group, for their continued material and professional support. English Australia would also like to recognise the invaluable contribution of Professor Anne Burns to the ongoing implementation and success of the program.

2014 Action Research Award (L-R): Marc Weedon Newstead (Chair, English Australia), Dr Gad Lim (Cambridge English Language Assessment), Caroline Keogh and John Smith (Griffith English Language Institute), Prof. Anne Burns (University of New South Wales)



2014 Action Research group (L-R): Front row (sitting): Wendy Onslow-Mato, Caroline Keogh, Anne Burns, Eileen Wood Back row: Luke Alexander, Narelle Clarke, John Smith, Katherine Brandon, Kerry Ryan, Jade Sleeman, Marlon Schoep



The Action Research in ELICOS Program: Refining the development of a national model

ANNE BURNS UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY

Introduction

It is five years since the Action Research in ELICOS Program was initiated by English Australia with funding from Cambridge English Language Assessment. In that time, 44 English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS) teachers have participated from almost all states and territories across Australia, gaining the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the processes of action research, and to investigate personally motivating issues in their classrooms. What began as a pilot program, somewhat tentatively and with a sense of uncertainty about its potential on the part of both English Australia and Cambridge English, has grown into a major component of English Australia's yearly professional development initiatives. The presentation of their research by each group of participating teachers is now a regular and much-anticipated event at the annual English Australia Conference, and the teacher research model underpinning the program is one that has been adopted since 2014 for a parallel project between Cambridge English and English UK (*Research Notes* 61 (Cambridge English

Forthcoming 2015); see also Burns and Kurtoglu-Hooton (2014) for the adaptation of this model in a project with modern language teachers in the UK, funded by the British Academy). In this article, I describe the model developed for the program, and reflect on the changes that have been made to it over the years as a result of what was learned through feedback from the participating teachers and other stakeholders.

The model for the research program

The initial model for the program, utilised in 2010, was based on one used for more than 15 years in my work with Australia's Adult Migrant English Program (see, for example, Burns and de Silva Joyce (Eds) 2005), where teachers were similarly widely distributed across the country. The ELICOS model assumed that teachers would come together to attend a series of workshops in Sydney and then follow up with their own research activities between workshops to conduct their investigations and develop renewed understanding of

Table 1: Format for initial model of program (2010)

Time	Focus
January	Expressions of interest (EOIs) sought from teachers working at accredited ELICOS institutions around Australia.
March	Evaluation of EOIs and selection of participants by the program Reference Group.
Mid May	Workshop One (1½ days) for teachers to familiarise themselves with concepts and processes of action research, refine their research focus, develop possible questions, and decide on initial action plans.
End July	Workshop Two (1 day) for teachers to provide updates, identify possible further steps and data sources, refine plans to complete their research, and prepare for report writing.
Early September	First drafts of reports submitted, for evaluation by Reference Group for the ELICOS Action Research Award.
Late September	Workshop Three (1 day), held the day before the English Australia Conference, for teachers to provide updates on their research outcomes, rehearse their conference presentations, and discuss the final reports to be published in <i>Research Notes</i> . These were to be submitted by early November.

classroom practices. The model adopted the format displayed in Table 1.

As seen in this outline, teachers were first invited to participate in the program through submissions of expressions of interest (EOIs). The voluntary nature of participation meant that teachers were more likely to see it as a professional benefit, rather than a centrally mandated accountability requirement (compare for example, Ellis and Armstrong 2014) and this is still a fundamental feature of the program. Confirmation that the teachers' academic managers were willing to provide financial and administrative support for their participation in the program was also required. Because of funding limitations and the fact that the first iteration of the program was a pilot, the group to be accepted was restricted to six individuals.

The 11 EOIs received from around the country represented a pleasing first response. They were evaluated by a Reference Group consisting of two representatives from Cambridge English, two from the English Australia board, and myself as the research facilitator, with administrative support from the English Australia Professional Support and Development Officer (PSDO) (see Brandon, this issue, for the program aims). The six teachers selected were located across four Australian states, namely New South Wales (3), Victoria (1), South Australia (1) and Western Australia (1) and two of the teachers came from the same institution. They ranged in experience from less than two years' teaching to over 20 years, with the implication that there was potential in the group to share both established and new ideas and experiences. Following their selection, the teachers attended three workshops with me and the English Australia PSDO in a period of just over four months, with the major focus of each workshop as outlined in Table 1.

Refining and developing the model

The refinement of this model has been a continuing process over the life of the program. Throughout each annual program,

participants are invited to give extensive oral and written feedback on their experiences. It is emphasised that they should raise issues about any negative reactions and also make suggestions for improvement for the benefit of future participants, particularly at the end of the program when they are able to reflect on the whole experience. By the end of the program, positive and trusting relationships between the participants and between the participants and the facilitators are firmly established, and our experience has been that teachers are both frank and forthright in expressing their views, resulting in very valuable feedback. A message from one of the participants to teachers beginning the program in subsequent years suggests the kind of integration and collaboration that teachers feel is developed with their colleagues during the program:

The AR project gave me the opportunity to learn about myself as a teacher. When you're in the middle of teaching, preparing and correcting, you don't have the luxury of reflecting on what you're doing and more importantly - WHY you're doing it! The action research workshops gave my teaching a boost and I really looked forward to the meetings with Anne, Katherine and the other participants, who turned out to be one of the most motivated and enthusiastic bunch of teachers! So, to all the new participants - you have an amazing learning experience ahead of you! Wish I was there!

I now turn to highlighting the major changes that have been made to the model and the reasons behind them.

Program timeframe

Feedback from the 2010 teachers indicated that overall they felt this model of three workshops worked reasonably well, but that they were under too much pressure to complete the research, to write up their research accounts, and to prepare for the conference. They regretted there was not more time to 'get really into the research', as one participant put it. This feedback was important as we had deliberately minimised the research period because of the time pressure effect on teachers that is consistently reported in the literature (e.g. Barkhuizen 2009, Nunan 1993, Rainey 2000, van Lier 1994). However, the participants clearly felt time limitations had restricted the scope of their research. Consequently, the time period for the program was extended to take place over 6-7 months, with the first workshop in early March. Feedback from participants in subsequent years has shown that this longer timespan was welcomed, and felt to be about the right duration for managing the requirements of their research. Other feedback in 2012 alerted us to the fact that teachers felt that more time was needed in the first workshop for input and reflection, at the point when action research was not a clearly understood concept for many of them. Consequently, the first workshop now extends over two days rather than one and a half days, with additional theoretical and practical input on action research and the thematic areas selected for research (see discussion on research themes below).

Research partnerships and equity of participation

Teachers in the pilot program also raised the issue of conducting projects individually. They had received rather varied reactions to their research from colleagues within their institutions. The idea of research and conducting research within the ELICOS sector was completely new,

even confronting, for many, and in some cases colleagues' responses had been less than positive, seeing action research as going beyond the bounds of what they were paid for or disturbing the status quo. On the other hand, in some institutions there had been great enthusiasm about the opportunity to do action research, and teaching colleagues and even academic managers had joined in. As it was important to ensure that the teachers felt supported, it was essential to consider other means of contact (see discussion on increased contact below) centrally.

The two teachers from the same institution reported that, although they were conducting their own different research projects, they had been able to support each other and had found this collaboration to be a source of further motivation (see also Willis and Edwards 2005). As a result, since the second year of the program we have encouraged EOIs from both individuals and pairs of colleagues. While there have been requests for teams of teachers from the same institution to work together, it was decided, in consultation with the Reference Group, to maintain the concept of individuals or pairs working collaboratively in order to ensure maximum diversity of participation. Also, in order to further ensure diversity and equity across the sector, participation is limited to one team or individual from any one institution, although more than one EOI from an institution may be submitted.

Research themes

When the program commenced, teachers were encouraged to submit proposals for areas of research that interested them across a broad range of possible topics in ELICOS teaching and learning. To help teachers get a sense of potential research areas, we produced a list under the following headings, which were identified through consultation with the English Australia board and feedback from member college staff:

1. Monitoring and assessing student progress, achievement, and proficiency
2. Teaching General English
3. Teaching pronunciation
4. Teaching academic literacy/EAP
5. Student motivation

However, because the topics in the pilot program covered a range of different areas, there was only limited connection between the projects, which meant that the participants' sharing of ideas across their research tended to be disparate. Because there was no feedback from the 2010 participants that they saw this breadth as a problem, we maintained this approach into the 2011 project. Feedback from these participants, however, was that it would have been beneficial to have a themed approach for projects, which would allow for more targeted discussion, sharing of resources and ideas for a similar research area, and more consistency across the collection of published research reports.

Thus, from 2012 the approach has been to adopt an overall theme within which some of the broad areas outlined above could be integrated. So far, this has proved to be advantageous as teachers now share their resources and focus on complementary aspects of various areas of their investigations. As a 2013 participant commented in the

final feedback session, 'there always seemed to be overlap between projects which meant that sharing of ideas . . . was of benefit to all participants'. The priorities they have recommended from year to year have inevitably reflected teachers' practical teaching interests, that is assessment (2012), speaking (2013), and reading (2014). The 2015 theme on which the research will focus is writing.

This approach has enabled the creation of a more integrated body of annual practitioner research that intersects and offers other ELICOS practitioners a rounded set of examples for classroom practice.

Increased contact

Another issue raised by the teachers and alluded to already was that there was little group contact between workshops, apart from email. As facilitators wanting to establish a sense of community within the group, the PSDO and I were very conscious of this limitation; the geographical dispersion of the participants and the funding limitations made it impossible to hold more workshops, but clearly we needed to develop other means to maintain contact. We realised we needed to make greater use of technology; therefore, in 2011 we set up a blog, which proved, however, to be unsuccessful. Because it was unwieldy and not very user-friendly, the participants were reluctant to adopt it as a means of contact. After further research and discussion with technology experts, we initiated a wiki in 2012, which has been used with increasing frequency and more positive feedback over subsequent years. The wiki provides a central point to post material, such as project information and deadlines, bibliographies related to the research topic, teaching suggestions and sample activities, questions and responses about research processes, recommendations about resources or technology, and support for report writing.

We had anticipated that the trial of the blog in 2011 would provide additional support for the teachers and help them feel confident that their research was on track. Instead, a further initiative in 2012 was to introduce an hour-long Skype meeting for the teachers in each project between the first and second workshops (with further meetings if necessary). These meetings proved to be very successful and continue to be a key feature of the program. Different concerns and issues have emerged from these interactions. For some teachers they present an opportunity to describe their research or teaching activities and to rationalise the progress they have made; for these teachers the discussion becomes an affirmation that their plans are proceeding in a viable direction. For others, the Skype meetings have been an opportunity to discuss why they feel their research has stalled, or why they believe they have had 'disappointing' outcomes; the meeting then provides a way to review this situation, to devise some new directions, and to revitalise the research. In other cases, the teachers are interested in finding more resources for their research, such as input from the literature, or suggestions about how other teachers in past projects have handled similar situations, in some instances being put in touch directly with these teachers; these discussions illustrate the broadening of perspectives on their professional development that is occurring as part of the process, as they increase their confidence and creativity.

One of the issues that has challenged and continues to challenge us, however, is how to create a continuing network

or community of professional practice with all the teachers who have participated in the program. ELICOS teachers lead busy personal and professional lives. In addition, the volatility of a fluctuating international education sector cannot guarantee enrolments and, thereby, continuing teacher employment, a circumstance which affected several of our participants. These factors, coupled with the mobility of the international English teaching profession, all create challenges in establishing larger professional connections. Strategies we have used to date include periodic email updates to past participants, invitations to former participants to join us socially at conferences held in their cities or states, in order to share experiences with current participants and also to attend colloquia on the research, and postings on the English Australia website with information about current projects. Of course, previous participants also have access to *Research Notes* electronically where they can read about further research being undertaken. A forthcoming volume of the *Studies in Language Testing* series, to be edited by me with Hanan Khalifa from Cambridge English, is also bringing participants from each year into contact with each other, as they prepare chapters about their research for publication. However, it remains the case that identifying creative ways to connect the program's participants once they have completed their projects could be taken further.

Research dissemination

From its inception, the model included an opportunity for teachers to present their research through publication in *Research Notes*. Publication in a peer-reviewed journal has been seen by participants as both exciting and daunting. Although several participants had completed or were completing postgraduate study, few had ever published. In the case of the 2010 participants, since they were the first to create reports of their research, no models existed from previous programs. One of the issues we needed to address was what constituted an appropriate genre for such reporting (see Burns 2014). On the one hand, the accounts needed to be sound enough for a peer-reviewed publication; on the other hand, they needed to appeal to a primary audience of teacher practitioners rather than academics and to reflect the exploratory and evolutionary nature of action research.

Although we tried to encourage a narrative-based approach, the teachers struggled to create a practitioner-oriented style and format in the belief that, in order to publish an article, their writing needed to be academic and densely written, to include a literature review and to follow a traditional 'scientific' format. While in the first year we were still working to develop an appropriate genre for reporting, in subsequent years we have been able to present teachers with a format that aims to provide some consistency but also allows for individual flexibility. The articles in this issue reflect the overall approach that is now taken, which aims to steer a course between the journal requirements and the characteristics of action research. Considerable support for writing is provided in the program wiki, which is also available to assist participants in past programs who may wish to publish further.

The teachers' written reporting of their research was also used as a basis for English Australia's annual Award for Action Research, presented to one of the participants at the conference. These reports needed to be prepared at the same time that the

participants were completing their research, so that they could be evaluated by the Reference Group. The 2010 teachers had been encouraged to submit short interim accounts, but because they were anticipating (no doubt rather anxiously) the final published versions of their reports, the pilot teachers seemed to believe they needed to produce lengthy, academically oriented drafts, which placed them under additional pressure. We realised we needed to make the reporting requirements much more explicit and discussed this issue with the teachers in the final workshop. As a result, we created a more structured two-stage approach, where teachers are asked to produce a shorter interim report (up to 1,500 words) for the Reference Group, and then to use this first draft as the basis for the full report, which is provided by the end of the year in order to meet publication deadlines. This extended period has given the teachers more time to work on their final submissions.

One other issue that came out of feedback discussions with the 2010 and 2011 teacher groups, as well as from English Australia member colleges, was that teachers in the ELICOS sector were not necessarily interested in reading peer-reviewed reports, which would limit dissemination of the research and, therefore, a major aim of the program. Their view, also reflected in the literature (e.g. Borg 2013, Burns 2014), was that unless they were studying, busy teachers were not inclined to go to research journals. Consequently from 2012, we have produced an eight-page newsletter, comprising project overviews of approximately 500 words written by each participant, together with their photos and sometimes photos of their students, or examples of teaching artefacts. The newsletters are posted on the English Australia website (see www.englishaustralia.com.au/2014_action_research_program.html) and also included in conference bags at the annual English Australia Conference to publicise the research and to encourage further participation. Formal and informal feedback to English Australia has shown that these newsletters are very well received in the ELICOS sector.

As the framework in Table 1 shows, the third workshop was held the day before the annual English Australia Conference. One of the purposes was to finalise presentations for a colloquium on the research. The first presentation in 2010 attracted an audience of approximately 60 participants, some of whom submitted EOIs the following year. Consequently, a joint colloquium by each teacher group is now a dedicated session on the conference program. The colloquium has gathered a regular audience, as suggested by this conference evaluation comment: 'I really look forward to attending these action research presentations each year'. It has also provided many of the program's participants with their first opportunity to attend a national professional conference; as a participant recently observed:

I also wanted to add how much I have enjoyed and learned from the two [English Australia] conferences and pre-conference workshops that I have been able to attend over the past six years. What I learned at each of these has helped to shape my perspectives, knowledge and approaches to teaching. So, thank you also for your part in making them such valuable and enjoyable opportunities for professional development.

Participating in the colloquium is highly valued by the program participants, many of whom are presenting at a conference for the first time. A spin-off of the colloquium is that it has greatly

increased the participants' confidence to respond to further possibilities to present their research, including at their own institutionally based professional development conferences, such as those at Billy Blue College of Design, Think Education, Curtin University, Deakin University, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) English Worldwide, the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney and the University of Queensland. More nationally, they have been included in the annual TESOL Research Network Symposium at the University of Sydney, and the National English Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) ELT Management Conference, while overseas participants have, for example, presented at the British Council in Mexico, the Intensive Reading Conference in Thailand, the IATEFL Research SIG, the IATEFL Conference in the UK, Cambodia TESOL, and the GlobELT Conference in Turkey.

Conclusion

Although a model for facilitation of such an action research program in the field of English language teaching already existed nationally, the developments described above represent a considerable and continuing process of further refinement. We see the model as a living and complex system that needs to be refined in response to continual feedback and critique from those most centrally involved. In this respect its refinement aims to incorporate the key principles of action, reflection and evidence gathering that are integral to action research itself. The re-visioning of the model in the light of critically evaluative feedback has enabled it to expand and develop to meet the needs of the national and international professional and funding bodies supporting the program, and also the sector and the teacher researchers who have participated in the process. From 2014 this model has been replicated in the UK for a similar program, The Cambridge English Language Assessment/English UK Action Research Award Scheme, also funded by Cambridge English Language Assessment.

Whatever evidence exists that the process of developing this model has been productive must come from those who have experienced it. We recently received this comment from a teacher who participated in one of the earlier groups: 'I can't thank you enough for all the support you extended to [my co-researcher] and I during our action research. It has led us down some very interesting paths!' Independently, her manager had expressed the institutional view:

I think I speak for all involved here at [my institution] in saying that the project has been beneficial for us on many levels. The actual process of conception, training, research, reflection, analysis and documentation of their projects was a very valuable learning experience for [the participating teachers] and one that they have been able to share with their colleagues, hopefully providing an inspiration for others to get involved. There have already been project meetings to identify future research directions. The added dimension of preparing and delivering presentations in the various professional development contexts our three teachers were able to access was an exceptionally useful exercise, and again was part of our objective in supporting the program – to raise [the institution's] professional profile in the ELICOS community. All of

this is in addition to the actual research findings which will inform [the institution's] development of assessment for learning and independent learning. The support and direction in the project were exceptional and our thanks go to you. I hope our staff will continue to be involved in future projects.

It appears that some of the changes described above have enhanced the perception of the program in the sector and the commitment of English Australia and Cambridge English to continue it into what will be a sixth year in 2015 with 12 teachers participating. In doing so, the model has aimed to ensure that any new processes build on what is already known to work, that the rationale for new strategies is sound, that the process of improvement involves choice, flexibility and openness to criticism, and that the outcomes are seen to be as relevant as possible to the sector and its goals.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Katherine Brandon for her comments on this article. However, more than that, I need to thank her for her collaboration on this program for over five years and for her dedication to its continuing development. Katherine recently left her position as PSDO at English Australia to pursue other professional interests. However, without her conviction that an action research program would successfully offer ELICOS teachers a major research and professional development opportunity, this program would never have commenced.

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Incorporating student reading habits into a classroom-supported extensive reading program

CAROLINE KEOGH GRIFFITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, BRISBANE

JOHN SMITH GRIFFITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, BRISBANE

Introduction

In our classroom, we have consistently noted a lack of student engagement – defined as participation in set activities and a willingness to complete out-of-class reading tasks – with extensive reading (ER). Students were not completing the out-of-class reading tasks and consequently were unable to participate in the in-class activities. However, there was not a lack of interest in improving reading skills *per se*, and we believe that our students deem reading as essential to improving their English language proficiency. Furthermore, many of our students are most likely reading extensively on their own, albeit in their first language (L1). Thus, the purpose of our action research (AR) project was to investigate and exploit students' existing reading habits by incorporating them into a pedagogically supported ER program with the goal of increasing student engagement.

Context and participants

This AR was carried out at the Griffith English Language Institute (GELI) in Brisbane, Queensland, attached to Griffith University. It offers courses in 5-week blocks in General English (GE), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English Test Preparation (ETP), and Direct Entry Pathway (DEP) courses for direct entry into Griffith University.

GE is divided into six different levels, with GE level 4 (GE 4) corresponding to the B1/B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Upon completion of GE 4, students on an academic pathway are able to enter an EAP course. We decided to conduct our action research at the GE 4 level with the hope of instilling conscientious ER practices before students started their academic English classes.

All students in the GE 4 classes we taught were involved in the AR project. The project was replicated across three classes in April, May, and August 2013, through Cycles 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In our three cycles of AR, the 50 participants were the students from our assigned GE 4 classes. Each cycle ran for five weeks. Across the three cycles, two students participated in both Cycle 1 and 2, and two students participated in both Cycle 2 and 3. The demographics of the participants are summarised in Table 1. In the first two cycles, nearly all of the students were on an academic pathway, with 43 students planning further study in Australia. However, Cycle 3 included five students on an integrated study tour program, who returned to their home country after three weeks of study.

Research focus

The benefits of ER on learners' second language (L2) development are well established in the research literature and include improvements in reading comprehension and fluency; development of vocabulary and spelling; positive impacts on motivation; and subsequent improvements in writing, speaking and listening skills (Bamford and Day 2004, Day and Bamford 1998, Grabe 2009). In order to be successful, previous research suggests an ER program should allow students to choose material that is at a level just below their current proficiency, and from a range of genres and topics (Bamford and Day 2004, Renandya 2007). Students should approach ER materials in the same way as they would in their L1, with a focus on the overall message of the text as opposed to focusing on particular linguistic features (Waring 2012). Within this context, the role of the teacher becomes that of a facilitator who helps to establish a community of readers within the classroom (Day and Bamford 1998, Renandya 2007).

Considering these principles, we realised that our current ER program – which consists of one prescribed, graded reader for each 5-week course – needed to incorporate a much greater degree of student choice. Initially, we considered ways to better integrate digital materials into an ER program, on the assumption that this would provide our 'digital native' (Prensky 2001 cited in Sokolik 2006) students with the most options. However, we quickly realised this approach was potentially too broad. We were still unsure which materials would be most engaging for ER or even what students actually wanted to read. Students, of course, have developed reading habits and skills in their L1, and these habits can aid or constrain the development of reading habits and attitudes in their L2 (Day and Bamford 1998, Yamashita 2004, 2007).

These L1 reading habits, however, also include the use of technology, so it was equally important to horizontally

Table 1: Participants

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
No. of students	15	17	18
No. female	8	12	8
No. male	7	5	10
Age range	18–39	17–39	18–25
On academic pathway	15 students	15 students	13 students
L1s represented	Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Spanish, Vietnamese	Arabic, Chinese, Mongolian, Thai, Vietnamese	Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese

integrate these everyday technologies into the language-learning sphere (Levy and Stockwell 2006). In other words, our aim was to integrate the technologies that the students were using in their personal lives into the classroom and institution. Providing access to online material when it is preferred can also provide a greater degree of autonomy by allowing the learners to choose a mode of learning that is most significant to them (Godwin-Jones 2011).

Thus, we decided we needed to first gain a better understanding of what students were already reading extensively in their L1 and L2, and how they were accessing that material. This led us to our research question: To what extent can an extensive reading program that is informed by extracurricular student reading practices promote learner engagement?

The action research cycles

Cycle 1

Each of the three cycles was patterned in a similar way, though modified slightly at each iteration in response to our

reflections and student feedback. Figure 1 details our first and subsequent action research cycles. In the first week of each cycle we surveyed the students (Appendix 1) as to their preferences regarding genres and topics for reading in either their L1 or L2.

Figure 2 details that the most popular genres were magazine articles, novels, social media genres (such as Facebook or Twitter), and the news respectively. This data would form the basis of the material selection for the duration of the cycle. In Week 1, we also asked students to complete a Reading Journal (Appendix 2) in order to take a snapshot of their reading habits. The journal asked students to detail what they had been reading recently and where they had accessed the material, online or paper based. Figure 3 shows that a majority of the students (89%) preferred online reading over paper-based materials.

Using the data as a guide, we then selected the ER materials. The most popular choices were social media genres, magazine articles, news articles and novels. As the majority of students expressed a preference for reading online, GELI's learning management system (LMS), Blackboard (Appendix 3), was

Figure 1: Action research cycle

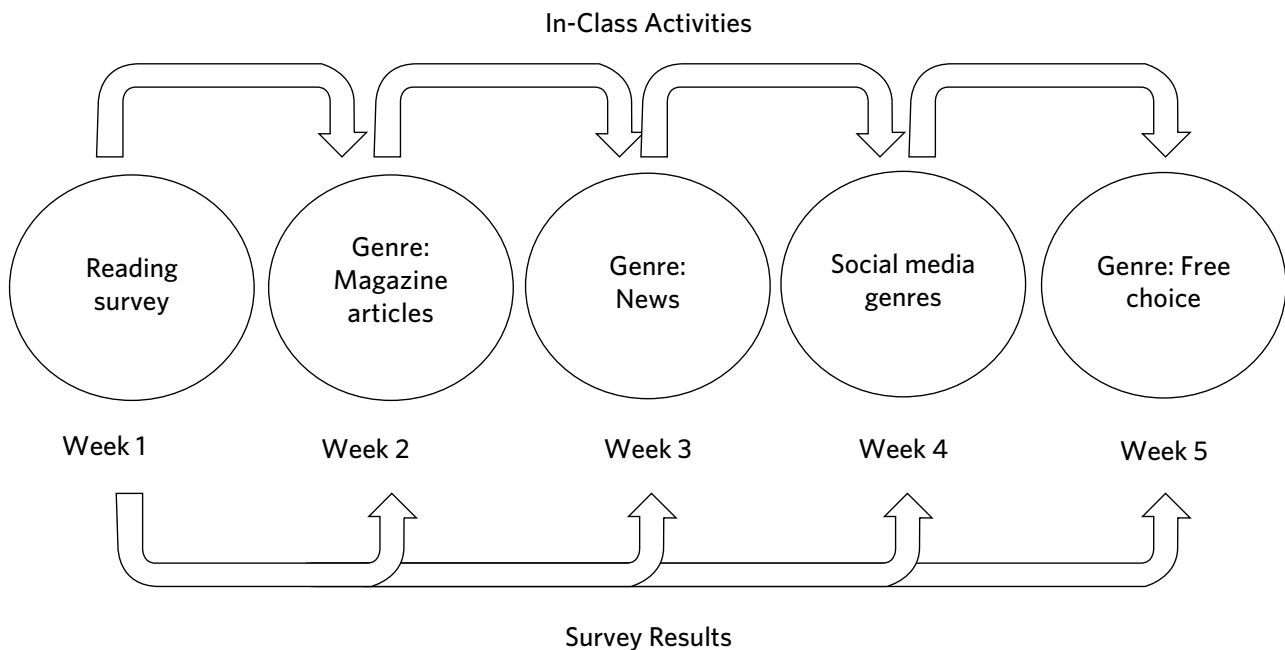


Figure 2: Student reading journal - genres preference in Cycles 1-3

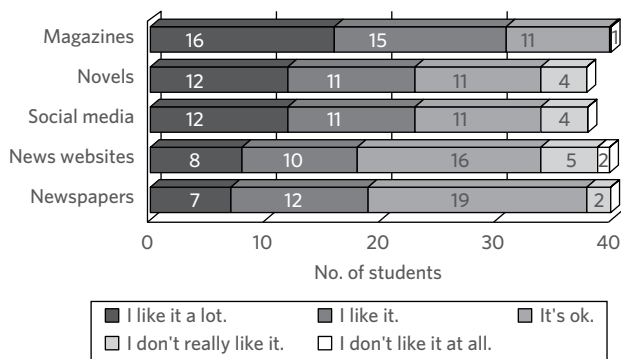
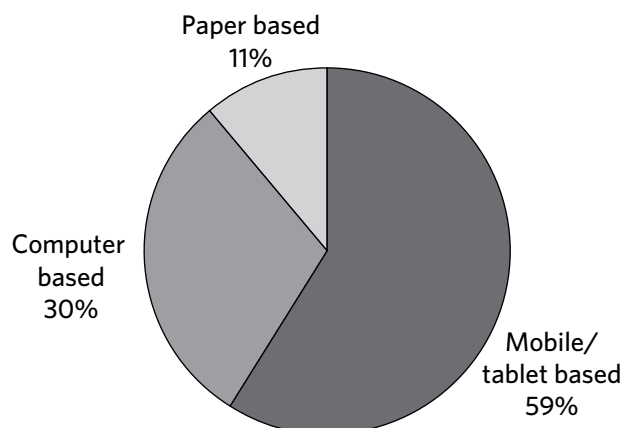


Figure 3: Student reading journal - modes of reading preference in Cycles 1-3 (n=50)



chosen as the platform through which the selected reading materials could be accessed via hyperlinks. The ER materials were introduced in class weekly, with students asked to read at least one article per week from the websites.

In-class activities were also completed each week to both support the previous week's reading material and introduce the next week's. Our first in-class activity in each cycle aimed to raise student awareness of ER. This activity included identification of different genres, the features of ER, and how ER differs from intensive reading (IR). It heavily emphasised that ER is primarily for enjoyment rather than as an assigned task with a specific language goal, such as learning a particular set of vocabulary items. The subsequent activities were not simply comprehension checks, but rather whole-class and small-group activities that encouraged students to share what they had read with their classmates both in terms of content and opinion, thus emphasising reading as a social practice. One hour each week was designated for these activities, which are summarised for all three cycles in Table 2.

Throughout Cycle 1 we used observation journals, which were both descriptive and reflective (Burns 2010), to measure our perceptions of student engagement in the ER program, and we also conducted student exit surveys (Appendix 4) at the end of the course. As the graded readers are prescribed by GELI's curriculum, students were still required to complete the assigned reading and activities from the reader each week of the cycle.

Cycle 2

Having reviewed the data we had collected from our observations and exit surveys, we could see there had certainly been an overall positive student response to the ER program, and therefore we decided Cycle 2 should be conducted in much the same way as Cycle 1. However, we did make the following modifications in Cycle 2.

Most of the students did not complete the online Reading Journals in Cycle 1, despite many having actually completed the readings. As a result, students were provided in Cycle 2 with a paper-based version of the Reading Journals that they would fill in at the beginning of each ER lesson by interviewing each other with regard to what they had been reading. This activity became quite useful as an interactive warm-up activity that helped to reinforce the notion of reading as social practice.

In Cycle 1 students were asked to join Tumblr, a blogging platform and social networking site as a means to interact

with a range of ER materials. However, there was a limited student response with only three of the 15 students joining the site. During our Skype session with the action research project facilitator, we realised Facebook would likely be a better option, as most of the students already had an account and were actively using Facebook daily. We then both set up a teacher profile on Facebook in order to share reading materials with the students. This proved to be much more successful with 12 students becoming involved, and with the selected materials garnering 35 likes and three comments.

To gain more insight into the students' perceptions of, and engagement in the ER program, we added two open questions to the exit survey: What did you like about reading online in this course? and What did you not like about reading online in this course? We also decided to run focus groups in the final week of Cycle 2 to further gauge student attitudes towards, and their own experiences with reading in their L1 and L2. These findings are discussed later in this report.

Cycle 3

Despite a greater uptake of Facebook by the students in Cycle 2, we still felt that we had not yet discovered how best to incorporate social media genres into the program. In the AR Workshop 2 in Sydney, other participants outlined the success they had had in using Facebook as the platform for sharing and discussing student-sourced reading material. Inspired by their experiences, we saw the potential in using Facebook not just as a means of providing reading materials, but rather as the platform through which students could share and discuss with each other what they had read. We created the Facebook page 'Extensive Reading for GELI Students' for this purpose.

From the focus group discussions, we further discovered that students viewed vocabulary as the biggest hurdle in their L2 reading. In response, we incorporated vocabulary activities and strategies for dealing with new vocabulary into the in-class activities. Table 2 provides a description of these.

In Cycle 3 we also conducted follow-up interviews with students who had previously participated in the ER program in Cycles 1 and 2 to determine how the students felt the ER program had helped them with their reading and language development in the longer term. Two students, one from Cycle 1 and one from Cycle 2, participated in these interviews, which were held in week 2 of Cycle 3.

Table 2: In-class activities

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Cycle 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genre matching activity Reading survey Rules for ER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: What have you been reading? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: What have you been reading? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: What have you been reading? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: What have you been reading? Exit survey
Cycle 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading survey Rules for ER Discussion: What have you been reading? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The News: Ask four 'wh-' questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Journal 4-3-2 speaking activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Journal Find someone who read... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Journal Focus group Exit survey
Cycle 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading survey Rules for ER Reading and discussion: 'Street Food' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dealing with new words The News: Ask four 'wh-' questions Reading Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding collocations Reading Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find someone who read... Reading Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: Questions on article topic Reading Journal Exit survey

Data collection

Determining existing reading practices

In order to investigate our students' existing reading practices, the initial step in our data collection was to conduct student surveys. In Week 1 of each cycle the students completed an online reading survey (Appendix 1) that had a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it was designed to gain a snapshot of the out-of-class reading practices in terms of what genres students read. This would be used as the basis for the genres that would be included in our ER program. Students were asked to tick and then to rank on a Likert scale their preference for reading particular genres *in any language*. Those included were magazines/journals, social media (such as Facebook, Weibo, etc.), novels, news websites, sports news websites, Twitter, newspapers, text messages, advertising material and other. Secondly, the reading survey highlighted to students that ER was not restricted to traditional paper-based novels or graded readers, but rather a range of text types and genres.

In the first week of each round the students were also given access to an online Reading Journal (Appendix 2) to complete. The students were asked to record a text they had read over the previous three days to a week. From Cycle 2, this online Reading Journal was replaced by a paper-based journal that was completed in class.

Measuring engagement

We used a range of data collection tools and methods to gauge the level of student engagement throughout our AR, including: teacher observation journals, student Reading Journals (Appendix 2), digital tracking of student access to the learning management system (Appendix 3), student exit surveys (Appendix 4), in-class focus groups, follow-up interviews, and the number of 'likes' or 'comments' left by students on the ER Facebook page.

In all three cycles of our AR project, teacher observation journals were used to record student behaviour and comments in class, teachers' perceptions of student engagement in the in-class activities and the ER program overall, and also student completion of in-class and out-of-class tasks. The journals were completed soon after each lesson and were both descriptive and reflective (Burns 2010).

As the digital resources in the ER program were made available through the learning management system (LMS) Blackboard, it was possible to track student access to the websites. However, the system does have two limitations. Firstly, it only measures a 'hit' if the student accesses the website via the LMS, and therefore is unable to record direct access to the websites. Secondly, it simply records access to the websites and not time spent on the websites, and is therefore not a definitive record of a student actually having read the material.

Exit surveys were conducted in the last week of each cycle. The students were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements, 'I liked reading online this course'; 'I preferred having the reader only'; 'I liked having more choice of text type'; 'I liked having more choice of topic'; 'I liked choosing my own reading material'; and 'I read more outside the classroom this course'. From Cycle 2, two open-ended questions were added to the survey: 'What did you like about reading online this course?', and 'What did you not like about reading online this course?'

We conducted two focus group interviews in the final week of Cycle 2 to identify factors outside of the classroom that could potentially impact on the level of student engagement with the ER program. The eight students present for the focus groups were divided into two groups of four and were given the following five questions to discuss: 'Why do we read?', 'Of the four skills, how important is reading in improving your English?', 'Did you read much when you were a child or did your parents read to you?', 'What are some of the reasons for including online reading in a course?', and 'Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to read in English outside the classroom?'. These focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

In Cycle 3, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Richards 2009). Ten students were invited to participate, with two students, one each from Cycles 1 and 2, participating in the interviews. Questions included: 'What did you think of the reading program?', 'What kind of program do you prefer: a reader only, online reading only, or a mixture of both?', 'After the course, did you read any of the websites?' and 'Do you think the program helped for your study in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) now?'. The interviews were recorded.

In Cycles 2 and 3, we established teacher Facebook profiles and the students were asked to become 'friends' with these profiles, which then provided them with access to a range of online resources. Facebook enabled students to 'like' and 'comment' on posts that we shared with the class via the ER Facebook page, which provided us with a record of active student interest in our postings.

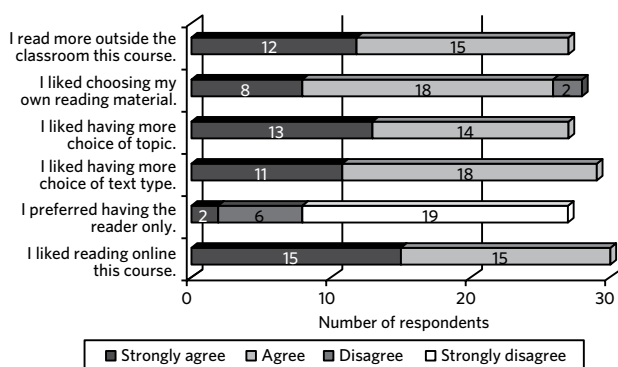
Findings

The goal of our action research was to discover to what extent a digital extensive reading program that is developed from and for students' existing reading practices is able to promote learner engagement with ER in our classrooms. For this project, we defined engagement as participation and interest in set activities, and a willingness to complete assigned tasks. The data collected from the exit surveys, focus groups, follow-up interviews and teacher observation journals revealed a marked increase in interest and enthusiasm during the in-class activities, which contrasted sharply to the lack of student engagement with the prescribed reader. Further analysis of the data revealed three dominant recurrent themes that could account for this discrepancy: student interest for reading online, enthusiasm for students to choose texts that interested them, and recognition of the benefit of ER to language development. This is discussed next in more detail.

It was noticed during teacher observations that student interest and participation in the online reading program increased, while simultaneously noting a lack of engagement for the prescribed graded reader. In 10 of the 12 weeks across the cycles, we recorded observations of the majority of students either not completing the reading from the prescribed reader or not engaging with the accompanying in-class activities. On one occasion, Caroline noted an audible moan from the students when asked to get out their prescribed readers. One student in class exemplified this contrast by commenting, 'Before I thought reading was boring, but now . . . I'm interested in reading.' In follow-up interviews, both interviewed students referred to their level of interest in the online reading material on eight occasions.

The results from the exit survey (Figure 4) provided some further insight into the enthusiasm for the new ER program.

Figure 4: Student exit survey - Cycles 1-3 (n=30)



Of the 30 students from Cycles 1, 2 and 3 to complete the survey, all students reported that they preferred reading online, and three of the 15 students commented specifically on this in the open-ended questions saying that texts and topics from the online reading program were more relevant and interesting to them. In the focus groups, five of the eight students commented on their preference for reading online. One student during the focus group session commented on the appeal of the online reading compared to the reader:

I think if I'm reading online it's not boring. Because when I read one book oh [that's] boring! Because when you . . . read one book just [there's] only the one topic, [but] if you read online, [there are] many, many topic and [if] I want [I can] change it [them].

The availability of choice was another major theme to emerge from the data. In the exit survey, all but two students reported liking the greater choice of texts and topics made available to them, and five of the 15 made specific positive reference to the greater degree of choice. One student illustrated this in saying they liked the course 'because it has a lot of topic that we can choose'. Student A in the follow-up interview also commented on this saying, 'I don't feel compulsory to find the words. I want to find the meaning the words because I interested in the text.' However, in the exit survey, two students complained that some of the topics were not of interest to them. We think this response can be partly attributed to the difficulty in finding a variety of quality material that was also appropriate for the students' English proficiency level. Over time, it should be possible to build a stronger bank of resources that can cater to a variety of interests. It will also be important to provide alternatives for students who do not share the majority interest.

The final dominant theme from the data was the student perception that the program had benefited language and reading development. In the exit survey, nearly one-third of the students'

comments were related to the respondents' improved language and vocabulary development. In the follow-up interviews, there were 11 comments from both participants referring to their improved language, vocabulary and reading skills. Student A stated the benefit to her reading skills by saying that 'I don't feel the pressure to find unknown vocabulary'. Student B also recognised the benefits of this increased reading noting, 'When I read more, I feel my language gets improved and I understand any topic now, I can understand.'

Most encouragingly, our observations noted a much greater uptake of out-of-class reading. Whereas ER activities in class were often a struggle for the teacher, as many of the students were not completing the assigned readings from the graded reader, now many of the students had read at least one article from the ER program each week. These observations were supported by the data. In the exit survey, 27 of the 30 respondents reported that they had read more outside of the classroom during the course. Digital tracking of student access to the ER websites through the Learning Management System (LMS) also revealed that students were accessing the online reading materials. Table 3 details the numbers of times each student accessed the ER websites via the LMS. At least 25 students accessed the websites at least five times or more between 24 April and 5 September, and there was an average of 9.28 accesses per student across all three cycles. The tracking further showed that a number of students continued to access the websites through the LMS even after their course had finished. This was confirmed in the follow-up interviews by Student A and Student B who both reported that 10 weeks after their GE 4 course had ended they were still regularly reading some of the material introduced by the ER program. It should be noted that students who accessed the materials directly on the web rather than via the LMS would not be captured by the tracking software, so the number of accesses recorded in Table 3 reveal only the minimum number, and the actual number of hits is probably higher.

Interestingly, compared to the data from the interviews, focus groups, teacher observation journals and LMS tracking, the self-reporting from the Reading Journals seemed to demonstrate a less widespread uptake of the out-of-class reading. However, this may actually reveal a deficiency in using Reading Journals as a reporting tool. In general, our students seemed to view the Reading Journal as a burdensome, administrative task that they were uninterested in completing. Initially, because it was designed as an online tool for easy access, few of the students in Cycle 1 completed the journal. This was most likely due to the inconvenience of accessing the tool through the LMS as well as low student buy-in to take the time to report on their reading habits. In Cycles 2 and 3, we switched to a paper-based journal, which

Table 3: Number of times students accessed online materials (Cycles 1, 2 and 3, 24 April - 5 September)

Student 1	37	Student 9	19	Student 17	12	Student 25	5	Student 33	1
Student 2	35	Student 10	17	Student 18	11	Student 26	4	Student 34	1
Student 3	34	Student 11	17	Student 19	10	Student 27	3	Student 35	1
Student 4	32	Student 12	16	Student 20	10	Student 28	3	Student 36	1
Student 5	27	Student 13	15	Student 21	8	Student 29	2	Student 37	1
Student 6	26	Student 14	15	Student 22	9	Student 30	1	Student 38	1
Student 7	26	Student 15	14	Student 23	7	Student 31	1	Student 39	1
Student 8	21	Student 16	12	Student 24	6	Student 32	1	Student 40	1

all students completed in class under our direction. However, this approach required students to recall what they had read over the past seven days, limiting the validity of the data.

Despite their eagerness to utilise internet-based materials for class, an underlying theme to emerge from the data was student frustration with technological issues, such as the inordinate amount of time it took to log in to the wireless network and LMS. This was repeatedly commented on both in class and in the exit survey. One student vented in the exit survey by saying, 'I like to read in this course but I have to sign in before I can read. So it [is] very complicating and waste of time.' Another student also noted some limitations of reading online, commenting that 'When I read online I can't remember and I easy forget it.'

Our findings have indicated that our ER program improved student engagement. The data illustrated an overwhelmingly positive response from many of the students, in particular in relation to their interest in reading online, and also in their being able to make choices with regard to genres and topics.

Reflection

Hill (1997:17) states that when developing an extensive reading program, teachers should 'think big and start small', and this has been the guiding principle of our ER program. Ultimately, we wanted to improve our students' reading fluency; this is thinking 'big'. We sought to do this by directing students' existing reading practices; this is starting 'small'.

As our project has progressed, we have discovered that 'thinking big and starting small' is perhaps why action research is so beneficial to both teachers and students. It provides the opportunity for teachers to systematically investigate their hunches regarding language learning and classroom practice. This reflective practice then creates a positive feedback loop whereby we develop as teachers, and contribute to our community of practice, which in turn benefits teachers, and ultimately our students.

Another benefit of our action research is the continuous cycle of enquiry that it has now engendered. Our AR has raised additional questions for us about our students' extensive reading practices and how we as teachers can encourage them to read extensively. For example, did our AR intervention lead to a self-sustaining reading practice that students carried with them once leaving our course? How do we best involve the students who found neither the established graded reader activities nor our AR intervention engaging? Did students who find reading challenging engage more/the same/less with the ER program than other students? These questions highlight the need to continuously evaluate and re-evaluate the individuality of our learners, their learning practices and our own teaching practices. They also suggest a potential for us to provide a much more learner-centred ER program whereby reading material dovetails more readily with students' interests than is normally accounted for in a prescriptive program. For us, action research has provided the perfect platform to continuously explore and develop these ideas.

But perhaps the greatest advantage of our AR project is its potential uptake by our colleagues. Our project shows that no extra training or particular skill set is required for a teacher to incorporate this engaging ER program into their own repertoire. The only requirement is for a teacher to get to know the students and their reading interests. We hope that,

because of the demonstrated success of our intervention and the ease of its integration into the curriculum, our ER program will become a regular fixture in GELI's curriculum.

Conclusion

The value of self-directed reading practice for English learners cannot be overstated. The means by which we can best encourage this practice for our students was the key question in our AR, and our findings indicate that an ER program that better incorporates student reading preferences can encourage better engagement with ER reading and associated class activities. Both we, as the teachers, and the students involved in our project were also in agreement that online reading has much to offer, or as our students enthusiastically expressed it, 'online, yeah, online!' While some teachers may despair at this resounding rejection of the 'book', our AR was not about supplanting paper with digital materials, but rather about developing a student-driven ER program. By responding to students' views about which genres, topics, and modes of access to select, we were able to become learning facilitators rather than comprehension checkers. The words of one of our students perhaps best capture the essence of our ER program and its goal to improve reading engagement: 'Some words nobody knows, and I know because I read.'

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Appendix 1: Reading survey

Do you like to read?

Do you read (in any language) ...

- Magazines/Journals
- Social Media (Weibo/Facebook/Hi5/Mixi/Orkut/Tumblr)
- Novels
- News websites
- Sports news websites
- Twitter
- Newspapers
- Text messages (SMS, Viber, Lime, Skype)
- Advertising materials
- Other:

Do you like to read ...

	I like it a lot.	I like it.	It's ok.	Not really.	I don't like it at all.
Magazines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Novels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
News websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sport news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advertising materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Think about everything you read over the last 3 days. Make a list of everything that you read here.

Appendix 2: Reading Journal

Reading Journal

Name

What did you read?
(eg, a magazine article, a book, a website, etc)

What was the title/topic?

Where did you read it?

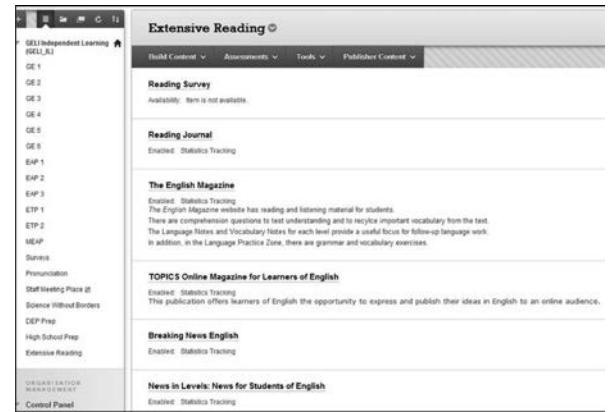
- On my phone/tablet
- On my computer
- On paper
- In the world

What language was it in?

Why did you read it?

How many minutes did you spend reading?

Appendix 3: Blackboard learning management system



Appendix 4: Exit Survey

Extensive Reading - Exit Survey

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

	Really agree	Agree	Disagree	Really disagree	Have no opinion
I liked reading online this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I preferred having the reader only.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I liked having more choice of text type (for example, magazine, news article, etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I liked having more choice of topic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I liked choosing my own reading material.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I read more outside the classroom this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What did you like about reading online in this course?

What did you not like about reading online in this course?

Motivating students to read extensively

MARLON SCHOEP CURTIN ENGLISH, CURTIN UNIVERSITY, PERTH

EILEEN WOOD CURTIN ENGLISH, CURTIN UNIVERSITY, PERTH

Introduction

The goal of our action research, which took place across different class levels within the ELICOS curriculum at our teaching centre, was to motivate our students to become extensive readers. Our main premise was that reading extensively is beneficial to students and the more they are motivated to read, the more they will read. The research aimed to respond to our colleagues' observations that students were not reading for pleasure in English. We set out to discover why this was the case, what interventions could be implemented to improve this situation and whether their effectiveness varied between students with differing levels of language proficiency.

Educational context and participants

Students study at Curtin English (CE) to gain entry into Curtin University or Curtin College, improve their English skills so they can understand their mainstream course better, and participate effectively in the predominantly English-speaking community around them. CE classes consist of students with a range of differing backgrounds and nationalities grouped by their level of English. Courses aim to achieve specific goals and not meeting these goals costs students time and money in that it delays their entry into university or college. As a result, learning activities in class are typically designed to be completed within a short time-frame and achieve concrete outcomes, often focusing on a specific skill. At the time of the research, extensive reading was not part of the syllabus or curriculum.

The research participants were drawn from four classes represented in Table 1. Each class participated in the research over a 5-week period, which is the length of a module, and classes were conducted consecutively over a 20-week period. Students were aged between 17 and 38, with the majority being under 25. Classes were predominantly made up of Middle Eastern (Saudi Arabian, Kuwaiti, Omani and Iranian) and Chinese students, with the remainder of the students coming from Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Venezuela, Colombia and Nepal. Most students were on a pathway to study an undergraduate degree at Curtin University and were supported by their parents or governments. The classroom environment was monolingual.

Table 1: Action research participants

Class	Level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)	Number of students
1	A1 and A2	15
2	A1 and A2	9
3	B1 and B2	13
4	B1 and B2	16

Research focus

The goal of the action research was to explore how to motivate students to read extensively by laying a foundation for an extensive reading program and by using a variety of activities, centred around a book review website. Early in the research process, the purpose of the research was further refined to examine the following questions:

1. What interventions can be conducted to motivate students to read extensively in terms of decreasing demotivators and increasing motivators?
2. How effective is each intervention for students with differing levels of language proficiency and why?
3. Which interventions create lasting motivation for students to read extensively and why?

Data gathering

Over the period of the research, data was collected using various formal and informal processes. Formal processes included surveys which included questions requiring open-ended responses to supply qualitative data, and closed questions using Likert scales to provide quantitative data. In the first week of the cycle students were given surveys to determine their reading culture/backgrounds (Appendix 1), with a focus on their previous exposure to reading, current reading habits, attitude towards reading, their approach to understanding new vocabulary and what was important to them when they read. The latter four areas of interest were mirrored in all formal feedback surveys to determine whether change was taking place over the course of the interventions. In the second week, students were given an opportunity to give anonymous feedback on interventions up until that date by answering open questions: how do you feel about the reading program so far? Why do you feel this way? The goal was to provide an open format for feedback so students could raise issues that had not been anticipated. In the third week, students were given individual interviews with open questions which mirrored the end-of-cycle survey (Appendix 2). In the fifth week, the end-of-cycle survey was conducted to determine the success of classroom interventions, attitudes towards them and students' intentions to read in the future.

Additionally, teachers were engaged in continuously collecting qualitative data informally through observations of students' actions, and the recording of students' unsolicited feedback from their weekly diaries and/or verbally as a class or individuals. If further data was required to address an issue raised from data collection, teachers used open-ended questions to discuss issues with individuals or the class informally, conducted further interviews with individual

students and gave students additional anonymous written surveys. In order to determine the long-term effect of the reading program, post-program focus groups were used in which students answered open-ended questions about their reading habits. In terms of quantitative data, students recorded their reading progress on reading record sheets.

Overview

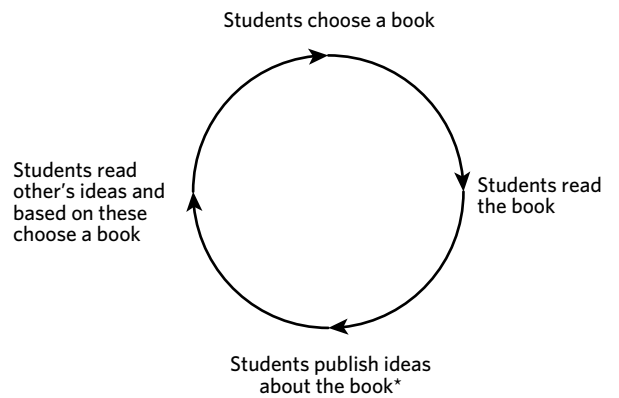
The initial survey showed that in classes 1 and 2, a majority of students read a book or article in English less than once a month. However, in classes 3 and 4, a few students read nearly every day or once a month, with most students reading a few times a week. It was not clear whether this included reading from textbooks. The survey did not identify why students were not reading extensively, but showed that all classes felt comprehension of the text and difficulty of the texts were important. In the first week of the program, it became clear that many students had significant difficulties with basic features of written English such as sentence structure and referents, especially in classes 1 and 2. These initial results along with the teachers' own observations formed the basis for interventions.

Interventions were carried out for each class over a 5-week period, the length of a level, and the four classes were conducted consecutively over a 20-week period. The basis of the intervention was providing students with material for 15 minutes of daily in-class reading and out-of-class reading so students could then share what they had read through

communicative activities. These activities were conducted once a week over a 2- to 4-hour period, with smaller activities (approximately 15 minutes) being conducted daily.

Students were expected to finish a book per week and, based on the communicative activities, chose a new book to read. This process formed the basis of the Reading Cycle (Figure 1). It was hoped that the activities in the Reading Cycle would lead to reading communities. These interventions were accompanied with students being taught strategies to equip them with the skills to access reading materials autonomously. Figure 2 summarises the interventions taken for a class over a level.

Figure 1: The weekly Reading Cycle



*Tasks include: Reviews, Character Reviews, Comic Creation, Plot Summaries, Posters and Presentations

Figure 2: A summary of interventions for a class

Week	Group reading material		The Reading Cycle	Facilitating reading	Reading habits	Feedback mechanisms
	B1-B2	A1-A2				
1	SS choose from class sets 1-3	SS read the same book	Introduce ↓ Read Book 1 ↓ Activity/Choose Book 2	↑ In-class reading (15 mins/day) - Dictionary use - How and when to record vocab. - Guessing meaning from context - Using referents	↓ Movement towards autonomous reading	Initial student surveys
2	SS choose from class sets 1-3	SS choose from 18 titles in the class library.	↓ Read Book 2 ↓ Activity/Choose Book 3			Anonymous feedback survey
3	SS choose from class sets 1-7	SS choose from 18 titles in the class library.	↓ Read Book 3 ↓ Activity/Choose Book 4			Student interviews
4	SS choose from library collection	SS choose from library collection	↓ Read Book 4 ↓ Activity/Choose Book 5			
5	SS choose from library collection	SS choose from library collection or class library	↓ Read Book 5 ↓ Activity/Choose Book 6			End of cycle survey

Interventions

Removing demotivators

Over the course of the action research, interventions were undertaken to address five key 'demotivating' factors: poor perceptions of reading, access to reading materials, not having time or space to read in, obstructive habits and difficulty with reading.

Poor perceptions of reading

In the initial survey many students did not appear to have a grasp of the usefulness of extensive reading. Discussions with all classes found that around half of students in classes 3 and 4 thought that reading was not worth their time compared to activities that gave them immediate and tangible benefits. A majority of classes 1 and 2 thought it would be useful, but did not know exactly why. With the goal of illustrating the usefulness of reading and thereby increasing motivation to read extensively, students were given activities to explore why reading was beneficial.

Availability of materials

Initially, of the 53 students, a verbal survey showed that only three students already had English texts which they were reading. So, with the expectation that students who have access to reading materials would read more, students were provided with access to a choice of graded readers through an 'in-class library'. Furthermore, as students moved through the program, they were taught to use the university library to find and borrow graded readers with the goal of facilitating lasting autonomous reading.

Removing distractions

From experience, we saw that students were easily distracted from reading in the classroom and we guessed this would be more so outside the classroom. With the goal of minimising distractions to promote a focus on extensive reading, we gave students time each day for in-class reading. Initially students had 10 minutes, but very soon we changed this to 15 minutes for two reasons: firstly, some students in class 1 and 4 said that the reading time was too short and expressed frustration at being stopped; secondly, Day and Bamford (1998) recommend 'at least' 15 minutes in class per day, with the claim it gave students enough time to settle into reading and engage with texts.

We also varied the part of the lesson when we did the class reading. The goal was to determine how to best place in-class extensive reading within class time and lessons so that students were motivated to read.

Obstructive habits

We had noticed that most of our students had the habit of checking texts word-for-word and were constantly using dictionaries, even though in the initial survey a majority of students said they only sometimes looked up vocabulary. Operating on the hypothesis that interrupted reading limits students' ability to engage in and enjoy stories, and therefore affects motivation to read extensively, we undertook three interventions: firstly, students were not

permitted to use dictionaries or ask for word meanings during reading sessions; secondly, students practised guessing meaning from context and, thirdly, students were given techniques for looking up vocabulary after a reading session.

Addressing difficulty

In the initial survey almost all students said it was important that they could understand overall meaning while they were reading. It was clear that an obstacle to uninterrupted and enjoyable reading was ease of comprehension. Difficulty was addressed by the use of graded materials and building bottom-up reading skills.

Students were given graded readers with the expectation that because they are easier to read they are more accessible and therefore potentially more enjoyable, leading to greater motivation to read. In classes 3 and 4, the number of readers was initially limited to three titles so groups of students could navigate the reading cycle together, making the process less intimidating and allowing them to share reading experiences more easily. The same reasoning was applied to classes 1 and 2, but to a greater degree, in that the whole class read the same book to start with. Once students were confident with the process, they could choose from a larger pool of books.

From teachers' observations and the results of language exercises it became apparent that students, particularly from classes 1 and 2, had trouble guessing the meanings of words from context and understanding cohesive devices. We hypothesised that teaching these skills systematically and regularly would make them automatic, which would increase reading fluency, leading to more engagement and, therefore, enjoyment of the text, which would motivate students to read extensively.

In view of this, we set about empowering students by giving them the tools to access the text by doing regular and systematic activities for guessing meaning from context, and identifying/understanding referents and cohesive devices. We used published exercises such as those from *Reading Power* and *Reading Power Basic* (Jeffries and Mikulecky 2009) and also wrote our own materials.

Creating motivation

Often the success of a learning activity depends on engaging students' extrinsic motivation (motivation for external reward or to avoid punishment) and intrinsic motivation (motivation that is personally rewarding). Knowing this, we tried to motivate students using the following strategies: goal setting, creating routine, creating engagement with materials, providing good models and providing purpose for reading.

Goal setting

In the first week of each class, students were asked to establish their reading goals so they could monitor their progress. The expectation was that by keeping track of their progress, students would feel personally invested in their improvement and this would increase their motivation to read extensively.

Creating routine

In the initial survey many students did not read on a daily basis. In our personal experience and as teachers, we found that making activities routine leads to better results and more lasting engagement. It was with this purpose that we tried to make all the interventions routine.

Engagement with materials

Almost all students in the initial survey cited interesting material as very important to them when they read. For all classes, graded readers were selected from a catalogue to create a class library. The criteria for choosing the books for the library were the following: culturally neutral, age appropriate, and appealing to a range of interests and readers. The expectation was that the variety of choice would lead to greater motivation amongst students because they would feel empowered by their choice and choose titles they were interested in and could engage with.

Providing good models

Although there was no data to support this idea, we felt that some students may not have had models for reading, especially if their peers or parents did not read. In response to this, teachers read during in-class reading time. The expected result was threefold: students would see what the teacher was doing and replicate it, the students would feel that the teacher is part of their reading community and the teacher's enthusiasm would motivate the students.

Providing purpose for reading

From our own experience we had observed that when students had an authentic reason to do activities, such as reading, they were more likely to do it. With this in mind, we designed various communicative tasks that required students to share their reading experiences. Based on the information and opinions students received in these interactions, they would choose their next book. These activities included discussions, writing plot and character reviews, giving presentations, and creating comic strips and posters.

Community interaction

With the goal of creating a community, communicative tasks were set in the classroom and on a reading website. It was hoped that as the physical and virtual reading communities developed, students would become more autonomous and lasting readers, as their continued social needs would motivate their reading during and beyond the class.

In the physical space, students interacted face-to-face, while in the virtual space students interacted online using the My Reading Library website (www.myreadinglibrary.wordpress.com). On the My Reading Library website all the available graded readers at Curtin English and Curtin Library were listed. Following the Reading Cycle, students read a book, rated it and then carried out a communicative task about the book. Other students could then read this information to choose a new book, or comment on it if they had already read it, as partly illustrated in Appendix 3. The website could be used by all classes, regardless of level, could be used at any time and could continue being used even after students changed courses or left the school. Alternatively, students

could write their opinions or ideas on a comment sheet attached to a book, which was then read by other students with the same purpose as the website.

Findings

The data collected during the research provides insights into actions teachers can take to motivate students to read extensively.

Set reading goals

From teachers' observations, students were initially motivated by activities illustrating how useful reading was to achieving their language goals. Most students began to value reading as a way of learning as illustrated by the following comment: 'For me [reading] is a new experience and way to study and learn English I like too much'. These language goals were linked to reading goals and reading records were a useful strategy for illustrating students' progress towards them. Achieving these goals created a sense of achievement in most students, which was motivating. This was evidenced by observations of behaviours such as many students comparing how many books they had read, enthusiastically adding new books to their reading lists, anticipating the weekly reading deadline, asking for books earlier than required. Furthermore, several students from classes 1 and 2 talked about how pleased they were with their language progress in their weekly diaries, attributing it to reading. This was to such an extent that one student pointed to his grades from previous levels to show how they had improved only when he started reading.

Provide access to materials

Providing students with materials at the beginning of each level was an essential step towards extensive reading. By the end of the first week, all students had books and by the end of the level they knew where and how to get their own books through the university library and were doing so. However, there were obstacles with library use: half of all students had difficulty using the borrower cards, graded readers could not be searched for on the library catalogue, and many books had a 3-day loan period. One student from class 3 summed up the feeling about the obstacles: 'It is too difficult, teacher'. This sentiment was much more so for students from class 1 and 2 who did not have enough language to address the obstacles. This illustrates the point that if students cannot easily get access to appropriate reading materials, especially lower level language users, they may not read at all.

Fortunately, these problems with the library were solved and post-course focus groups showed that half of the students were still using the library to borrow books. Similarly, other teachers who had students from the action research in their classes reported half of these students came to class with books they were borrowing from the library. This shows that to create lasting autonomous extensive reading habits, students need lasting access to materials which they can access independently.

Provide a choice of materials

Students who have a choice in what they read are more interested in the material and more likely to read it.

Furthermore, the more involved this choice is, the more students are engaged in it. In informal interviews of students in class 4, students who had read numerous reviews of a story from other students on the website were more confident with their choice of book and appeared more interested in reading it.

Use stories

We found the use of stories increased motivation to read. The plot engaged students and they often did not want to put down their books at the end of reading time, with several members of all groups expressing that they wanted to know what would happen next. Interestingly, this enthusiasm was not replicated by students reading non-fiction texts. This may be because there were not engaged in a plot. For example, in the final survey, in an open question about what the student thought about the reading activities, one student answered, 'I like reading books but I dislike reading article of textbook because it's not interesting'.

It became clear that students needed to read the same types of books for communicative activities to be effective. For example, a student in class 3 who read about the city of Chicago could not participate in a character analysis task and share with their peers. In contrast, students in classes 1, 2 and 4 were only offered a choice of stories to read and sharing between class members became easier. From teachers' observations, this led to greater engagement in communicative activities.

Promote reading habits

We found providing students with regular reading time and a space to read increased motivation to read. Teachers observed that a reading space for students removed distractions from in-class reading so students focused on reading more. This focus could be further increased if the teacher read as well so as not to distract students during reading time and provide a model for extensive reading. Three students from class 1 claimed that if the teacher was working during reading time, it was a distraction from reading. Another possible contributor to the success of in-class reading was that disengaged behaviour was easily identified by peers and frowned upon as a distraction, and as a result the group provided some peer pressure to read.

Another finding was that reading every day also created reading habits. After the first week, most students were eager to read, pulling out their books quickly when reading time started, indicating increased motivation to read and that the regularity of in-class reading was forming habits.

With regard to the length of reading time, from open discussions with the classes, they felt 15 minutes was enough time for them to engage with and enjoy their texts, but not any less. A quarter of students across all groups would have liked more time to read for their own enjoyment. Across all feedback mechanisms, students said they liked 'in-class' reading time.

Where this reading time was within the larger lesson, it was also important to promote extensive reading. Ending the lesson with reading seemed to work best with the classes 1 and 2, as students could, and sometimes did, continue reading into lunchtime. Some students also told the teacher they felt unsettled if reading was followed by an unrelated

activity. However, from observations, classes 3 and 4 were more enthusiastic about reading when times were varied as confirmed by a class vote, the reason being it made the day more interesting.

Address difficulty of comprehension

The use of graded readers lowered the difficulty of reading comprehension. From group discussions, the graded readers were easier than normal books to read leading to more reading in most students. However, in the second week of each class, a quarter of students had slow reading rates and were unenthusiastic. Anonymous surveys with open questions about the reasons for this indicated that students were still finding the reading too difficult, particularly the vocabulary. As a result, students were given a graded reader that was one level lower than their proficiency level. From observing students' progress, engagement during in-class reading increased, as did their reading rate. When asked about this in the student interviews, they said it was because it was easier so they enjoyed it more. The positive relationship between ease of reading, rate of reading and enjoyment is further supported by the following example: two students in class 3 and four students in class 4 requested higher reading material; however, their reading rates slowed to less than a book a week and they said they were enjoying reading less. As a result, they were limited to readers of their level and their rates increased to match the Reading Cycle.

Combining the banning of dictionaries during reading sessions with vocabulary recording strategies and guessing meaning from context skills led to a less interrupted narrative, so students enjoyed the text more, which motivated them to read more. From teachers' observations, by the last week of all classes, almost all students were not using dictionaries while reading, even texts from outside the reading program, such as articles in course books. The final surveys indicated that a majority of students were guessing meaning from context more frequently and, as indicated by in-class exercises, with greater accuracy. However, over half of the higher groups also indicated that they were recording more vocabulary. Interviews of these students revealed that they were using the vocabulary recording strategies which were taught in class, in which vocabulary was revisited after reading. In the end-of-course survey, all students indicated a sense of achievement at having learned a range of new vocabulary and indicated that they felt their English was improving with comments such as, 'I am going to read 1 hour everyday, because I want to know more words, improve my skills.'

It must be noted that for the first couple of days at the start of each new class, there was some resistance from two or three students to the limiting of dictionary use. But very quickly even the most 'dictionary dependent' students became accustomed to reading without them. This indicates that using dictionaries is often an ingrained habit that takes some time to change. The process can begin with continuing students providing good models for dictionary use for students who join the class at a later date.

Teaching comprehension skills, such as the use of referents, led to uninterrupted and faster reading so students engaged with and enjoyed stories more, leading to extensive reading. In classes 1 and 2, close to two thirds of students commented on how much more confident they felt reading

after doing exercises practising referents. From the teacher's observations, as they practised these skills regularly, they became more motivated to read, with several members of the class commenting that it was 'like a game'. A student from class 3 summed up the general sentiment: 'Now I can read story. I have confident. I am happy.' The regular and systematic nature of the exercises meant that they became automatic and increased reading speed as illustrated by comments such as 'Read every day help me to improve my speed and understand' and most students claiming they could read faster in the end-of-course survey.

Create a sharing community

Communicative activities with which students shared their reading experiences also increased motivation to read. By the end of the program, it was clear to observing teachers that a real sense of community was developing and the centre of this community was inside the classroom in the interaction between students. This may have been because communicative face-to-face in-class tasks provided models for authentic interaction which meant that students no longer needed set tasks to share information. For example, the teacher of classes 1 and 2 overheard several students recommending books to each other outside of class time. When individual students in classes 3 and 4 were asked why they talked about their books, several said it was interesting. Almost all students gave positive comments about reading activities when answering an open question in final surveys and from classes 3 and 4, a quarter of students wanted more activities.

Initially students were less engaged in the virtual space, particularly classes 1 and 2. However, as other classes have joined the virtual community it has gained momentum and, with the guidance of teachers, it is now becoming a much broader community with other classes joining it. As this occurs, its potential to involve students in a lasting online community is evolving. In both the classroom and virtual space, their desire to share had increased their motivation to read.

In the final survey almost all students said their enjoyment of reading had improved, they felt they were better readers and that they would continue to read in the future. Overall, amongst other strategies, the keys to motivating students to read extensively are to make materials accessible, reading routine, comprehension easier (less interrupted), reading interesting and meaningful. Lower level students needed help with access and comprehension, whereas higher level students needed variety and responded very positively to communicative activities.

Conclusion

Although students like to read, they are easily distracted and they may not have experience of reading regularly. To give students the best opportunity to become extensive readers, on a regular basis, they need to be provided with lasting access to reading materials, a period of time and a distraction-free space in which to read, and good reading models. These are the basis for making reading a habit.

A reoccurring theme is that students will read extensively

if they enjoy reading. Enjoyment can be increased by giving students a choice of materials so they can read what interests them and showing them how to access materials in their daily lives. Students found stories were enjoyable since they kept them more engaged across different reading sessions. Stories also facilitated a range of communicative tasks which give students a purpose for reading. The regular use of these tasks led to a sense of community developing and students began to engage in authentic face-to-face behaviour to share reading experiences. They have the opportunity to continue to do so beyond the classroom environment via an online community.

Students also enjoy reading more when difficulty with comprehension is decreased so they can read with minimal interruptions and 'lose themselves in the story'. Likewise, low comprehension led to decreased reading confidence, making reading a less attractive activity. Comprehension levels and reader confidence, particularly with lower level students, can be increased by systematically practising bottom-up reading skills such as understanding referents and guessing meaning from context, providing graded readers of a low level and strategies for looking up new vocabulary without interrupting a reading session. Students' confidence and sense of achievement can also be built by meeting reading goals, keeping reading records that illustrate progress and increasing students' vocabulary.

Overall, the classroom has provided a model for how to enjoy reading in the real world and has equipped students to keep reading beyond their time at Curtin English. Students became skilled readers who changed their perceptions of reading for the better, enjoying reading and reading more extensively. In the process they improved their language, gained confidence, connected with others and became independent and lasting readers.

Reflections on the program

Participating in this AR has been an exciting, inspiring and empowering experience. We have always considered ourselves to be reflective teachers, but AR, has given us the opportunity to make our explorations more effective. A key factor was the systematic nature of AR which produced results that led us far beyond what we had initially expected and to a deeper understanding of what we were examining.

The AR program also provided a very powerful structure which enabled us to transform our ideas into action. There were clear signposts at every point so we always knew what we needed to do to further our investigation.

Our conclusions from the program have probably been reached previously by other researchers. However, they were new for us and our colleagues. Because the research was classroom based, our findings were very 'real' to us. These results have provided a very practical basis for insights that we can implement in our future teaching. This experience has made us more effective teachers.

The collaborative aspect was a revelation. We met frequently to discuss and evaluate what was happening in the classroom and once a week we posted our thoughts together on a teacher blog (www.actionresearch2014.wordpress.com). The blog was the engine of our action research. Through it we could apply the process of exploring action taken,

reflections and future action. It provided us with a systematic process for tracking our progress and was also a forum for generating future action. We brought different perspectives to the work in hand, which made us question what we would have otherwise taken for granted. Furthermore, collaborating helped us build bridges between each other's ideas to reach new end points, especially at points when we felt we could not move forward. The workshops in Sydney were another source of inspiration and support as the other participants were also supportive and generous with their ideas. All of these collaborative interactions led to deeper analysis and more profound conclusions.

We also inspired our colleagues. We held a professional development workshop for other teachers at Curtin English and afterwards some of our colleagues began implementing extensive reading programs in their classes. For example, the academic bridging course now has an extensive reading component and its development is informed by the AR process explored in the workshop. Furthermore, an extensive reading program is in the process of becoming part of the general curriculum at Curtin English, largely based on our research. In addition, the professional development team is planning to implement AR on a micro level to engage teachers in their own growth. The response has been enthusiastic.

The program also had a positive effect on students' general engagement in class. This was in addition to the impact it had on their reading, motivation and language ability. We enrolled them in the idea and purpose of AR and they felt they were part of the research team. They asked questions, offered suggestions and were involved in creating photos for publication. It was clear that being part of the research was a rewarding experience for students.

In summary, the AR program has been an inspiring and empowering process for us, our students and our colleagues. It has provided not only a framework for our own reflections and professional development, but also for an extensive reading program that is being adopted across Curtin English. Our students have become effective and motivated readers who are part of a reading community and it was delightful and satisfying to see students reading so confidently and with such enjoyment.

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Appendix 1: Example of an initial survey

READING SURVEY

DETAILS

1. Name: _____

2. Class: GER

HISTORY

1. Did someone (maybe your parents) read to you when you were young? If they did, how often did they read to you?
Yes, she: my mother read story to me every day

2. What did you read most when you were young? For example, comics.
The story

ATTITUDES TO READING
Read the questions below and tick the box you agree with.

1. Do you like reading in English?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you like reading in your language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Never	A few times a month	A few times a week	Nearly every day	Every day
3. How often do you read articles or books in English?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How often did you read articles or books in your language when you were in your country?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

FACTORS AFFECTING MOTIVATION
How important are these to you when you read? Tick you agree with.

	Don't care	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very important
a. Reading quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Understanding words all the words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Interesting material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Difficulty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Understanding the overall meaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

VOCABULARY
How often do you do these things when you read? Tick a box.

	Never	Sometimes	Always
a. I look up words with my dictionary when I read	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. I write down new words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. I guess the meanings of new words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

OVERALL OPINION
Do you think reading is useful for improving your English? If yes, why?

Yes, I do. Because in IELTS exam, reading is a part of the exam.

Appendix 2: Example of an end-of-cycle survey

READING SURVEY

DETAILS

1. Name: _____

2. Class: GE50

ATTITUDES TO READING

1. Read the questions below and tick the box you agree with.

1. Do you like reading in English? Never A few times a month A few times a week Nearly every day Every day

2. How often do you read articles or books in English now? Never A few times a month A few times a week Nearly every day Every day

READING IMPROVEMENTS

2. How much has your reading improved in these areas? Tick you agree with.

	Got worse	No improvement	Improved	Improved a lot
a. Reading quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Understanding words from context	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Understanding the overall meaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Enjoyment of reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

e. Understanding

VOCABULARY

3. How often do you do these things when you read? Tick a box.

	Never	Sometimes	Always
a. I look up words with my dictionary when I read	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. I write down new words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. I guess the meanings of new words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

OVERALL OPINION

4. Do you think the reading books has been useful to you? Why?
Yes, I do because I memorized many vocabulary
I think, I'm reading quickly than before

5. Do you think you will read books more often in the future? Why?
Yes, I will. Because I like reading books.
It's makes me happy when I realized to improve my English skills.

6. In general, what did you think of reading and the activities we did? What did you like or dislike the most?
I like reading books but I dislike reading article of textbook because It's not interesting
Moreover, vocabularys are little difficult to memorize.

Appendix 3: Example of an online comment

PRE-INTERMEDIATE – JOHNNY ENGLISH

IMAGE MARCH 21, 2014 EILEENMARLON 9 COMMENTS



AUGUST 15, 2014 AT 8:04 AM
 Jonny is a funny and lucky man, he called Johnny English in the story. He is a secret service agent, so he is very safely and careful to do this job. He often makes very bad mistakes, but he's got an important job now. Anyway I liked this book, it is very interesting.

REPLY

AUGUST 28, 2014 AT 3:00 AM
 yes, I completely agree with you.

REPLY

AUGUST 28, 2014 AT 2:29 AM
 Jonny is a witty man. Although he makes some mistakes, he is very lucky, I think the story is very funny, you should read it.

REPLY

AUGUST 28, 2014 AT 2:38 AM
 Johnny English Reborn is a British action comedy film. Johnny English is a very clumsy and simple-minded secret agent, who gets the job of protecting the crown jewels in the tower of London, he always makes some mistakes in life. It was funny that he makes many absurd events. What gave me a deep impression were " he knows no FEAR, he knows no DANGER, he knows nothing" I think that although there are many troubles in life , we should face them with positive attitude and happy emotion! Just like Johnny English!

'Only connect': Facebook, reading and student engagement

JADE SLEEMAN LA TROBE MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE

KERRY RYAN LA TROBE MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE

Introduction

'Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted'
(Forster 1910).

The quote from E M Forster raised questions for us as teachers about how we could help our students to make the link between prose and passion. Consequently, the aim of our project was to connect students with reading in a meaningful, personal way; to see texts not just as objects for language study, but also as sources 'of factual information, simple pleasure, joy or delight' (Day and Bamford 1998:6). We wanted to use authentic reading materials from the news to encourage students to read more extensively in a way that could garner their enthusiasm. To do so, we decided to harness their engagement with mobile devices by using social media to facilitate an interactive reading environment online where we hoped students would develop critical thinking skills through discussion. We believed Facebook could afford collaborative learning opportunities as it was already a familiar social platform for both our students and ourselves and one that could engage students beyond the classroom (Willms, Friesen and Milton 2009). While the primary focus of our project was student engagement with reading, we soon found that engagement extended to other facets of the classroom experience for both our students and us as teachers.

Context

Our research took place at La Trobe Melbourne, a private college offering intensive General English (GE) and English for Further Studies (EFS) language courses in association with La Trobe University. Students participating in this research were studying EFS Level 4, which is a 10-week course at upper-intermediate (CEFR B2) level focusing on academic skills such as essay writing, researching, managing tutorial discussions, and giving presentations. We completed our project with four classes, an approximate total of 60 students, who were mostly young adults from Asia and the Middle East on academic pathways to undergraduate or postgraduate courses (see Table 1).

Our interest in changing our approach to teaching reading arose from what we saw as a disparity between reading activities in beginners and intermediate General English classes, and reading activities in higher academic English courses. The teaching of reading at lower levels tends to focus on general comprehension for practical skills, such as obtaining travel information, understanding communication from friends or professionals, or following instructions. At

these lower levels, reading is often connected to real-world goals, which prompts a certain level of motivation from the students and interaction with others in order to complete tasks. As students move from the lower levels up through Academic English programs, the nature of texts becomes less concrete and goal oriented and more abstract and ideas oriented. As such, reading at higher levels is a more solitary and cognitively demanding activity, focusing on inference, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and generating evaluation and synthesis of information. However, this transition from reading for comprehension to critical reading can be a huge gap for students to bridge, possibly due to a lack of familiarity with the demands of these types of text. In our teaching, we had endeavoured to help students become more critical readers. However, sometimes we felt that our teaching strategies did not easily bridge this gap from basic comprehension to critical thinking, nor did they necessarily encourage students' interests. We felt that a lack of engagement with the texts at EFS levels negatively impacted on student comprehension and development of key reading skills.

Research focus

We were interested in changing our classroom pedagogy and the students' reading environment to look afresh at 'how' and 'where' reading could take place in order to improve how our students developed critical reading skills. As reading is a skill that is often practised individually, we were keen to develop a strategy that connected texts with the real world of social activity. We were particularly interested in introducing an approach where our students could read and interact. Through this interaction, we hoped that students would develop enthusiasm to become critical readers. From these interests we were keen to explore the questions:

- How can we better engage academic English students in reading?
- How can we develop a more collaborative method of reading to increase engagement with texts?
- How can we help students to improve critical reading skills?

We decided to investigate whether we could use technology to engage our students to become more critical readers through reading the news online. This led to our main research question:

- Can social media be used to facilitate students' critical engagement with extensive reading of the news in English?

Action research intervention overview

We completed our research in four 10-week cycles over a 6-month period. As we were both teaching separate classes, we decided to complete our research with two classes each, which would give us a chance to refine and revise our intervention, but also learn from each other's practice and experiences. Kerry led the first cycle beginning with a new Level 4 EFS class. Five weeks later, at the beginning of the following term, Jade administered the second cycle with her new class. As Kerry finished Cycle 1, she began the third cycle with a new class, and then as Jade finished Cycle 2, she began the fourth cycle with another new class. In this way, all four cycles overlapped and allowed for adjustments in the new cycles. However, in relation to action research methodology, we viewed the first two cycles as our initial intervention with major revisions implemented in Cycles 3 and 4. The demographics of the participants are illustrated in Table 1.

Action research intervention: Cycles 1-2

Although we had our own hunches about which technology to use, to maximise student engagement in this project it was important to survey them. As Sammel, Weir and Klopper (2014:105) state 'the technology must first meet the needs of the user. Therefore the needs and understandings of the user must be explored'. As suspected, our initial survey data told us students preferred to read on mobile devices, and predominantly accessed news through social media. We also found that students read for fun in their first language but not in English, primarily read English to study or research, mainly read English through social media or internet websites, and believed it is important to know about the news although not all agreed it is interesting. All students unanimously agreed that reading the news would help improve their English skills.

Using this information we set up a Facebook page and posted a news article and a discussion question. Users of Facebook can set up an open education page linked to their personal

account, which displays no personal information to other users. Then each week, we asked a student to choose the next topic and article for discussion, on the assumption that if students nominated the topic they would be more engaged. They were also asked to pose a question about the item which we posted for them. The other students then read and answered the question or made a comment on the Facebook page before an afternoon class discussion each Friday. At the end of the first cycle students completed a survey about their experiences and participation in the Facebook reading group (see the section 'Findings: How can we better engage academic English students in reading?'). After analysing the survey data, we conducted focus groups to investigate their experiences further. We followed the same procedures in Cycle 2.

Although Cycle 1 and 2 students expressed their excitement orally about using Facebook as a learning tool, they were a little slow in the initial weeks to comment on the actual page. However, momentum soon built up. The majority of students became invested in the project and took charge of making contributions to the Facebook discussions. A few students had to be more strongly encouraged to participate, because they saw the project as an extra task. We learned that reinforcing students' participation was crucial. We did this by promoting the Facebook page and reminding the students of the activity daily, encouraging comments and prompting students to pose further questions on the Facebook page. In focus groups, those less engaged admitted they would have participated more if the Facebook discussion had been assessed. Some students also told us that they were apprehensive about making comments on the Facebook page, as they were concerned about the quality of their language.

Action research intervention: Cycles 3-4

In Cycles 3 and 4, we followed the same procedures for the Facebook activity and data collection. However, due to the feedback from the focus groups in Cycles 1 and 2, we changed direction before beginning Cycles 3 and 4 to further engage

Table 1: Participant backgrounds

Cycle	Number of students	Gender	Age range	Languages	Study pathway
1	14	8 female 6 male	18-44	Chinese- 4 Vietnamese- 4 Arabic- 3 Thai- 1 Urdu- 1 Spanish- 1	Undergraduate- 9 Postgraduate- 2 PhD- 1 None- 2
1	16	6 female 10 male	19-30	Arabic- 5 Vietnamese- 4 Hindi- 3 Chinese- 2 Spanish- 2	Undergraduate- 9 Postgraduate- 6 None- 1
2	14	10 female 4 male	19-31	Vietnamese- 6 Chinese- 5 Hindi- 2 Spanish- 1	Undergraduate- 8 Postgraduate- 6
3	14	4 female 10 male	19-30	Chinese- 7 Vietnamese- 5 Arabic- 2	Undergraduate- 11 Postgraduate- 3

students. We did this by putting the Facebook discussion on the students' official timetable to reinforce the importance of the learning activities included in the curriculum and to encourage the few that saw it as an extra duty. Responding to the focus groups' suggestion that assessment would increase participation, the Facebook activity was also evaluated as an independent learning activity, which was worth 5% of their overall assessment score. We decided to also use the previous groups' Facebook activity as a way of modelling participation for the new groups.

In the first classroom activity, to introduce the reading group to the intervention, we asked students to find the Facebook page on their mobile devices and read through some of the posts from previous classes. We then discussed the type of language students were using for agreeing and disagreeing. In addition, we also asked students to investigate whether every post consisted of perfect grammar. When students noted that not every post was grammatically correct, we highlighted that the aim of the exercise was communication, not grammatical accuracy. Wherever possible, we linked the texts to critical reading skills, such as discussing the framing of the news, language used, how opinions were expressed and supported. We highlighted that practising these skills was essential for their academic success. We further responded to students' suggestions from the first cycles to include an audio-visual element, such as a video or photograph, complementing the Facebook news item. These changes resulted in a surge in participation and engagement in Cycles 3 and 4.

Data collection: Surveys, observations, focus groups

In this project we collected various forms of data to investigate student engagement, following the same data collection procedures for each cycle and using this information to make improvements where possible in following cycles. The first form of quantitative data collected was a survey on student reading habits. Firstly, we asked students to rate their English reading ability on a scale from 1 to 10. Then we used identical multiple questions about their behaviour in their first language and in English, regarding reading purposes, what they read, how they accessed the news, how frequently they read the news, and who they discussed the news with. We also used open questions to determine whether they considered the news important or interesting, and whether reading the news would improve their English skills. While the information in this survey guided our choice of technology at the beginning of the study, we also used it when starting the following three cycles to establish any similarities or differences between the reading habits of each group of students.

Once students were participating in the weekly Facebook discussion threads we were able to collect data on individual student engagement. We did this by counting the number of comments and Facebook 'Likes', whether a student was liking a post or liking other students' comments, and also recording who was adding additional material, such as further web links, videos or photos. The Facebook page preserved the thread of conversations, showing us how students were expressing themselves in interactions with one another's ideas.

We also audio-recorded the weekly in-class discussions that followed the Facebook threads so that we could count the number of turns taken by each student. We then compared the turn-taking of students in each discussion over the course of the project to determine any increases in their participation. As teachers, we also used a wiki journal to record our own observations of how students were engaging in the Facebook and classroom activities. The journal provided a collaborative space where we could keep up to date with what was happening in each other's classrooms, which we also complemented with a weekly catch-up to discuss our progress.

An additional form of unexpected data was the Facebook page 'Insights' which gave us information on the number of times each post was clicked, and the 'Reach', which told us how many people had received the post in their newsfeed. This information revealed that other students were engaging with our activities outside of our classes, which we had not anticipated; once a Facebook page reaches 50 'Likes', the Page managers are provided with 'Insights' about user engagement with the page. This includes the number of post clicks, people who see the page, demographics of page users, etc. For more information see: www.facebook.com/help/336893449723054

At the end of each cycle, we administered an exit survey to find out how students felt about participating in the action research activities. In this survey we used multiple-choice questions to ascertain how, when, where and how often students accessed the Facebook reading group. Open questions also focused on how easy students found the Facebook page to use, how interested they were in the reading items, how comfortable they were in participating in the online and face-to-face discussions, and how confident they felt in their language abilities after participating in the activities. The data from these surveys formed the basis of our focus group questions to obtain more qualitative feedback. We each led these focus groups with our own classes in the final week of each cycle. As well as taking notes, the discussions were video-recorded for further analysis. Another useful tool that informed us of what students were thinking and feeling was their journal-writing entries, which were completed in the students' own time as reflective writing practice and collected by the teacher once a week.

Findings

We will outline our findings by considering each of our research questions in turn.

How can we better engage academic English students in reading?

Our action research intervention aimed to increase the amount of reading that our students were doing, as well as engaging their interest in reading the news.

The Facebook reading group gave the students additional authentic reading materials outside the classroom. In each 10-week program students read at least eight extra articles, often with more materials added to posts by other students (see examples in Appendices 1 and 2), including the reading of other students' comments. In the exit surveys from the four cycles, 48 students (81%) said they were more interested in reading

the news, 46 students (78%) felt more confident reading the news in English, and 49 students (83%) were reading more English news than before joining the reading group.

A further indicator of an increased engagement with reading came from our exit survey data, where we found that interest in a reading topic often extended beyond the week it was discussed in class. Fifty-one students surveyed (86%) said they continued to follow the news stories after the weekly discussions. We also noted that a few students from earlier cycles continued to 'Like' current articles and comment on the Facebook page even though they had left our classes, or even left La Trobe Melbourne.

Choice of reading material is important to facilitate reader engagement (Day and Bamford 2002). In our intervention most students had the opportunity to choose an article they were interested in and wanted to discuss with the group. We also felt that a choice of an alternative reading medium that used a screen rather than paper facilitated further engagement of our students. All the students had the Facebook app, and were accessing the reading page from their mobile phones. In focus groups, the majority found this to be a stimulating method of instruction. As one student noted, 'in my opinion, using mobile phone, tablets or computers in teaching is an interesting way. My teacher has had a modern method to teach us effectively through Facebook reading.' Another student added that 'students prefer to pay attention on [sic] the internet more than books'.

As can be seen from the previous student comments, many students in our classes appeared to appreciate the novelty of using Facebook for reading, exemplified in a comment in a student's journal: 'It is a new style of learning English to me. It make learning no longer boring anymore'. From our observations and comments made in focus groups, it seems that students became more engaged with reading in this way as it integrated a familiar social networking tool, the use of which reflected their personal practices. In this manner, their practice of reading was partly stimulated by their enthusiasm for using mobile devices and their connection to social media, and partly by interaction with others. As one student commented in an exit survey, 'in my opinion, this is a creative education method and really I feel optimistic about results for this group'. As we noted, by using an online interactive platform students were also provided with the possibility of continued engagement with the reading group, even after they had finished in our class.

How can we develop a more collaborative method of reading to increase engagement with texts?

Our intervention aimed to provide students with an opportunity to interact with others by reading with a social purpose. Posing a question with the news article meant the students were reading with the purpose to share opinions on a topic in a collaborative online forum. As one student commented in the exit survey, 'the Facebook reading group more like a team work'. Students were encouraged to agree or disagree with each other on Facebook and to pose further questions for discussion or clarification. As soon as a student commented on Facebook, we acknowledged their comment with a 'Like', so they received an instant notification. The students often 'Liked' the comments they agreed with and provided extra reading materials or photographs to support their opinions (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3).

The students reported that receiving 'Likes' gave them a great boost in confidence and engagement as they could see that their teacher and/or other students were interested in their opinion. This was succinctly described in one learner's journal entry: 'I like this kind interaction, it gives me a push to read'. The students also described being excited to read other comments and for some students this helped them to understand the issue more fully and improve their English skills. For example, in a learner journal a female student wrote, 'I not only know many the interesting comments and various thoughts of all the classmates, but I also see their writing and using words'.

In focus groups, many students expressed that the Facebook discussion helped them to prepare for the weekly discussion as they had time to consider opinions different from their own. In turn, the in-class discussion offered an opportunity to recycle vocabulary from the reading and the Facebook thread. In this way, students were integrating a variety of language skills, as this student commented in a focus group:

I think it is really useful for improving my reading and speaking skills because it provide the platform for both me and my classmates . . . to discuss the latest most interesting news and enjoy it all the time. To comment on the article, I need to read it carefully for understanding . . . I can learn lots of new vocabulary.

Using an interactive platform, such as Facebook, for developing reading skills can build connectedness between students through sharing links to reading items and commenting on the posts of others. Reading in this way does not necessarily have to be an individual activity, but can become a collective experience. In a focus group, one student said, 'I check the reading group more than 10 times a day because I want to know anyone have [sic] same thinking like me or not'. The extension of Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, where a learner can enhance his or her performance with the assistance of more capable peers, and to constructivist theories of learning, such as social constructionism, where meaning is constructed through social engagement (Gergen 2009), remind us how important social interaction is for learning.

How can we help students to improve critical reading skills?

The students all reported an improvement in their reading skills, most notably in relation to increased vocabulary, skimming and scanning skills, speed and overall comprehension, which is an important base for developing critical reading comprehension. Many also felt that their critical reading skills had developed as in the Facebook and the weekly discussions they were being asked to support their opinions and consider opposite viewpoints. One student commented in a learner journal:

it is really excited [sic] for me to convey my opinion to the other people and at the same time I can also get their various one [sic] about the article. In my view, in this sense is extremely great because everyone takes part in it and learn more knowledge together.

Reading within the Facebook group helped students to develop not just a sense of engagement with others, but also opportunities for critical thinking. This type of collaboration with peers allowed students to explore ideas more deeply than a typical classroom reading activity might allow. As

each reading topic spanned a week, students had time to consider, evaluate, and question their own and others' opinions.

In the progression of each cycle, we noticed that students were managing the class discussions more independently, asking for each other's opinion, seeking clarification and qualification of ideas, as well as relating personal experiences. One student highlighted: 'reading group is very helpful, it provides us a lot of knowledge about many problem in this life for students. Students can know the topic from other student country to understand this'. By providing two spaces to discuss and critically reflect on the ideas presented in the reading items, many students felt that they had the opportunity to interact with others to build their knowledge.

Reflections

We, like other educators, have often lamented that our students are more interested in their mobile devices than they are in our classes. However, after using social media for learning in this project we feel that it is important to recognise a place for it in our classrooms. The positive benefits of using applications like Facebook to engage students in English language learning are increasingly reported in current research. Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) trialled Facebook as a learning platform to practise English at a Malaysian university with 300 undergraduate students, finding that 91% of students found it a positive experience that provided an authentic and engaging learning environment. Similarly Omar, Embi and Yunus (2012) used Facebook with ESL learners in Malaysia for group information-sharing activities, which students rated as useful, easy and convenient, and interesting and enjoyable. Acknowledging and harnessing student engagement with digital media is no longer a choice, but an imperative. As Taylor and Parsons (2011:6) note, 'students respond to this world and have changed over the last twenty years in response to their engagement within a technology rich society and changes in upbringing . . . How schools respond is key to student success'.

However, while most of our students were enthusiastic about using Facebook for learning in this project, the use of social media also highlighted some issues that need to be considered. Because social media does not involve face-to-face interaction, it can induce anxiety in users related to the representation of their identity (Pangrazio 2013). As students are learning a language, some may fear that their competence is not adequate for participating in online discussion, or that others may judge their contributions (Miyazoe and Anderson 2010). This was an issue that we noted, especially in the first two cycles. Though we essentially overcame this problem with the following groups by discussing this possible fear at the beginning of each cycle and reiterating that using Facebook was not for a grammar or writing assessment, the few students who did not fully engage may still have experienced these feelings. Another element of identity representation related to the security of participating in a Facebook group. Two students from Arabic

countries separately expressed concern about whether their participation could be followed by government organisations. Though we allayed their fears in regard to voicing opinions through social media in Australia, this is a valid consideration for students who may return to countries where government surveillance is a reality. For some students it may mean creating an alias Facebook account.

While language skills were a major focus in our project, by using digital technology we were also compelled to integrate the teaching of digital literacy, as a fundamental part of education today (Kalantzis and Cope 2012). Lotherington (2007) has argued that language teachers must incorporate the teaching of digital skills in addition to language, which was highlighted in the final cycle when one group of students was banned by Facebook for trying to add unknown people as friends. This incident presented an important learning opportunity to explore how to maintain privacy online, which led to a class discussion about what personal information should be shared online and with whom. We also had the opportunity to discuss appropriate online behaviour and use of language in relation to a heated discussion that arose between two students on the Facebook thread about a highly sensitive political issue.

Notwithstanding these considerations related to identity and digital literacy, we really enjoyed using Facebook with our classes in this project and it was clear that most of our students did, too. Though we set out to engage students with reading, we felt the Facebook group had the additional benefit of encouraging closer relationships among students and teachers. As teachers of international students, we understand that there are many issues in adjusting to living and studying in a new country, such as homesickness, loneliness, depression, stress, and anxiety, and that even the best prepared students can experience a period of isolation (Anderson, Carmichael, Harper and Huang 2010). However, the unforeseen benefit of using social media was that students bonded with us and with each other more quickly.

In conclusion, this action research project was a valuable journey of learning for both us and our students. From the beginning, we involved our students as active participants in the research process, modelling our activities to be relevant to their own academic endeavours, sharing our findings, and updating them on our progress in class and on the Facebook page. In addition, we feel that we have had an important opportunity to engage with each other's ideas as teachers, and improve our pedagogy collaboratively (Burns 2010). Baron and Corbin (2012:763) define a student who is engaged in learning as one 'who has a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption and who views him or herself as belonging to, and an active participant in, his or her learning communities'. We believe that the majority of the students in our project became such learners. We, too, have been learners in this project, learning how to better connect with our students, with each other and with our practice. 'Only connect': what started as just 'prose' has reawakened our passion.

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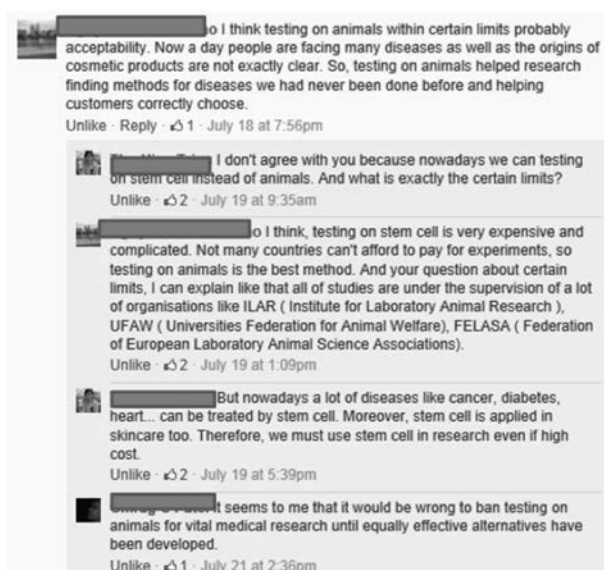
Appendix 1: Student Facebook post including image



Appendix 2: Student Facebook post including suggestion for further reading



Appendix 3: Student Facebook conversation



Students as active protagonists in the reading process: Developing tasks for critical reading for the EAP classroom

LUKE ALEXANDER MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE, SYDNEY

WENDY ONSLOW-MATO MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE, SYDNEY

Introduction

In English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, and most certainly at university level, critical reading skills are important for students' success in an Australian academic context.

When international students arrive in Australia often they have not yet acquired the reading skills needed to support university study. Based on observations of students attending the Macquarie University English Language Centre (MQELC) to study, it appears that the methodology and curriculum in the students' countries of origin may not have included the explicit teaching of the reading skills and strategies they need, which is why English language schools such as MQELC attempt to develop the required skills. As a result of long-term observations of student reading strategies in our academic classes, we have found that an area in the EAP program warranting further attention is that of critical reading, a skill not only essential to further university studies but also for non-academic reading. It is this area that our action research focused on.

Context

Our action research was primarily conducted at MQELC, where five different classes were involved in the action research across three blocks of five weeks each. Participation in the action research was dependent on teacher timetabling for the course and resulted in some classes only being involved for one or two days per week. This was followed by a shorter action research cycle at UWSCollege at the University of Western Sydney, which was chosen as a second context for our research due to greater availability of classes for research at the time.

The MQELC offers two main program streams: General English and EAP for international students. The students who intend to continue onto further study at Macquarie University, but do not meet the required entry level of English, usually complete the General English courses followed by the EAP courses. The EAP courses each run for five weeks with four non-discipline-specific class levels from the lowest to the most advanced: Academic 1, Academic 2, Academic 3 and Academic 4. Students are then placed into discipline-specific courses according to their future studies, which allow them direct entry into Macquarie University if they are successful. These direct entry courses run for a 10-week period (two 5-week blocks) and are categorised into Business, Economics and Accounting (BAE); Humanities; Arts and Sciences (HAS); and Education and Translating & Interpreting (ED/TIPP).

UWSCollege has a similar structure of General and Academic classes.

Participants

Our action research at MQELC was conducted in classes at the two highest EAP levels: Academic 4 (A4) and the direct entry class of BAE. The students in these classes were at B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The A4 students were at the lower end of the B2 band whilst the BAE students were at the mid to high range of B2. The majority of these students were intending to enter Macquarie University master's degrees, with one or two students intending to enrol in bachelor's degrees.

In total, at MQELC, approximately 85 students, 32 males and 53 females, with ages ranging between 18 years and 38 years, participated in the action research across three A4 classes and two BAE classes.

For ease of identification, the A4 classes that participated in Cycle 1 of our action research will be referred to as A4a, A4b and A4c. Classes A4a (18 students: six males and 12 females; 16 Chinese, a Brazilian and a Thai) and A4b (16 students: eight males and eight females; 11 Chinese, three Brazilian and an Iraqi and a Saudi) were involved in the action research for approximately two days each per week. Class A4c (15 students: four males and 11 females; 10 Chinese, four Brazilian and an Italian) only took part in the action research one day per week. In sum, classes consisted of a mixture of students from Brazil, China, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Vietnam, with the majority being from China.

The two BAE classes in Cycle 2, identified as BAE1 and BAE2, each had a total of 18 students. BAE1 consisted of eight male and 10 female students of four different nationalities including 15 Chinese and one each from India, Italy and Vietnam, while the students in BAE2 were all Chinese, six males and 12 females.

The research conducted at UWSCollege was undertaken in the university direct entry course (EAP5), with students at B2 CEFR level. The class consisted of 16 students: nine females and seven males, eight being from India, three from Vietnam, two from China and one each from Kuwait, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Theoretical perspective

The literature on critical reading originates from a variety of different theoretical traditions, such as critical pedagogy,

critical discourse analysis, and literacy studies. Initially, it was work conducted in second language reading that informed our research, such as Widdowson's concepts of 'assertive' and 'submissive' reading styles (1984), or Banks' notion of 'literal' and 'inferential' reading (2012). Widdowson (1984) defines an assertive reading style as that when the reader freely interprets the text as they see fit, while a submissive reading style does not question the authority of the text. Our observation of students in an Australian EAP context was that they employed overly submissive reading styles and needed to be encouraged to question the text. Banks (2012) suggests that students who are educated in a system where the classroom interaction was primarily one-way from teacher to student are increasingly more likely to possess underdeveloped skills. This situation is common in many Asian countries, where they tend to read for literal meaning and the use of critical skills is limited. In comparison, students from Europe are more likely to be inferential readers with more highly developed critical skills. Drawing on the previous literature and own observations of our students, we identified a need for developing a more questioning stance during reading in our second language learners, many of whom are from Asian education backgrounds.

Critical reading has the potential for being considered 'quite dry' by many students, so there was a need to look at methods to make the acquisition of the critical reading skills more interesting and encourage more student participation both inside the classroom as well as in their independent study periods outside class time. Therefore, work on multimodal approaches, such as Johnson and Rosario-Ramos' (2012) study on the use of multimodal texts (e.g. texts combined with photos or videos) to motivate underperforming ESL students, was also an influence. The authors examined ways to encourage Puerto Rican street-kids to take part in ESL classes and be more engaged in the learning process; multimodal approaches were seen as a tool to do this and we attempted to include this approach in our classrooms.

Research in the area of critical literacy studies also proved important to our theoretical perspective. Luke and Freebody (1991) define four reader roles which are necessary for understanding a text: code breaker, which involves an understanding of the script; meaning maker, which is concerned with an understanding of the meaning of the words used; text user, which denotes understanding how a text is used in varying social contexts; and finally text analyst, characterised by understanding the writer's purpose, underlying assumptions and biases. Their model asserts that the critical analysis of texts – the role of text analyst – is equally as important as the roles of code breaker, meaning maker and text user. Our action research intervention sought to encourage students to take on the role of text analyst while reading, and to design reading tasks that would encourage them to do so.

Research focus

While initially our focus was on the creation of tasks for critical reading, as our research proceeded we shifted our attention to the learners and their motivations for reading. We

became more interested in what motivated students to read critically and how to encourage them to do so. This focus was reflected in the development of our research questions:

1. How do we encourage students to engage more critically with a text?
2. How do we design tasks to encourage students to read critically?

Our interest also extended to multimodal texts, as our students needed to be able to critically read websites, audio-visual material and other such material. We wanted students to develop an understanding of the importance of critical reading skills in both academic and non-academic use, as well as encourage the transfer of those skills from their L1.

Intervention

Our action research extended over three cycles, two at MQELC and a third at UWSCollege. Cycle 1 was conducted over five weeks with three classes: A4a (two days per week), A4b (two days per week) and A4c (one day per week). The duration of Cycle 2 was 10 weeks: BAE1 for three days per week for the first five weeks and two days per week for the second five weeks, and BAE2 for two days per week for the whole 10-week period. The cycles were intended to build upon each other but most students only remained the same for the duration of one cycle. Class participants changed in Cycle 2 due to the division of students into specialisations at the direct entry level or because new students arrived at MQELC and needed to be placed into classes. As a result, some flexibility in approach was needed and activities used in Cycle 2 were based on the skills that students would have been expected to have at that level rather than the skill outcomes of the previous course. In addition to in-class and independent activities, it was intended for Cycle 2 to challenge the students with less focus on scaffolded tasks than in Cycle 1, and more focus on the transfer of their L1 critical skills and a further development of critical reading skills in English. There was also the intent to raise students' awareness of the use of critical reading skills in both academic and non-academic situations. Cycle 3 at UWSCollege was conducted after we had reflected on the results of the previous two cycles. It allowed us to test one of our findings from the first two cycles in the classroom – that critical reading tasks with carefully graded language were perceived as more useful and motivating for students than those with authentic texts.

In each cycle, an initial survey was conducted to ascertain which elements of critical reading were most important to the students (see Appendix 2). After consideration of both the survey results and our own teaching experience, other factors also needed to be taken into account in the creation of the tasks, such as course content, aims and materials. Depending on the class and teacher, a combination of approaches was used whenever possible in each class. These included:

- graded authentic texts (authentic texts with language graded to an appropriate level for the students) selected to match each appropriate level by the curriculum team and included in the course syllabus
- authentic texts chosen by the teacher of the class

- multimodal material to provide stimulation and variety which tied into readings
- integration into the curriculum to ensure time efficiency for teacher and students.

Data collection

The collection of data throughout this action research was conducted in two differing forms depending on the teacher of the class. The teacher of A4b, A4c (Cycle 1) and BAE1 (Cycle 2) took a more qualitative approach and based most findings on observations and open-ended questions, with a modicum of quantitative data in the form of percentages being derived from students' survey answers and test scores. The focus of this method of data collection was to monitor the level of student understanding, engagement and interest in the activities related to critical reading and compare to results gained in the tests. In the A4a (Cycle 1) and BAE2 (Cycle 2) classes the main form of data collected was survey data, consisting of both numerical ratings by students of the critical reading tasks used along with comments by students, which were collected at the end of each task (see Appendix 1). These data seemed to be the best way to evaluate student interest and motivation in the tasks. The other forms of data collected included observations of student engagement in class, audio and video recordings of students completing tasks, student materials from completed tasks, and short focus groups. Such data collection tools were able to provide further information on how students responded to the tasks. The collection of data was conducted throughout all cycles whenever a relevant activity was used in class. In addition, after Cycle 2, we organised focus groups of a few students to obtain their feedback on whether the approach in the BAE class had assisted in their tertiary studies at Macquarie University.

Cycle 1

The first cycle ran for five weeks and involved three A4 level classes: A4a, A4b and A4c (see Context and Participants). One researcher was teacher of the A4a class, and the other was the teacher of both A4b and A4c. Slightly different approaches were taken in each class due to our personal teaching style and to explore how different types of text affect students' critical reading skills. A4a trialled authentic texts as well as graded authentic texts; the other two classes used graded authentic texts from the course syllabus. However, all three classes used multimodal material such as photos and film clips.

An initial survey was conducted in order to determine which aspects of critical reading should be the focus of teaching. In the A4a initial survey, students selected 'understanding the background of a text', 'understanding why a writer chooses to write some things and not others' and 'understanding the 'ideal reader' as their weakest elements of critical reading, and those they were most interested in learning more about. As an important part of the course was finding news stories and presenting a seminar presentation on a certain topic, there was a focus on news items for some of the critical reading tasks in this cycle. A total of four critical reading tasks were trialled in A4a.

Overall, the A4a students in the first cycle were very receptive to the critical reading tasks. For example, students' task ratings in terms of their usefulness were generally relatively high in the A4a. This may perhaps have been due to the nature of the A4a class and the tasks, but we also felt that, as a whole, these students were under relatively less stress than a direct entry to university class. There was a low number of assessments to complete and even if students did not pass the assessments, progression into the direct entry class was almost certain. As a result, students did not insist on classroom tasks relating directly to assessment tasks and were more open to experimentation within the classroom.

The initial survey results from A4b and A4c were mixed and did not show a common theme so we used our discretion in deciding which aspects of critical reading should be the focus of the class. Based on Coffey's (2011) guidelines to critical reading, activities were designed to incorporate a variety of texts which were chosen in an attempt to challenge students to develop their critical reading skills and also take social aspects into consideration when evaluating topics. As a result, in the A4b and A4c classes a combination of approaches was used whenever possible in each class: using graded authentic texts appropriate for the A4 level, and importantly, using the already existing course material and extending it to include multimodal material and activities, which were presented through scaffolded tasks. The latter was efficient both for teachers and students because the use of the current course material meant that the texts were already graded as being appropriate for the A4 level, and the already content-heavy course was not over-extended.

Multimodal material, which included YouTube clips, for example, incorporated academic and non-academic contexts and genres. Our intention behind this was to allow students to recognise a link between academic and non-academic uses for critical reading skills and take advantage of the critical skills they have learned in their L1. Thus, wherever possible, lessons were linked not only to academic reading purposes but also non-academic ones with students being encouraged to provide examples drawn from their own personal lives and L1 use wherever possible. This was done in order to allow students to identify how critical reading skills learned are relevant to each individual student in many contexts, academic and non-academic as well as their L1 and L2. To support this, material and activities would also allow students to transfer the critical skills they have in their L1 to the English learning environment. One example of this was a YouTube advertisement for Evian water used in class to initiate critical reading skills. The cult hero Spiderman was used in this advertisement to promote the product. The clip, titled 'The Amazing Spiderman Evian baby and me 2', was chosen because there are only images and music for the majority of the film clip and students already have knowledge of Spiderman from their L1. In the clip, it is not evident that it is an advertisement. The clip is stopped before the Evian brand is revealed. Students are asked to discuss what the film clip is for and students suggest ideas such as a movie trailer for a Spiderman movie. The remainder of the film clip is played and it reveals the Evian branding and its slogan 'Drink pure and natural' and 'Live young'. Students are then asked to discuss the link between the advertisement and the slogan. Thus, the process takes advantage of the students' knowledge

of Spiderman, the Evian water brand and critical reading skills they would use to understand advertisements they encounter in their L1.

Students in A4b and A4c were introduced to the basic concepts of critical reading and were encouraged to question all aspects of the texts. For example, after each activity and text reading the students were asked to write down questions they had about the text, or anything the text made them want to know. These questions were collected, shared and discussed in class. The activities were designed to fit into the course curriculum; they were scaffolded and started with group activities which led to individual tasks in later classes. This approach was extended in further classes through the use of images to prompt student speculation on texts and talk around texts (see example tasks in Appendices 3 and 4). To elaborate, as a preparation activity for a critical reading task, students were divided into groups of four or five students and were given a handout with the two different photos as shown in Appendix 3. Students were asked to discuss the photos and were instructed to note down anything they thought about the photos, whilst discussing with their group members. The groups then provided feedback to the class based on the group discussion. The teacher then asked open-ended questions, depending on what the students had provided as feedback, to encourage and question the ideas of the students. The students were then shown the original article which each photograph illustrated and then further discussion was encouraged. Once this process was completed, the students then read the article, as show in Appendix 4. Students were then placed into new groups and discussed the article. Observation of the groups noted a heightened attitude and understanding of the reading as compared to readings where students did not have an extended lead-in as in this case. At the completion of the group activities, students worked individually and were asked to write down any questions they had relating to the topic or reading. Over the course of the research, in most cases, the questions asked by the students become more critical and reflective, indicating an improvement in their critical skills. For example, at first the questions were sometimes unrelated to the reading but developed over time to critical questioning related to issues, which may not be addressed in the text.

Cycle 2

The second cycle was conducted over a 10-week period and the classes were at the direct entry level known as BAE (see Context and Participants). Two BAE classes participated in this second cycle, BAE1 and BAE2. It was decided that BAE1 would follow the same approach as that taken in A4b and A4c as students seemed to respond well to the approach. In BAE2, we used a combination of graded and non-graded authentic texts. As this second action research cycle was conducted with a direct entry university course, we decided to focus more closely on academic critical reading skills, such as critically evaluating sources. At the commencement of the course, as in the previous cycle, all BAE1 and BAE2 students completed the survey to ascertain what the students believed to be their strengths, weaknesses and needs in the critical reading skills area.

BAE1 student responses to the survey indicated that they were interested in improving most aspects of critical reading

without any main area appearing to be of concern. In view of this, and the success of the approach with A4b and A4c classes, we decided to adopt a similar approach in BAE1. This included task scaffolding by introducing the topic through multimodal approaches and the use of graded authentic texts, as well as the extension and adaption of the existing course material to include multimodal activities. As A4b and A4c students before them, BAE 1 students were also encouraged to continuously question the texts they read. To further the activities used in A4b and A4c, extra independent reading activities that were aimed at developing speed reading, skimming, scanning and intensive critical reading skills were added. There was a need to give many tasks as extra-curricular activities due to the BAE course being considerably more content-heavy than the A4 level. The advantage of this was that students could complete the activities at their own pace and then report back to the teacher with any questions, or to request further activities. As the extra-curricular reading activities were on a voluntary basis, some students completed all activities, but others only a portion.

BAE2 survey results indicated a preference for studying 'understanding how a text related to other texts', 'understanding why a writer chooses to write about some things and not others' and 'understanding why a writer chooses certain grammar forms, to persuade a reader'. Therefore, critical reading activities were designed to address these needs. Only five tasks in 10 weeks were used with this class due to a very busy syllabus with many assessments that made it difficult to accommodate extra tasks. This class was fairly critical of the reading tasks. However, their criticism proved to be very useful in assessing the successful and unsuccessful aspects of the critical reading tasks.

Cycle 3

The third and final cycle was conducted at UWSCollege. This cycle was initiated primarily to test out a finding based on the data collected from MQELC that texts with graded language were more motivating than those with authentic language. Two tasks, which were variations of two earlier tasks using rewritten, graded texts, were conducted in this cycle. The aim of the tasks was to prepare the students for writing a critical literature review. It was anticipated that developing their critical reading skills would improve the students' ability to critically evaluate their sources.

Findings

Our findings are subject to a number of variables in the classroom environment. Firstly, the researchers are two teachers with different teaching styles who used approaches that differed according to student survey responses and activities used in the classroom. Secondly, the classes were not a consistent group of participants, with the composition of individual students and nationalities differing between classes and, dependent on the class make-up, classroom dynamic is affected, which could impact on results. Finally, the data collection methods were primarily qualitative and therefore open to interpretation.

In this action research we wanted to learn more about how to encourage EAP students at higher levels to engage more

critically with texts and to ensure the activities and tasks we designed would do that. To complement these aims we also wanted to utilise the critical reading abilities the students possess in their L1 and convert them into transferable skills for the ESL classroom. Then, our goal was to further extend critical reading skills from the academic context to the non-academic one so that students have a greater awareness of how useful these skills are in life.

We discovered that it is important to ensure the activities and materials used at each level are appropriate and offer the students enough variety and stimulation to challenge and engage them in the classroom and beyond. Overall, our main findings are the following: 1) students have become more critical readers; 2) graded authentic texts tended to be more successful in the classroom than non-graded authentic texts; 3) students are often not aware of their own needs; and 4) student buy-in and integration into the current course is an important factor in the success of developing critical reading skills. These main findings are discussed in detail next.

Students have become more critical readers as a result of this action research

In A4b, A4c and BAE1 only graded authentic texts were used so there is no opportunity for comparison with non-graded texts (see Cycle 1 and Cycle 2). These findings are based on the graded authentic texts which were included in the course materials.

In Cycle 1, for classes A4b and A4c, the use of texts which were already part of the student syllabus proved to work well, and the supplementary material, such as photographs and short film clips, used in conjunction with the course syllabus not only enhanced the students' understanding but also provided variety in the course material used for critical reading. Through the scaffolded tasks and the employment of multimodal texts, students became more engaged in discussions. Through teacher observation it was noted that students would participate more in discussion about the topic and started to voice opinions related to but not specifically addressed in the text. Students also asked questions about the reading and topic area and over the period of the course started to ask more critical questions. In addition, students were able to understand how critical skills from their L1 were still relevant in English learning in both academic and non-academic environments. Feedback was also obtained via small focus groups (of four to five students) to ascertain how the activities and tasks assisted with the development and improvement in critical skills. The feedback received in these cases was positive overall, and some students indicated that they were interested in learning more about how to read critically. To ensure the teacher was on track to meet student needs for this research, once a week the class would have a short meeting where they would raise issues and give feedback to the teacher. During this time, and on a regular basis, students requested extra critical reading for both in-class activities as well as take-home work, which testifies to their motivation to improve their reading skills.

A similar result was noted in Cycle 2 for BAE1. The BAE1 class students were able to relate the critical reading skills to in-class readings as well as to their independent reading activities. A regular comment during the short weekly feedback meetings was that students wanted more

independent reading activities as they found them very useful to develop critical reading skills. An end-of-course feedback discussion revealed that the majority of students believed they had seen improvement in their ability to critically assess a variety of texts and situations, and to do so at a faster speed. It seemed that the project had been successful in increasing the students' use of critical reading in both academic and non-academic situations.

Feedback obtained from focus groups, conducted once the students had commenced their university studies, indicated that those students who completed all of the independent activities appeared to experience increased benefits, as they seemed to struggle less with the heavy reading load required by their university courses and understood more when reading, as compared to those who only completed a portion (half) of the readings. Interviews conducted with five BAE1 students approximately one month after completion of the course, revealed that developing critical reading skills had made them feel more confident in their studies at Macquarie University. As a result, students found that they were able to handle the heavy reading load of their university course better. In addition, the students reported an increased questioning during and after readings, which assisted in an improved ability to understand the text and link to related topics outside the text.

Graded authentic language texts rather than non-graded authentic texts are more motivating to students for critical reading

Classes A4a (Cycle 1), BAE2 (Cycle 2) and a class at UWSCollege (Cycle 3) were able to make a comparison between using the graded authentic texts and non-graded authentic texts (see Cycle 1 and Cycle 2).

In class A4a, tasks using texts with carefully graded language were generally rated higher on our survey (Appendix 2) and received fewer negative comments than those based on non-graded authentic texts. For example, in the first cycle in A4a class, a task where students analysed graded texts with adapted language scored an average rating of 1.9 out of 5 (1 being very useful). In contrast, a task requiring students to analyse authentic newspaper and magazine stories received a marginally lower rating of 2.0. Furthermore, a task where students analysed authentic newspaper articles received a score of 2.0 with a student commenting, 'We can learn some new vocabulary, but it's a little bit difficult . . . '.

In the second cycle, a similar pattern emerged. In BAE2 the highest rate, at an average of 2.1, was given to an activity where the article was written in carefully graded language. Following this task, one student commented that it was 'easy to understand'. In contrast, one of the lowest rated tasks, where students were provided with questions to critically evaluate authentic texts, was rated lower in terms of usefulness at 2.7. In response to this activity, one student commented that it was 'too complicated to understand and use'. This finding was also supported by data collected by recording a group of students who were doing the task. Much of the recording consisted of students quietly reading the texts aloud (a technique known as sub-vocalising, which Rayner and Pollatsek (1994) link to a reader's need to reduce cognitive load), and questioning each other about the meaning of the texts.

The third cycle was instigated to specifically investigate the difference in perceived usefulness of authentic and graded authentic texts, and in order to do so the two lower-rated tasks referred to above were rewritten and accompanied by simpler graded texts. The rewritten texts appeared to be more motivating for students. The revised task was rated at an average of 1.8 (as opposed to 2.0 previously) and received positive comments such as 'it's useful . . . We can use this in Research Essay.' Similarly, the revised 'critical evaluation questions' task received an average of 1.9 (as opposed to 2.7), and again received only positive comments such as 'The task is useful for student as it helps them to read critically and gives them some ideas of how they do it' [sic].

Student needs analyses should only be considered as part of the larger decision-making process about what kinds of critical reading tasks to focus on

It appeared that students do not have a realistic understanding of their actual needs. When tasks were developed in accordance with the students' survey responses there was not always a positive result. It was often found throughout this action research project that tasks designed specifically in response to students' needs analyses (2.0 in the first cycle, and 2.0 in the second cycle) were rated quite low. For example, in the first cycle, while A4a students rated 'understanding the background of a text' as a weakness and as an area they would like to study, a task based on this skill rated the lowest with an average rating of 2.0 (the other tasks in this cycle being rated at an average of 1.6). Similarly, in the second cycle, while students ranked 'understanding how a text related to other texts' as important to them, when a task exploring notions of intertextuality was trialled in class it was ranked the lowest at 3.1 (the other tasks in this cycle being rated at an average of 2.5).

There could be a few reasons that might account for this finding. Students may not have fully understood the descriptions of the different critical reading sub-skills in the survey or they may have understood the statement differently from how the teacher-researcher intended it. This means that definitions of the skills should be more specific and also written in fairly simple English, to avoid misinterpretation. Moreover, many students participating in this action research are from backgrounds where critical skills are not a priority and are not familiar with the concept. Therefore, they may not be able to accurately assess their ability in an unfamiliar skill and language, such as critical reading in English.

In the BAE classes, tasks decided on by the teacher-researcher that were focused on students' future roles as business students and professionals proved more successful than those based on student surveys. For example in the BAE classes, the two most successful critical reading tasks focused on an industrial dispute and analysing commercials as part of a broader study unit on marketing, which may have appealed to students' future needs as business professionals. In view of the above considerations, it is essential that teachers base their decisions on their own assessment of students' broader educational aims, rather than just on students' reported needs.

Student 'buy-in' is essential, and can be achieved in several ways

In our research we found that students need to have an invested interest in the classroom activities and tasks. This is a key element of student engagement and increasing motivation. If a student can clearly see how the process will be beneficial, this usually engenders interest and participation. Therefore, gaining student understanding of the importance of critical reading is essential, particularly if the students have previously experienced educational systems where such skills are not developed. Additionally, the method in which a task is presented can also affect the student 'buy-in'. Thus, including a variety of interesting methods that are seamlessly integrated into the syllabus and assessment and do not place unnecessary extra workload on the students is also vital. This was quite evident at the direct entry level of BAE.

Awareness of usefulness

In BAE2, two aspects of our project led us to the conclusion that awareness of the usefulness of critical reading was important to student motivation to engage with the critical reading tasks. Firstly, the BAE2 task ratings were lower than those of A4a class. As stated earlier, the average rating of tasks in A4a (Cycle 1) was 1.6 and in BAE2 (Cycle 2) was 2.5. Since BAE2 students had to cover more syllabus content, we did not include a pre-task explaining the importance of critical reading. We believe, therefore, that students did not have an adequate framework for understanding why critical reading is an important skill, which led to lower ratings of task usefulness. Secondly, BAE class was a direct entry class, and due to that, there were many assessments for the students to pass to gain acceptance into university. The critical reading tasks were sometimes perceived as less important by BAE students because they were not assessed. Student comments such as, 'How to find resources you need is really important (Do more exercises on paraphrasing)' or 'I don't understand what's the relevant contents of academic essay', suggested that they preferred more work on academic writing, which was an important part of both their assessment tasks and exams. In view of this, we believe that a closer integration of critical reading with the existing syllabus and assessment would have led to greater student motivation.

Variety in methods

From A4b, A4c (Cycle 1) and BAE1 (Cycle 2) findings, which were based on qualitative students' feedback and observations in the classroom, we learned that scaffolding and the use of multimodality in tasks is important to encourage students in the development of critical skills. The findings across these three classes are similar as graded authentic texts from the course material were used and presented in a variety of ways. We observed during our regular classroom observations that when a scaffolded approach was used (by introducing the topic through videos or photographs) to encourage creative questioning and discussion before the introduction of the reading material, students appeared to experience a better understanding of the text. Also they tended to formulate more critical questions in the wrap-up discussion at the end of the reading. Additionally, students commented that they found both the approach to critical

reading in class and extra-curricular reading activities useful as they not only assisted in the development of their critical reading, but also found that they increased their confidence in reading and applying the skills to their personal life. Integration into the syllabus meant that students did not experience any extra workload, as all attempts were made to extend and adapt the existing material.

Reflection

Overall, this action research project has been a rewarding, stimulating and informative learning experience for both of us. The process of action research itself provided us with an opportunity to not only reflect on what occurs in the classroom, but to also examine our own teaching methods, adjusting and improving where necessary to benefit our students. Developing the tasks and observing student reactions to them has certainly benefited our practices as teachers by allowing us to focus on what is often an area of student reading ability which is not prioritised, and by allowing us to listen closely to our students and their needs and interests. We believe that our findings can be useful locally, to teachers at MQELC, and also nationally and internationally, to teachers working on similar courses and in other contexts.

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Appendix 1: Sample survey ratings sheet

Activity 9: Commercials

How useful was this activity? Rate it from 1 – 5 (1= very useful)	
Comments	

Appendix 2: Sample survey sheet

Please answer the following questions about your experience with critical reading.

	Agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Disagree	Don't know
a. Can you understand why and how a writer chooses to write about some things and not others?					
b. Do you understand who the writer wants to read the text?					
c. Do you know why a writer chooses certain vocabulary for a text, to persuade a reader?					
d. Is it easy to know why a writer chooses certain grammar forms, to persuade a reader?					
e. Can you see how a text is related to other texts?					
f. Do you understand why certain people and places are included in a text, but others are not?					
g. Can you understand the background of the text if it is not explained?					
h. Do you understand how who the author is, and where the text is published can tell us more about the text itself?					
i. Do you know how the structure and meaning of the text is influenced by the type of text it is (e.g. advertisement, academic journal article)?					

What critical reading skills are important to you?

Put them in order (1= very important and/or I want to learn this, 9= not important and/or I'm not interested in learning this)

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	

Do you have any comments about your critical reading?

--

Appendix 3: Example in-class activity

Part 1

Look at these two photographs and discuss them with your group members.

Note down any ideas you have.



This particular exercise was a lead-in to an article related to child labour being indirectly used by the Australian biscuit company, Arnott's (see Appendix 4). Students were put into groups and asked to discuss the photographs and note down anything they noticed or anything the photograph made them think about. It was up to the students what they wanted to say.

After group discussion each group gave their feedback. To make it more interesting the teacher added information or made comments in response to students' comments. It was interesting to note how different groups found different things and how they changed their opinions with each new comment/piece of information the teacher gave.

Finally, the teacher showed students the related article for each photograph, as the headlines (in order of photographs) made it clear what the photos were for.

The Exploitation of Domestic Child Labor; Enslaved in a System of Servitude

By Allison Richina, International Labor Rights Forum

Raising a Helpful Child

By Deborah Walstad. Edited by Amy Carson.

Updated: 6/6/2012

Result:

The students questioned the Arnott's article much more and the questions they asked were more critical.

Appendix 4: Example in-class activity

Part 2

Arnott's probes child labour claims

Jeff Turnbull

March 30, 2010

Arnott's is taking steps to make sure the cocoa for its iconic Tim Tam chocolate biscuits is produced in Africa without the use of child labour. Its pledge follows a meeting on Monday with World Vision Australia chief Tim Costello, who called on the Australian-based manufacturer to ensure its West African cocoa is from an ethical source.

"Every Australian loves Tim Tams and Mint Slices but we want to know the chocolate in these biscuits has been produced ethically," Mr Costello said.

"We're calling on Arnott's to demonstrate that it is not indirectly supporting the worst forms of child labour."

Arnott's says it is aware that child labour is used in the cocoa fields of West Africa and within six months it will have a proposal for how they would source ethical cocoa.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, about 75 per cent of the world's cocoa is sourced from West Africa. Arnott's says a fraction – just 0.1 per cent – of its cocoa comes from West Africa. In a statement, Arnott's says it is committed to playing its part by sourcing sustainable cocoa that avoids the use of child trafficking and unacceptable forms of child labour.

A report published by the US Department of State indicated there were at least 100,000 child labourers in the Ivory Coast alone. Mr Costello said that last August, Interpol rescued 54 children, some as young as 10 years old, from the cocoa fields of the Ivory Coast.

"These children were unpaid, forced to carry massive loads and were of seven different nationalities, indicating that they had been trafficked from neighbouring countries," Mr Costello said. He said ethical certifications, like the Fairtrade label, aimed to ensure products met agreed environmental, labour and developmental standards.

World Vision Australia's 'Don't Trade Lives' campaign is calling on the global chocolate industry to guarantee farmers a fair price for their cocoa and to eliminate exploited labour from cocoa production by 2018.

"The campaign has borne fruit with Cadbury's – this Easter their Dairy Milk bar for the first time is ethically-sourced," Mr Costello said.

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Source: Turnbull, J (2010) Arnott's probes child labour claims, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March, available online: news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/arnotts-probes-child-labour-claims-20100330-ra58.html

Moodle in the development of independent reading skills for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students

NARELLE CLARKE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE, NEW SOUTH WALES

Introduction

The ability to read academic texts proficiently is critical to successful tertiary study but is considerably more challenging for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Tertiary students using English as a second language face the same pressures to be independent learners as native speakers with the added challenge of having to continue to learn the language (Alexander, Argent and Spencer 2008:272). Increasingly, this autonomy includes working within university learning management systems such as Moodle.

In the current information-rich academic environment, technology has become increasingly central to reading. However, evidence does not support the view that independent learning will naturally result from access to the technology (Alexander et al 2008:273). As Dörnyei (2007:109) suggests, there is a role for language teachers to actively promote learner autonomy. My research interest lies in technology, specifically the learning management system Moodle. My goal is to explore how Moodle can support ESL students in becoming successful autonomous academic readers.

Research focus

Reading on the internet is not always linear and sequential and often includes multimedia and visual elements. This indicates a need for additional reading skills and strategies that students can use when working independently. As technology becomes increasingly central to language teaching and learning, Hubbard (2013:163) contends it cannot be assumed that second language (L2) students have the knowledge and skills to make the best use of available technology to enhance their language learning. From a review of studies on the potential value of learner training in the use of technology, he concluded that training is essential to the success of any Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) activity (Hubbard 2013:175). Consequently, he argues, L2 students need both initial scaffolding and ongoing support to thrive in this technology-rich learning environment. In addition to scaffolding and support, students need the opportunity to develop self-monitoring and self-assessment skills because these skills increase motivation and confidence and are important contributors to independent learning (Dörnyei 2007, Gardner 2000). Therefore, the focus of my research centred on finding a balance between providing adequate scaffolding and support for online learning with opportunities for students to monitor and assess their progress in reading skills development.

Research questions

The central question addressed by the Action Research Intervention was: How can EAP students be supported to achieve the attitudinal changes needed to become successful independent readers using the learning management system Moodle?

The following two questions addressed the extent to which the intervention was successful in answering the central question:

1. What changes have occurred in students' independent reading behaviour as a result of the intervention?
2. How has the use of Moodle contributed to the development of learner autonomy?

Method

Participants

The target group for this project consisted of students in English for Academic Purposes Level 2 (EAP2) studying at the English Language Centre (ELC), the University of New England (UNE), in Armidale, New South Wales. The entry requirement for this course is *International English Language Testing System (IELTS)* 5.0 with no sub-band less than 4.5. Sub-bands refer to scores for individual tasks – reading, writing, speaking and listening. The maximum class size is 18. Most students are from China and Middle Eastern countries including Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia. In addition, there is usually a small number of South-East Asian students. On successful completion of the 10-week EAP2 course students gain entry to EAP3 for a further 10 weeks and then progress to tertiary studies.

Several reasons were considered in the targeting of Level 2 students as participants. Significant among these was the need for early intervention to address the reading problems of many Level 3 students as indicated by mid-term and final exam results. A further consideration was the higher workload of Level 3 students, which may have resulted in reluctance to participate in the study.

The class that participated in this action research (AR) project was made up of 12 students – 10 male and two female. The nationalities represented were: Saudi Arabian (five male), Iraqi (three male and one female), Chinese (two male students) and Vietnamese (one female). Five students intended to complete undergraduate studies (three, Bachelor of Business and two, Bachelor of Nursing). The remaining seven students wished to pursue a range of postgraduate studies (Agriculture, Economics, Health Administration and Information Technology). The students in this class displayed a high degree of intrinsic motivation. They quickly developed strong bonds of support and were willing participants in the research.

Data collection

An online fixed response questionnaire was used to collect data on current reading habits, attitudes, interests and strategies applied to independent reading in English. Data collected in this baseline survey provided a starting point against which changes in and attitudes towards independent reading could be compared. Results of the survey are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 1.

An electronic journal was set up on Moodle to enable individual students to record information about their extra-curricular reading activities. Moodle facilitates 'capture and archiving' of student interactions (Murray and McPherson 2004). It therefore provided a large body of data from the journals and forums, which was examined during the term, and at the end of the cycle. It will also be available in any future research.

The students could access the journal at any time and entries were monitored and commented on weekly by the teacher. Examples of student responses to independent reading activities have been included in Appendix 3. The journal could also be shared with other students and discussed in online forums, which provided additional data on autonomy and peer support in the Moodle environment. Responses to mid-term student interviews using an open-ended questionnaire were recorded during week six of the 10-week course. These interviews provided data on reading habits and the use of Moodle to reflect on and share English reading experiences.

An online fixed response exit survey was given in the final week of the study. Responses were compared with the baseline survey to determine changes in independent English reading behaviour (see Appendix 2).

An overview of action research intervention

Overview

The actions taken to address the research questions were based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model (see Figure 1). My research involved two consecutive cycles of five weeks' duration, coinciding with the 10-week EAP2 course as outlined below:

1. Cycle 1 Weeks 1-5 of the 10-week EAP2 course

Observation: EAP2 reading rate and comprehension, Survey of students' independent reading habits

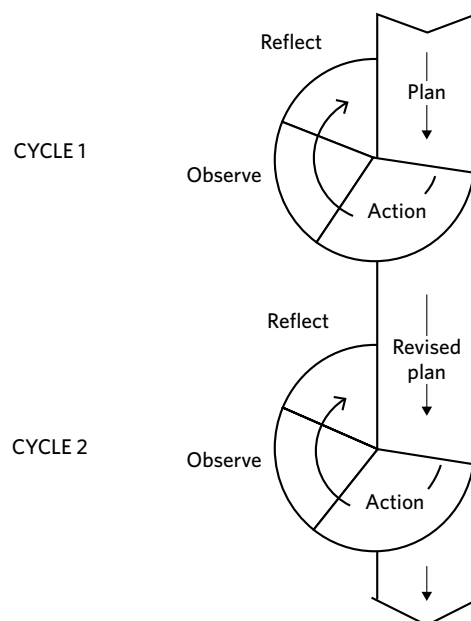
Reflection: Students need to be supported/motivated to read extensively and independently

Plan: Intervention 1 - Independent Reading Program (IRP) delivered on Moodle

2. Cycle 2 Weeks 6-10 of the 10-week term

Cycle 2 involved observation and reflection on the intervention in Cycle 1. I used the data collected and analysed in Cycle 1 to review the intervention where necessary and continue or plan an alternative one.

Figure 1: Kemmis and McTaggart model (1988:11-14, cited in Burns 2010)



Cycle 1 (Weeks 1-5)

Observation

The majority of EAP2 students surveyed engaged in very little independent reading in English beyond that required for social functions such as shopping.

Reflection

In response to the survey, I developed an online 'Independent Reading Program' (IRP) to be delivered using Moodle and trialled in conjunction with the existing EAP2 reading program. The action research progressed through two consecutive 5-week cycles over the 10-week EAP2 course with the same students. The aims of the IRP were to:

- Support the development of meta-cognitive skills and strategies, using Moodle as a platform for independent reading. These strategies enable students to effectively manage their own learning, for example monitoring their reading comprehension, checking for understanding and employing corrective strategies such as re-reading, or reading topic sentences.
- Improve reading fluency.
- Promote extensive reading (for enjoyment/interest, non-classroom literature).
- Provide motivation for reading (such as sharing reading interests).

Features of the IRP were the following:

1. Collaboration and communication

The weekly, 2-hour Information Technology (IT) and Guided Independent Learning session (GIL) was used to scaffold relevant Moodle features including accessing information, using the discussion forum, submitting work and making journal entries about independent reading. During the first two weeks students were given reading tasks in class, and support in using the technology. GIL provided opportunities for individual and collaborative

online participation in reading activities. From week 3 students were required to make online journal entries based on non-class, independently chosen readings from print or electronic media. Students had unlimited access to Moodle and were required to make a minimum of one journal entry per week.

2. Choice

Dörnyei (2007:103) notes that according to 'self-determination theory' choice is a prerequisite to learner motivation and independence. For this reason, opportunities for student decision-making were incorporated into the study by providing choice regarding the reading materials. Student interaction on the Moodle discussion forum enabled the formation of collaborative student groups, which is another important step towards learning autonomy. Regarding group dynamics, Dörnyei (2007:103) further notes that involved students become increasingly more autonomous. Working independently in Moodle allowed students to decide when and where they would participate and with whom they would interact in discussion forums.

3. Supporting learner autonomy

An important part of the IRP was the Reading Journal. It provided students with the opportunity to reflect on and share their learning experiences in English reading and to develop meta-cognitive strategies, which enable students to effectively manage their own learning.

Action

In the first research cycle students were introduced to the IRP using a PowerPoint Presentation, which outlined the features and aims of the research. During the first two weeks scaffolding by the teacher was very important and online journal entries were modelled using EAP2 graded reading materials. However, in subsequent weeks during weekly 2-hour IT and GIL sessions peer support developed quickly.

Cycle 1 results and findings

Apart from providing valuable insight into the reading progress of individual students, journal entries in particular provided me with insights into how to improve the IRP. For example, the entry for Student D in Appendix 3 was included because it is indicative of the need to re-consider the role of student choice in the selection of reading materials for the purposes of the study. For example, Student D had a strong interest in a particular magazine article. Despite his motivation and effort, he could not successfully master the content. His persistence was not rewarded and his efforts could have achieved better results with a more appropriate choice. Reflecting on the experience of Student D in particular, and similar experiences of other students, I realised the importance of guiding selection to facilitate success so that students' independent reading efforts would be rewarding and provide the motivation to continue.

Cycle 2 (Weeks 6-10)

Reflection

Reflection on the data collected in research cycle 1 resulted in the following conclusions and consequent changes to the IRP before the second cycle:

- I had underestimated the degree to which the technical expertise of the students might be limited by their English language development.
- In my enthusiasm for the project I had underestimated the amount of support students would need in the initial stages of the IRP.
- While choice is essential to the development of autonomy, it can also be prohibitive to success if materials are too difficult to allow for successful completion.

Action

In view of the conclusions arrived at in Cycle 1, I implemented the following changes during Cycle 2:

- To support understanding of the task a more comprehensive approach to scaffolding of the instructions on Moodle was adopted and the online instructions were reinforced in the weekly 2-hour GIL session.
- New resources – specifically graded readers at EAP2 level – were purchased to provide a wider choice of materials that would ensure successful completion and comprehension.
- Similarly, the use of online resources was streamlined and scaffolded. Students were directed towards specific EAP2 reading level online resources, for example the Guardian Weekly Tefl classroom materials and Breaking News English.

Cycle 2 results and findings

In contrast to the journal entry by Student D, the inclusion of journal entries from Students A, B and C in Appendix 3 illustrates a greater degree of confidence in managing the content. Students were still able to choose items based on their interests but at a reading level that enabled them to read, comprehend and communicate clearly about the content. Findings indicate that the IRP addressed the focus of my research, which was centred on finding a balance between providing adequate scaffolding and support for online learning with opportunities for students to monitor and assess their progress in reading skills development.

Cycles 1 and 2 findings

Journal entries from Cycles 1 and 2 provided extensive data on the nature and volume of students' independent reading. In addition, students described content, expressed opinions and interacted in the Moodle Discussion Forum by providing 'reviews' and comments (see Appendix 3). Mid-term interviews and exit surveys provided additional data. From the data, I was able to conclude the following:

- A comparison of the responses to the baseline survey with those of the exit survey (see Appendix 2) indicated

encouraging signs of attitudinal changes towards greater responsibility for self-direction in seeking out and engaging in reading activities. The proportion of students who reported reading independently more than twice a week increased from 35% to 75% over the course of the study. Similarly, there was an increase from 51% to 65% in the proportion of students who reported reading online news daily, while the proportion of students who reported never reading independently decreased from 10% to 3%. These findings related directly to the central research question of how EAP students can be supported to achieve the attitudinal changes needed to become successful independent readers using the learning management system Moodle.

- Monitoring of student interaction on the Moodle discussion forum indicated that with greater autonomy the level of student collaboration also increased.
- The online journal supported self-assessment and contributed to students' satisfaction with the IRP. When comparing online data from Cycle 1 to data in Cycle 2, for example, journal entries and discussion forum, initial indications suggested that scaffolding the use of Moodle increased EAP students' autonomous participation in and completion of tasks. A common theme from mid-term interviews was increasing satisfaction in students' ability to function in the online/Moodle environment. The following comment recorded on 22 May 2014 is fairly typical of responses to the question: What do you think about using Moodle to communicate about your reading? 'You can . . . like contact with each other. You can answer after thinking for long time – easier than speaking face to face'.

Students also reported increasing levels of confidence in the types of online tasks that they were now able to perform independently in English, such as internet banking and travel bookings.

Limitations of the study

All the changes cannot be attributed only to the IRP intervention. For example, IRP intervention was taking place simultaneously with the existing EAP2 reading program, so it is not possible to clearly differentiate between changes in student attitudes and behaviour associated with the existing EAP2 reading program and the IRP, respectively. However, the IRP provided students with the opportunity to apply skills introduced in the classroom. These observations and reflections are areas I may consider in the planning of subsequent cycles.

Reflections

Traditional classroom practices focus on enabling students to acquire the skills needed to read critically from print-based materials. However, as noted by Murray and McPherson (2004), reading on the internet is not always linear and sequential and often includes multimedia and visual elements.

This indicates a need for additional reading skills and strategies that students can use when working independently. While the teaching of print-based reading is supported by extensive research on strategies in general and meta-strategies in particular, online reading has not as yet benefited from the same support. This study makes a small contribution to closing this gap.

Participation in this action research project has enabled me to examine my teaching by focusing on one key skill – reading. A significant benefit has been the opportunity to work collaboratively with my students. This initial study has provided the opportunity to build on their motivation to improve their ability to read English independently. It is the first of many small steps towards a culture of independent learning – particularly in reading. I hope that the identified strengths and limitations of this study can provide the means to adjust the program to achieve incremental successes in the future.

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Appendix 1: Baseline Survey Summary – Tables 1 & 2

Baseline Survey – Cohort 1

There were 12 students in cohort 1 and they all participated in the survey.

Table 1: Based on responses to an online survey of reading habits of students before participation on the action research

How often do you read independently in English (not for your EAP course)?

Independent reading habits	Percentage of Cohort 1-12 students	Student comments
Once a week	51%	
Never	7%	
Every day	37%	One student reported reading daily to her young children.
Other	5%	Students reported reading in English for basic social functions e.g. shopping – not by choice.

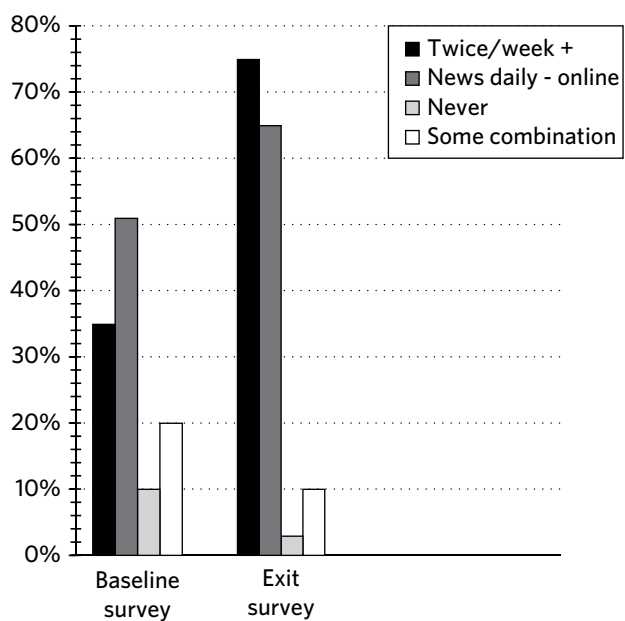
Table 2: A summary of responses to the question about English reading materials for Cohort 1

Which of the following reading materials do you read most often in English (you may choose more than one)?

English reading materials	Percentage of Cohort 1 - 12 students	Student comments
Books	14%	
Magazines and newspapers	11%	Students with families reported reading the local (free delivery) newspaper to compare supermarket specials.
Internet	68%	The majority of students reported using English language sites e.g. Facebook and eBay.
Other/none	7%	This group corresponds to students who do not read in English so source of materials is irrelevant.

Appendix 2

This graph compares English reading behaviour before the action research (I.R. Pre-study), with exit survey results, for the 12 students in the study.



Appendix 3: Student Independent Reading Journal entries: Samples

Student A – Response to a news item chosen by the student from a recommended website for ESL students

Title: Magazine article, book, internet site:	The bloom of cancer www.amygigialexander.com/portfolio
Author:	Amy Gigi Alexander
Date Started:	27 August 2014
Date Finished:	27 August 2014
Comments:	This article describes a young woman's self-salvation from cancer. Being depressed and waiting for death, she lost all her hope and desire to live. Not until she saw herself in the mirror one day did she realize that she must pull herself together. She wrote a basketlist of her own—wild and ridiculous—and fulfilled them one by one in the following five years. After the very one last wish of spending a month at the Louvre in Paris, she finally got what she had wanted the whole time: to be free and not defined by cancer.

Student B – Response to an online news item – Chosen for personal interest from a recommended site

Title: Magazine article, book, internet site:	Breaking News English. www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1402/140202-literacy-1.html#ixzz3Au9NyPDh
Author:	The United Nations (2nd February, 2014)
Date Started:	20 August 2014
Date Finished:	20 August 2014
Comments:	(b): over 250 million children of primary school age cannot read, write or do basic maths. 120 million children have spent little or no time in school. Countries are poorer when children do not go to school. Most children not going to school are girls. Countries get richer if girls go to school - up to 25% richer in 40 years. Almost two-thirds (66%) of girls in Arab countries and parts of Africa may never go to school e.g. just 36% of girls are literate, but The good news is that in Laos, Rwanda and Vietnam, the number of children not going to school fell by 85% in the last five years

Student C – Review of graded reader chosen by the student

Title: Magazine article, book, internet site:	Jane Eyre
Author:	Charlotte Bronte
Date Started:	10 April 2014
Date Finished:	10 April 2014
Comments:	I have started, but I have not finished the book. I read the beginning only. It is an interesting book. It is about a poor girl who leaves her aunt's house. She became a teacher and works for a rich man his name is Mr Rochester. She fell in love with him and wants to marry him. He loves her too, but he has a dark secret and the story begins here. I recommend the student to read it is not difficult.

Student D – Selected this item based on personal interest – Reading level too difficult

Title: Magazine article, book, internet site:	Magazine Australian Geographic
Author:	text by Ken Eastwood
Date Started:	15 April 2014
Date Finished:	15 April 2014
Comments:	The subject is very interesting (power into the future) Is very important I think and I will read it again

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