What is Extensive Reading?

Extensive reading (ER) is an approach to teaching reading skills in which language learners read as many materials as their linguistic competency level as possible in order to build their reading fluency.

Richard Day and Julian Bamford lay out the following principles:
1. Students read as much as possible.
2. Students read a variety of materials on a variety of topics.
3. Students choose what they want to read.
4. Students read for interest, fun, and general comprehension.
5. Teachers do little to no assessment of ER activities.
6. Students read materials that are at their comprehension level.
7. Students read on their own.
8. Students read faster, without a dictionary.
9. Teachers orient and guide students through the program.
10. Teachers act as a role model and read while their students read.

Although most ER responsibilities fall to the students and instructors, librarians can play an important role in supporting ELL literacy gains by developing and maintaining a dynamic, varied, and balanced collection of ER materials.

Positive Effects of ER 

Reading Comprehension & General Skills
- [Day & Bamford, 1998; Friday, 20 May 2016]
- [Hayashi, K. (1999). Reading strategies and extensive reading in EFL classes.]
- [Claridge, G. (2012). Graded readers: How the publishers make the grade.]

Vocabulary
- [Nation & Wang, 1999; Pigada & Schmidt, 2006]
- [Hayashi, K. (1999). Reading strategies and extensive reading in EFL classes.]

Grammar & Writing

Writing
- [Hayashi, K. (1999). Reading strategies and extensive reading in EFL classes.]
- [Claridge, G. (2012). Graded readers: How the publishers make the grade.]

TDFES Scores

ER research has been conducted in countries* around the world.

*Countries: See the Extensive Reading Foundation’s ER bibliography for a list.

Types of Materials 

Language Learner Literature (LLL, aka Graded Readers)
- The standard for ER collections.
  - Specifically written for language learners.
  - Series are leveled with restrictions on grammar and vocabulary.
  - Typically have vocabulary help, pre and end-of-selection exercises.
  - Number of titles published on bell-curve: more for intermediate than beginner or advanced learners.

Genres
- Adapted classics
- Audio: some narration
- Original fiction (mythory, SF, romance, thriller, etc.)
- Original nonfiction (mainly life sciences, history, biography, and culture).

Read-along
- Subset of LLL.
- Audio recording accompanies book.
- Provide listening practice, old word recognition.

High-Interest/Low Literacy (HILL)
- Written for native English speakers with low literacy skills.
- Typically have vocabulary help.
- Fill-out gaps in LL levels.
- Major publishers: Saddleback & Orca.

Genres: mainly fiction, some nonfiction.

Graphic Novels and Comics
- Images give reader context clues.
- Attention grabbing.
- Connection to American pop culture.

Young Adult Books
- Authentic English*, but not quite college level.
- Multicultural stories, multiple genres.
- Connection to American pop culture.

Children’s Books
- Authentic English*, grade levels.
- Multicultural stories, multiple genres.
- Some students don’t want “baby” stories.

*Authentic language has grammar and syntax that are closer to native English writers but are often beyond the most advanced intermediate students’ reading levels.

Organizing the Collection

Leveling Collection
- LLL: no standard levels across different series, even under one publisher.
- Extensive Reading Foundation has equivalence chart based on publisher’s headword counts.
- Create your own system.
  - Color coding levels, number/latter scale.
  - Extensive Reading Foundation suggests G–6 levels.
  - Should have some flexibility for books that need to be re-leveled.
- UMLF solution: unique system.
  - Created 3 distinct collections English Language Program (ELP), 1, 2, 3.
  - 3 collections color coded for Beginner, Intermediate, & Advanced.
  - Letters from G to H break down larger groups (based on Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading [Muford, 1982]).

Cataloging Collection
- Books should be shelved together for easy locating.
- Big issue: no standard library of Congress LC call numbers.
  - Could create non-LC call numbers that are into leveling, but not very flexible.

UMLF solution: Assign separate collections & create LC call numbers.
  - Give ELP collection designations, so shelved separately from main collection.
  - Fiction cataloged as English language learning materials (PE 1100s).

But adapted classics cataloged as variation of original text’s call number.
- Nonfiction classified by subject.

Displaying Collection
- Books tend to be very skinny (esp. for beginners).
  - Can’t see when shelved normally.
- Some ER guides suggest displaying books with many of the covers visible, but in most libraries it is impractical.

UMLF solution: display some books on shelves, rotate them.

Orienting Students

- Bring ELL classes to library toward beginning of semester.
- ORIENTATION SHOULD VARY BASED ON LINGUISTIC LEVEL.
- Try to discuss students’ reading habits.
  - Do they read only for homework? Do they read for fun?
  - Do they read in their first language? Do they like reading in English?
  - What kind of materials do they read? Books, magazines, newspapers, websites? Do they fiction or nonfiction?
- Give guided handouts about ER “rules” based on Day and Bamford’s principles.
- Model a read-along experience.
  - Explain reading system: colors and letters.
  - Explain call numbers, how to tell which books are fiction & which are nonfiction.
- Navigate to library webpage for ER collection.
- Have books laid out on table (easier to peruse than when shelved).
- Assist students through check out process, esp. new or beginner students.

Suggested Reading

References
- [Day & Bamford, 1998; Friday, 20 May 2016]
- [Hayashi, K. (1999). Reading strategies and extensive reading in EFL classes.]