

## STORIES FOR EXTENSIVE READING FOR LESLLA LEARNERS

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### 1 *Extensive reading in a second language*

In an ideal world, a first-time reader would spend some time reading alone every day to reinforce the skills being developed in the classroom through explicit instruction. Becoming a proficient, independent reader involves engaging in the act of reading, and the benefits of reading beyond what is covered in the classroom or assigned for homework, i.e. reading for pleasure, have long been touted as the key to promoting full development of literacy. We learn to read by reading (e.g. Grabe, 1988; Krashen, 1988). This sort of reading is variably referred to as extensive reading, sustained silent reading or free voluntary reading, and in addition to being recognized as key to the development of literacy, Krashen has also argued that reading provides additional comprehensible input that promotes oral proficiency/linguistic competence (Krashen, 2004). If Krashen is right, this is no small matter, given recent studies looking at the oral proficiency of low-educated second language adults whose authors have concluded that they typically reach lower levels than those who acquire an L2 with the benefit of literacy (Juffs & Rodríguez, 2008; Kurvers & van de Craats, 2008; Tarone et al. 2007). While the nature of the relationship between unschooled adults' low levels of morpho-syntactic competence and of reading found by these authors as well as by Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) will remain unclear without further research, if such adults spend little or no time reading outside structured classroom lessons, a slow rate of progress in learning to read and in acquiring linguistic competence is unsurprising.

Day & Bamford (1998) outline three basic characteristics of what they refer to as extensive reading (henceforth ER): it assumes that reading is its own reward, that ER occurs both inside and outside the classroom, and that an ER programme makes available to students a variety of materials at the level of readers in a particular class or group. While Krashen's approach to ER allows the reader free choice of reading materials, others such as Pang & Kamil (2004) argue that access to real literature and culturally rich materials are important for L2 learners' reading development. The quality of materials available to readers may thus have important implications for the success of an ER programme. However, according to Rodrigo et al. (2007), little time is devoted to any sort of ER in L2 literacy classes whose focus is on workbook and/or software exercises. If the teacher assigns homework from workbooks or textbooks, there is evidence that difficulties associated with reading such written text without teacher support result in students not doing the homework. Whiteside (2008) for example discusses how students using a popular textbook were unable to keep track of characters in a story due to discourse conventions with which they were unfamiliar.

Before we consider discourse and other linguistic features of low-level books written for pleasure reading, let us consider whether such books exist in sufficient quantity to support an ER programme.

Driven by their conclusion that students in literacy classes lack exposure to authentic reading materials such as magazines, newspapers and books, Rodrigo et al. (2007) set out to test the feasibility of ER with a group of 43 adults in the USA, most of whom had never read an entire book in their lives. 16% of the group were second language learners from Hispanic and Asian backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> 249 books at reading levels comparable to that of children between the ages of eight and ten years old were made available to the 43 adults. The data reported on concerned how many times books were read by category. There was overwhelming preference for general fiction (such books were read 246 times by those in the group), followed by biography (books in this category were read 97 times). Non-fiction books read the most by the students fell into the category of health and education and were read 59 times by students in the group. Students also showed a strong preference for books with themes and characters relating to their lives.

Given the success of Rodrigo et al's programme in terms of uptake of books by category, it is reasonable to consider just how ER can serve those starting to read for the first time in a second language. Such learners' reading skills and phonological awareness will not be that of the eight-to-ten-year old reading level of the books in the Rodrigo et al. study, but are instead closer to that of a preschool or kindergarten child's (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006). Moreover, first-time second language readers' morpho-syntactic development may be comparable that of a two or three-year old's. When starting to set up an ER programme, the first task is collecting books at students' level. While there are books aplenty for young children just starting to read, and at least 249 books (on Rodrigo et al's programme) with adult appeal for the reader at the eight-to-ten year old's reading level, the lowest-level adult L2 readers are not comparably well served.

## 2 Books in English for LESLLA readers

### 2.1 Current availability

Non-fiction and fiction books written for adults with low levels of literacy (albeit usually slightly higher than the preschool level) and distributed by various publishers exist (e.g. *Sam and Pat* by Lowry, Hendron & Hartell; see also Condelli & Cronen, this volume; Oxford Bookworm Starters). Teachers also make use of short books which they have written themselves (see e.g. Kurvers, 2008; Williams & Chapman, 2008) and which students have written as classroom projects (Peyton, 1993). In the latter two cases, content and level are guaranteed to be appropriate given teachers' detailed knowledge of their students own abilities and interests, and students' writing at their own level and on topics of interest to them. Children's story books might also seem to

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<sup>1</sup> The authors do not say whether the Asians were from South or East Asia, but common usage in the USA of 'Asian' to refer to those from East Asia suggests that those in this study would have been immigrants from regions in Southeast Asia where levels of education have been low.

be an obvious choice due to considerably less text density than adult books; however, use of such books with L2 adults with low literacy levels is controversial for a variety of reasons. Wallace (2008), for example, points out that characters (often animals) and story lines perplex adult students who lack childhood exposure to this genre.

A perusal by the first author of books available to students on one UK ESL literacy classroom revealed a closed cupboard full of multiple copies of seven books from the aforementioned Oxford series and sets of non-fiction readers written in 1997 for learners in that community. These 12-24 page books were illustrated, with an appropriately low amount of text per page (4-15 sentences). Despite their simple syntax (use of main verbs in the present tense and few auxiliary verbs), the sentences in these books were morpho-syntactically more complex than adults at this level can be expected to handle (see Table 1 below). These books were not in active use; rather, four-page books written by the teacher, with simpler morpho-syntax and photographs and on current topics, were being used for whole-class reading. These books were on display on a shelf at the back of the classroom, along with several books written by undergraduate university students, to be described in the next section.

## 2.2 *Getting the level right: Organic grammar*

Organic Grammar (OG) is a theory of language acquisition which entails the learner progressing through stages at which syntax and inflectional morphology become increasingly complex. OG is based on 1990s research on the L2 German of immigrant adults from Italy, Korea, Spain and Turkey who had received no instruction in their second language (see Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994). In addition to the four stages shown below, there is a preliminary phase during which most utterances contain no verbs; this stage is comparable to young children's one-word stage (see Myles, 2004). Stage 1 is characterized by the production of short, multiword sentences similar to the young child's two-word and telegraphic stages. In L2 acquisition, there is influence of the learner's native language word order as regards the non-finite verb and its complement (the VP). Data from Yamada-Yamamoto (1993) on her son's acquisition of English show an initial Japanese-based object-verb word order which eventually switches to the verb-object order of English. At both points in his development, he produces only non-finite verbs (including with -ing), and inflectional morphology is absent indicating that his grammar only consists of a VP, along the lines of what Vainikka & Young-Scholten have since 1994 claimed for the early stages of L2 acquisition.

### (1) Stage 1a: *Japanese object-verb (OV) order*

bread eat  
bananas eating

### Stage 1b: *English verb-object (VO) order*

eating banana  
wash your hand

One can also find memorized (unanalyzed) chunks at this stage such as *My name is...* that can mislead the researcher into concluding the learner is at a more advanced stage (see Myles, 2004). Under this theory, after initial native language reliance, inflectional

morphology and syntax develop in tandem, following the common stages shown in Table 1 and illustrated in the examples in (2) from the low-educated Somali speakers in the Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) study; non-target forms other than those relevant for Organic Grammar<sup>2</sup> are not listed here.

- (2) a *The initial functional syntax stage* (Stage 2)  
 The woman is cry.  
 Because too bad.  
 auxiliary form, but verb without *-ing*  
 subordinating conjunction but no  
 verb
- b *Elaborated functional syntax* (Stage 3)  
 Someone's die because he have accident.  
 Car hit the kid that's lie down on the street.  
 -*ed* missing; use of non-past form  
 productive simple subordination  
 progressive *-ing* missing  
 subject relative clause
- c *Target-like functional syntax* (Stage 4)  
 The young boy was having fun with his bike.  
 When you reverse, you have to see  
 anybody behind.  
 correct use of past progressive  
 complex subordination

Table 1: *Stages of Organic Grammar*

Stage markers	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Main verb position	L1, then L2	L2	L2	L2
Pronominal subjects	none	some	obligatory	obligatory
Copula, modal and auxiliary forms	none	one copula form; some modals	common	obligatory
Agreement	none	some suppletive forms	acquired	acquired
Embedded clauses	none	conjoined clauses	simple	complex
Question formation	formulaic; intonation	uninverted	correctly inverted	correctly inverted

<sup>2</sup> Organic Grammar is comparable to many other theories of development in its reliance on oral production data, where the assumption is that an underlying grammar is the basis for utterances produced. It is the systematicity of learners' production that allows such assumptions to be made. However, what learners are able to comprehend has more important implications for their comprehension of written text, and thus a theory of development might in part be based on comprehension data. There are methodological reasons for this; it is difficult, for example, to determine whether uninstructed learners distinguish among inflectional morphemes in varying positions. Here data from unschooled L2 adults' attempts to read text above their OG stage could contribute valuable information about learners' comprehension.

### 2.3 *Availability of books further considered*

The multiple sources of story books in ESOL literacy classrooms makes it difficult to know with any level of precision how many books are available in a given context to enable the establishment of an extended reading programme for the lowest level of L2 learners. It seems safe to assume that the current supply of books would on most programmes not allow application of a ratio similar to that of Rodrigo et al. (249 books for 43 readers - roughly six books per reader). The Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) study of 17 adults with either no or some previous schooling found that the sub-group with no schooling were all still unable to decode words and were also at the lowest stage of Organic Grammar morpho-syntactic development. The available evidence (including discussion on user lists) indicates that books at the very lowest level are in very short supply indeed.

In addition, due to the need to make best use of often scarce resources provided for teaching learners at this level, ESOL literacy-level programmes are typically multi-level. This was the case for the learners on the above-mentioned study, and was also the case for the learners for whom stories were written in the present study (see also Condelli & Wrigley 2006). In a single class there can be learners who, on the one hand, represent different (usually lower, but not always) levels of morpho-syntactic competence, and on the other hand, learners who demonstrate varying levels of reading skills and rates of progress in acquiring new skills, usually connected to their amount of schooling in their native languages. In terms of writing stories for an entire class of such learners for an ER programme, this translates into writing stories at more than one morpho-syntactic stage and more than one reading level, which when the ratio of six books per reader is applied, will result in a collection of books that is large enough to provide reader's choice.

Stories will continue to be written by ESOL teachers and their students, and hopefully more titles relevant to learners will be produced. However, if the rough evidence presented here is any indication, the current supply of story books is insufficient to approach the 6:1 ratio employed in the Rodrigo et al. study. In order to begin to address the need for more books, a pilot project was conducted in 2008 to determine whether undergraduate students would be able to assist in adding to the supply of books for a local ESOL literacy-level class.

## 3 *Writing Stories for readers at the lowest levels*

### 3.1 *The project and the assignment*

The pilot project was embedded in a course ('module' in the United Kingdom) for undergraduate English language and linguistics, linguistics, and linguistics and literature students at a university in the UK. The course began with discussion of the 1970s-1990s studies of immigrant adults who were acquiring second languages naturalistically, i.e. without instruction; many of those studied had not been educated past primary school in their countries of origin. Although researchers on these studies rarely isolated level of education as a variable and none of them focused on literacy, a number of important ideas applicable to both unschooled and schooled L2 adults emerged from

these studies (see Van de Craats et al., 2006). Among these ideas was Organic Grammar (see Table 1). The course content was not unfamiliar to these undergraduate students, given their background knowledge of second language acquisition from having taken an introductory course the previous semester or year. The syllabus was designed to cover the areas in LESLLA's mission statement (<http://www.leslla.org>), namely research, policy and practice. This meant that a good part of the course was devoted to learning about children's and unschooled adults' first-time literacy as well as ESOL policy and practice in the UK and elsewhere. Course materials included the 2006 and 2007 LESLLA proceedings as well as journal articles and books such as Holme's (2004) *Literacy*.<sup>3</sup> Students were given the option to write a story book for low-literate adults as their course assignment. While the external aim of this assignment was to add to the supply of books available to readers at a local ESOL programme, a prime, internal objective of the assignment was to raise undergraduate students' awareness of the issues surrounding LESLLA learners and to consolidate their knowledge of research, policy and practice.

In describing the development of this project, the two questions to be answered are (1) whether undergraduates can write stories appropriate for adding to the supply of books available to be made available on an extensive reading programme and (2) whether this assignment fulfills the goals for assessment on the course students took.

### 3.2 *Steps in writing the stories*

In setting out to write stories for a particular group of readers, there were a number of linguistic considerations students needed to take into account. Where these involved features at or below the sentence level, students already had sufficient background to meet these requirements. However, it became clear by the end of the project that in some areas students were deficient; for example students knew little about written discourse because the department they were studying in only covered this in a course offered every other year, and none had taken it. Students also had no knowledge of stylistics and little of the conventions of writing fiction for adults or, more importantly, for beginning readers, including children.<sup>4</sup> Although the department does offer courses taught by literature specialists on children's literature, creative writing, poetry, because none of the students had taken any of these, it is not clear what their usefulness in writing stories for (see previous suggestion) adults might be.

Linguistic considerations included vocabulary, phonology and morpho-syntax. For vocabulary, it is claimed that 98% of words in a text should already be known by the reader (Hseuh-Chao & Nation, 2000). Level of morpho-syntax should be the same or slightly higher (Krashen's 1985  $i + 1$ ); here Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis was operationalized in the form of the stages of Organic Grammar.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Students were aware through reading Holme's book (as well as some of the LESLLA proceedings chapters) of the socio-cultural aspects of reading. Discussion of the socio-cultural aspects of this project is outside the scope of the present chapter.

<sup>4</sup> This is not meant to imply that books for first-time second language readers and for children are comparable; see comments above in reference to Wallace (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis is also based on oral production, i.e. the many 1970s studies of L1 children, L2 children and adults.

In addition, words should ideally be monosyllabic with CVC syllable structure to aid decoding by beginners. Gourley (1984) is an author who discusses the discourse features of children's literature beyond the sentence level; these include cohesion, narrative voice, patterned repetition and relationship of picture to text. In writing fiction, one must also consider standard literary devices such as plot, character and setting. Finally, cultural sensitivity, level of sophistication and interest/appeal (see e.g. Palmer, 1972) are features that must be taken into consideration when writing for immigrant adults.

These requirements were simplified and broken down into manageable steps for undergraduates with no experience of writing fiction and also no familiarity with low-literate adult immigrants. Because these were undergraduate students who had never had any contact with such LESLLA learners and therefore had no awareness of their literacy needs, preparation for writing stories was broken down into the following steps, all of which were directed and/or monitored by the course leader: (1) a visit to one of the ESOL programmes at a local further education college with observation of students on a pre-entry level literacy class and in the resource centre, where the undergraduate students were able to chat with the ESOL students; (2) evaluation of books available at the LESLLA students' level in the college library/resource room; (3) consideration by the undergraduate students of what was read to them and what they had first read on their own as young children with the aim of raising their awareness of features of written discourse and conventions of children's fiction; (4) whole-class listing vocabulary likely to be known by the ESOL students and discussion of other factors, including cultural constraints on certain plot lines. For step 4, because there was no list available of words which pre-entry level ESOL learners are exposed to in their lessons, a list was instead created by brainstorming words learners were likely to know in the categories of numbers, money, colours, attributive adjectives, every day objects, clothing, places, animals, transport, family terms and people in the public eye. The undergraduate students then took these words, added verbs of their own choice and applied the stages of Organic Grammar shown in Table 1 to guide their writing of story text. The final step involved writing up this entire process as an essay for submission along with a copy of the story book, to be donated to the ESOL programme.

The titles of the resulting story books were: *David the Bus Driver*, *Laura and the Flowers*, *A Day in Newcastle*, *The Life of Victoria*, *Music for Money* and *A Day with Emma*. Authors based their plots on what they reasoned the ESOL students would be interested in from their observation and interaction with them during step 1 above. Two of the books, *A Day in Newcastle* (about a father and son attending a Newcastle United football match) and *Music for Money* (about a young man who busks to earn money to buy a camera) were written with two particular ESOL students in mind with whom the student authors had conversed about their leisure time activities and post-ESOL course aspirations when chatting with them in the resource centre. *A Day in Newcastle* was written by the only male undergraduate student to take up this course assessment option. The content and plots of the remaining four books evolved through classroom discussion of ESOL students' interests and needs, including citizenship, which was the theme of *The Life of Victoria*. Authors then used various techniques to support their written text visually. The first two books used line drawings, *A Day in Newcastle* used clip art and three books used photographs downloaded from the internet and/or taken by the authors or their friends.

Authors then field-tested their stories by reading them together with individual learners to whom they were directed by ESOL programme teachers. This step was taken primarily to ensure that the morpho-syntactic stage and vocabulary were appropriate for the intended readers. When the authors wrote about their field testing in the 3,000-word essays that constituted the assignment for the course, several problems emerged. First, it was difficult even for these metalinguistically knowledgeable undergraduates to write stories at Organic Grammar stages 1 and 2; stories were invariably written for learners at a higher stage. However, the main problem was not lack of adherence to OG criteria but rather the presence in their text of idioms which often involved abstract use of prepositions. An issue the authors raised when still writing their stories was use of deictic terms, particularly use of time adverbs when tense could not be used (at lower OG stages). The authors arrived at various creative solutions, including natural use of narrative present for relating a football match in *A Day in Newcastle* as well as use of illustration to depict the passage of time. Of course use of narrative present to avoid past tense turns out to implicate a late-acquired feature, namely subject-verb agreement. This did not seem to erect a barrier to ESOL students' decoding of such words, as they simply read the bare verb. In fact, when field testing their stories, the undergraduate authors were intrigued to discover that the ESOL students, who presumably had not acquired third person singular -s, also omitted it when reading. Since Lardiere (1998), the body of work in second language acquisition on what non-production of inflectional morphology indicates in regards to the underlying syntax has grown; such occurrences in the undergraduate students' data point to the continued importance of studying low-literate L2 learners, along the lines of what Van de Craats et al. (2006) and Kurvers et al. (2007) note in terms of their contributions to research.

To address the two questions posed above, (1) can undergraduates write stories appropriate for an eventual extensive reading programme, and (2) does this assignment fulfill course aims and objectives in terms of assessment, we turn to a summary of the assignment provided by Donna Maguire, one of the undergraduate students who took the course.

#### 4 Writing and field testing a story for low-literate adults

The excerpt below appears in Donna's own words, and is representative of what all students choosing this assignment experienced.

##### 4.1 *A day with Emma*

Producing a story book for low-literate learners wasn't a task I had ever tackled before, and I underestimated how much knowledge, including knowledge about ESOL, was needed to produce such a book. Visiting the ESOL programme made me and my fellow students realise that we had to take into account why these learners might have come to the UK and what their linguistic, cultural and social background was. The stories we were going to write had to be appropriate and we felt the best choice was to focus on day to day situations. During our visits to the programme and based on what we were learning on the course, we began to discuss how most of the immigrants on



the programme came from backgrounds very different to our own which meant that we would need to steer clear of the every day situations we were familiar with, for example male and female friends consuming alcohol together or a holiday situation where men, women and children are dressed in bathing costumes. Even though we thought that these kinds of contexts could help immigrants understand and therefore adjust to British culture, we decided to avoid them. Sticking to simple activities that all adults can relate to in their daily lives seemed like a better option. We came up with common urban activities such as transportation by bus, and in my case, going to the park. We knew by then that pre-entry ESOL students usually have low levels of oral proficiency and little or no ability to read in their native language or English, so we thought it would be best to start with the sight words applying to common objects which we assumed the students would be able to recognise by their shape, even if they could not yet sound out these words. If these sight words could be understood, it would then be possible that the rest of the sentence could be slowly comprehended. With all these points in mind, we then applied the criteria for morpho-syntax and phonology and consulted the list of vocabulary we brainstormed in class to start writing our books.

The first trip to the ESOL programme involved an observation of a literacy class, with around twelve pre-entry level second language learners. These students were involved in group work and an interactive whiteboard was being used by the teacher along with worksheets. We observed that although oral proficiency and reading ability among the learners varied, they all seemed to be interested in the class activities. During the same visit, we also went to the college library, where the librarian directed us to the section that held low-literacy and ESOL books. We spent a good deal of time there, but were unable to find many books at the level of the students we had just observed in class. The cultural inappropriacy and grammatical complexity of some of these books was striking, leading us to conclude that they were not aimed at the pre-entry ESOL reader. We were becoming aware that at the crucial stages of starting to learn to read, it would be better for the reader to tackle something with which they could identify. None of us had ever taken a course on children's literature, but we intuitively felt that the illustrations in books for beginning readers needed to relate directly to what the text was trying to convey. However, in one low-literacy book there was a drawing which was meant to demonstrate frustration with electronic equipment by showing a large disembodied foot stomping on a laptop PC. We felt that this was an inappropriate and probably misleading way to present frustration to this group of low-literate adults.

On the second visit to the ESOL programme, students tried to determine the morpho-syntactic level of the students for whom we were going to write a book. I was unable to participate in this trip, so I had to write my story without particular learners in mind. This meant that I probably had a less than accurate idea of what students were capable of in terms of reading. Taking the notion of simple syntax, phonology and vocabulary, the next steps for me were finding good pictures and writing my story, in keeping with everything I had observed. Putting the story together was difficult at first, and it was challenging to make it culturally appealing and relevant to the reader. I tried to create interest for adults and children, taking into account that the adult reader as a parent might want to give it to their children to read. So my story followed a little girl who had moved to a new country with her family and had one true friend, her dog, whom she loved to take to the park. On a very wet day she comes home from the park with her parents and the story then describes her home life, tea time and bath time as

daily family activities. My second visit to the ESOL programme was for field testing. I read my story together with two students from different cultural and educational backgrounds. I will describe the process with one of them, N. She was 24 and from Guinea and had immigrated without any literacy due to no schooling in her native language or the official language of Guinea, French. My book turned out to be too difficult for her; not only did she not seem to know words, but the syntax and the adverbs used in the story seemed too complicated for her. Consonant clusters required her to think about her decoding, although final affricates did not seem to pose a problem. However, word length and sentence length were impediments: N. struggled with words longer than a syllable and sentences longer than three words. These difficulties resulted in her becoming bored and slightly distressed at her lack of ability to read the story, so we did not continue reading together past the third page of the book. She struck me as not being further along than a reception-age child in her reading, but I realised that I had written a book for a reader at a higher level.

##### 5 *Discussion: Effectiveness of the course assignment and success of the stories*

One of the two aims of this pilot project was creation of an assignment that would measure undergraduate students' understanding of LESLLA research, policy and practice. Both the course syllabus and the assignment prioritized research, but in carrying out the assignment, students become aware to some extent of policy and to a greater extent practice.<sup>6</sup> If the value students attach to how they are assessed can be measured by enthusiasm, Donna's testimonial, which is representative of the behaviour displayed by all those students choosing this option, points to a high such level. An interesting by-product of the assignment turned out to be student commitment, at least with respect to Donna.<sup>7</sup> After field testing her story and submitting her essay, she wanted to be able to donate to the ESOL programme a more accessible story book so she decided to make a second attempt at writing her story. She laid out a simpler plot, took her own photographs and then considerably simplified the morpho-syntax, shortened the sentences and reduced their number per illustration to one or two. Donna's post-course story writing further shows that while undergraduate students may not have all the knowledge required to write a successful story on their first attempt, they continue post-course to think about the various issues to which the course introduced them. Of course undergraduates lack certain crucial knowledge – that of the skills of the ESOL students themselves. Information obtained from a single observation of students during a class session and one-off assessment of one or two students' morpho-syntactic stages cannot approach the amount of knowledge ESOL teachers have of their own students. On the other hand, by their penultimate and final years of study, undergraduate language and linguistics students have amassed considerable knowledge about language. An assignment such as the one discussed here stretches them in unaccustomed ways by

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<sup>6</sup> Because this was not a creative writing course, no marks were given for the actual story; rather students were assessed on how they applied the linguistic criteria to writing the story and on their field testing of the story.

<sup>7</sup> The assignment seemed to boost investment in LESLLA issues for another student, who carried out an independent study on the literacy of employees at a factory in Gujarat during a vacation internship in the middle of the semester he took the course.

challenging them to apply such knowledge to real life problems. However, even this knowledge is insufficient. To write a successful story, students need to know more about written discourse and the conventions of narrative fiction, particularly for beginning readers; when the course is offered again, it will include such topics.

In seeking to add to the supply of books available to low-literate immigrant adults, the assignment was heavily dependent on the good will of ESOL teachers and programme directors. When first approached, their protectiveness towards vulnerable adults inclined them to resist cooperation; those students who chose to pursue as an alternative assignment the assessment of literacy skills and linguistic competence met with more resistance. However, once teachers and directors realized the value of the final product – new story books for their low-literate learners – their initial wariness changed to acceptance. On-going cooperation can be expected to be closely linked to the appeal of these stories for their learners.

This paper began with a discussion of extensive reading, calling for the implementation of such programmes for very low-literate immigrant adults to boost their chances of eventually become independent readers. ER cannot be considered without a much better supply of fiction than currently exists for LESLLA readers. The evidence presented here shows that undergraduate language and linguistics students can make a contribution towards reaching the goal of six books per reader. At the start, establishment of an ER programme would favour Krashen's approach of not restricting readers' choice. Addressing Pang & Kamil's (2004) contention that quality (real literature and cultural richness) is key to development of literacy must await the time when the quantity of books reaches the critical mass necessary for extensive reading to become common practice on programmes for low-literate L2 adults.

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