

## Interview: Learning the Core Concept of Extensive Reading from Richard Day

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**E**xtensive Reading is probably one of the hottest topics in the context of second and foreign language (L2) reading instruction (Iwahori, 2008). Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Rodrigo, Krashen, & Gribbons, 2004) theoretically supports ER in which L2 learners' reading development and motivation to read are nurtured by exposure to a large quantity of comprehensible and interesting input. Graded Readers (GRs), lexically and syntactically graded readers, form a core of such facilitative input in ER. In this interview, Professor Richard Day, the Founding Chair Emeritus of the world-wide leading Extensive Reading Foundation, talks about the fundamental concept of L2 reading instruction. Furthermore, he gives encouraging support and input to readers of *The Language Teacher* who have embarked on and want to start the practice of ER. Professor Day has been tirelessly promoting ER through L2 teacher education for many years.



**Mitsue Tabata-Sandom (T-S):** How did you encounter ER in the first place?

**Richard Day (Day):** I was teaching English to high school students in a private high school in Japan, in the Kansai area. It was a senior year, 12th grade, and it was a reading class, and I had some material that was very traditional – skill-oriented with some grammar-translation. I was bored teaching it, and my students were not interested in it at all. They were very polite and they did it. But I said, "I'd love to read! What's going on?" Then I thought, I will get them interesting materials and let them read. So, I

went to the principal of the school, told him what I wanted, and he gave me money. I ordered some books that I thought would be good and interesting. They were more L1 younger literature. I didn't know about GRs at that time. And I got them and gave them to the students on a Friday. I said, "Pick a book that you like." This is the last 20 minutes of the class. "Start to read it, and if you don't like it, get another one." And they did. I had no idea what was going to happen. So, Monday afternoon when the class met again, I was very worried. And one young lady came in, a big smile on her face waving a book and she said, "*Sensei, sensei, I read a book!*"

**T-S:** The whole book!

**Day:** (*Nodding*) And, I just said, "Yes. This is going to do something." Then I was helping a student, Julian Bamford. I was working with him on his Master's program that he was doing independent research for. He was investigating reading. So we got together, and I told Bamford my experience. He said, "Yes, this is similar." Then he said, "Maybe you should use GRs." He turned me on to GRs, and then we got talking about it. Then we started to investigate it. And that's how I got into it.

**T-S:** Then you presented the Top Ten Principles of ER in your 2002 article with Dr. Bamford. You said that you encourage teachers to use the principles as the way to examine their beliefs about reading in general and then extensive reading in particular. Fourteen years after the article, we have had three world ER congresses. Do you see evident changes in teachers' beliefs about L2 reading?

**Day:** Yes. Regardless of how teachers do ER, I think the idea of *we learn to read by reading* has spread. There is a difference between translation and reading. So from talking with teachers, I think that has caught on. I don't know if they are doing ER, but they understand that the more students read, (the more) they may become readers, so I think, just, that idea alone, seems to be very important.

**T-S:** Ray Williams (1986) also said that reading can be learnt only by reading. That's one of the most important principles in general L2 reading pedagogy.

**Day:** Yes. I think that's caught on. So, I am very pleased. That's so important.

**T-S:** My third question is very practical. I want to hear your advice regarding cases when teachers want to employ ER into their courses. I am thinking of three different contexts. First, in a context of a beginners' course, is there a threshold level for teachers to be able to start ER?

**Day:** I think there really isn't. Maybe 20 years ago, I would've said, "Yes, there is." Now, I don't think so, because the material is available. There are GRs that have only the 100 most frequent words of English. So, even at those lowest levels, students know 100 words of English. So, I don't think, there is. Of course, there is a threshold in that students have to have English, they've got to know—

**T-S:** —the alphabet.

**Day:** Yes, they've got to know the writing system, so, I wouldn't say in Day 1 of a beginning English class, we could start ER. But certainly, after three or four months of English instruction, students should know enough vocabulary and the writing system.

**T-S:** Now, the second context, this is actually my context. An advanced student class, but students have been exposed only to conventional intensive-reading-oriented instruction. I am implying that some of the students might have fossilized perceptions toward L2 reading.

**Day:** Oh, yes.

**T-S:** Do you have any suggestions for how to employ ER in such a context?

**Day:** Yes, that's where the whole notion of the teacher having to introduce ER: what is ER? why should you do it? what will happen? If students are in university, as in your case, I would explain the efficacy of ER to them, and give them the results of research. So, they would have a *context*: if you engage in ER, here is what is going to happen. I would also bring the research in which shows its impact on listening, speaking, writing, and vocabulary. Doing this will not only help them become a better reader and a fluent reader, but these things will happen. I think that is very important to do, because when all of a sudden students who have three or four years of English or foreign languages, and they are told to read easy books, they are like, "what am I doing this

for!?" So, that's why we *have* to orient them to what is ER?

**T-S:** The third context is also my current context. I have to teach a genre of social science in Japanese. I had to make numerous lexically and syntactically controlled short texts with a social science theme because there aren't any GRs suitable for this kind of context. Do you have any advice for how teachers who are teaching L2 for specific purposes can employ ER?

**Day:** Yeah, that's a good point. I am not 100% confident that I know everything. Maybe, the internet might be a great source of materials. Have students bring in materials, or share websites with each other and talk about what they've been finding out, because what they need is materials that they can read that are directly related to the special reasons for their reading. That's tricky business.

**T-S:** At some institutions such as public universities, there is a high stake of accountability issues and thus teachers do not have much discretion of implementing ER fully. I would like to ask for your opinion about the practically ideal proportion of ER that you recommend when teachers employ ER in their courses at such institutions.

**Day:** Oh, that's what Hitosugi-*sensei* (Hitosugi & Day, 2004) and I did, because that was the same idea, because if there are 10 sections of Japanese 102, all teachers have to cover the same materials because their students are all going to take Japanese 201. That's a very tricky situation. We were lucky that we were able to give it a try. Most of the reading was done outside the class, because we couldn't take a lot of class time. We would not use every class for ER, but maybe twice a week, we would begin with 10 minutes of ER, right in class. And then on Fridays, during the last half hour, students did ER activities in class with the books they had read. To help them and motivate them, we gave credits toward the final grade for the number of books they read. Actually, after the first two weeks of the semester we had some students who wanted to transfer to our section because they heard that our students were enjoying it! So, it *can* be done but it has to be done very carefully. We did not cut anything out of the syllabus. The students in our class did exactly what students in the other classes did. Our students actually did more work, but they handled it well.

**T-S:** You categorized ER programs into a continuum in your 2015 article. The ER program you just mentioned would be the Modified ER in the continuum?

**Day:** No, we did everything according to—

**T-S:** –‘Pure ER’?

**Day:** Yes, it was. But we made it a part of a regular class. And that class as you know is not a reading class. It was Japanese—

**T-S:** –four-skills language class.

**Day:** Yes.

**T-S:** So, you probably recommend that teachers try ER within the framework of ER principles but outside the class. I mean, try Pure ER but outside the class?

**Day:** Yeah, but spend a little bit of time in class.

**T-S:** At one seminar talk session I attended, Professor Paul Nation asked the speaker who presented a study of ER, “How many of the Top Ten Principles of ER have been empirically proven?” Do you think all of the Top Ten Principles can be empirically supported?

**Day:** Well, we know that generally Reading is usually faster rather than slower, that’s been established quite well. Now, I don’t know if we could actually find evidence to support a lot of them. For example, I think it will be tricky to prove Principle Ten, “Teachers are a role model”. We would have to have a control group and a treatment group to see whether a teacher does this, and there are other variables at work there. So it’s hard to say that it could be supported. Now, I don’t know about Principle Nine, “Teachers orient and guide their students.” Probably. But again, that would involve a treatment and a control group to find evidence for that. Or if we did qualitative research, we might find that “Yes, teachers encourage me, they help me engage,” maybe we could do that without a traditional quantitative approach. It might be possible. Now “Reading is its own reward” is controversial, because there is something like Moodle Reader (<http://moodlereader.org/>). Some work could be done to see if that has support.

**T-S:** Research that uses Moodle Reader?

**Day:** Definitely, that would be possible, because apparently from people like Tom Robb, that group found students really engaged in it, take ease, and move on. So, I would say that reading is its own reward, yes, but there are situations in which things can be done. But I am not a big supporter of the idea of book reports and traditional ways of

comprehension questions afterward, but there are other ways in which students can do post-reading activities.

**T-S:** Next question. How can language teachers convince skeptical administrators?

**Day:** *By the research.* I would say that the research that shows students become readers, and research which provides the effect size, changes of the attitude, and the motivation. And in my work that I’ve done when I talk with teachers, not administrators, I tell them that students get excited about it and enjoy it, and the teachers get very interested in it because they know if you’ve got your students who are motivated and excited, they’ll *learn*. Yes. So, I think, if I were to work with administrators, I would begin with the effect size. And then say, “in addition, they do learn to read, we know that, and then there is other evidence to show that it spills over to other aspects of language learning.” That’s what I would do.

**T-S:** Now, do you have any suggestion to practitioners if they want to do action research, to let the public know about the benefits they are getting from ER practice?

**Day:** Again, I would look at the effect size. If they can report that students are enjoying it, like it, read outside the class, that to me would be very exciting. They might also want to show that students who were not readers in the L1 become readers in the L1 because of ER in a foreign language. That might be something that teachers could do for action research. Because I know it happened.

**T-S:** So, they can examine if it transfers back to the L1. Do you have any practical advice to do such a study in good ways?

**Day:** I would do qualitative research. I would begin with a questionnaire: How much do you read in your foreign language? How much do you read in your first language? Then I would talk to students individually. When you read in your first language, what do you read? Why don’t you read in your first language? You know, just to get them to talk about it, and then, after the ER class, when one semester is over, I would do the survey again, then do more interviews, talk to them again. “Why are you reading more in your first language?” “Are you reading the same thing?” They might be reading novels that they had never read before for pleasure. They would read textbooks. Some interesting things they could do as teachers.

**T-S:** That kind of research is very accessible for practitioners.

**Day:** Easy to do also, and *interesting*.

More and more ER studies have been reported in the L2 reading pedagogy. However, some factors of ER confuse language teachers. In this article, Professor Day clarifies some crucial aspects of ER as well as L2 reading in general, and encourages the audience of TLT to embark on ER both in research and practice.

## References

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**Mitsue Tabata-Sandom** was an assistant professor at the University of Hawaii where she received direct guidance from Professor Day. She is currently a Japanese lecturer at Massey University, New Zealand. She is disseminating accumulated L2 English research findings related to ER into the context of L2 Japanese reading pedagogy.



## [JALT PRACTICE] MY SHARE



### Philip Head and Gerry McLellan

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 600 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

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Hi again and welcome to My Share, the column devoted to fun-filled and educational lesson ideas. It is difficult to believe that another year has passed. I love autumn in Japan, and in particular Nagoya where I live. The leaves are changing colour and the vista is simply splendid. Additionally, the days are still warm enough to go camping and my family and I try to get into the mountains as much as we can. We usually manage to get a camp in at the end of November. In a few short weeks, we'll be off skiing! I recommend anyone new to Japan to get out of the city as this country has so much to offer.

Anyway, enough about me! Let's turn our attention to the articles in this issue: First, Steven Asquith has an interesting idea of using L1 prompts to increase L2 output. Then, Steve Hampshire has a lesson plan to help students speculate more and become more confident in hazarding a guess. Thirdly, Suzanne Kamata has created a plan to raise awareness of grammatical errors and to help students be more creative. Then, Elizabeth J. Lange and Jong Oe Park have an interesting way of deterring students from being late and increasing levels of politeness in the classroom.

In our fifth article, Michelle Chen shows us a way to have students adapt a famous short story into a play and, in keeping with the famous stories, Michael Bradley introduces a lesson plan to help students act out a court scene and learn lexis associated with legal matters. I hope you enjoy reading the articles as much as I did. See you in 2017!

Gerry McLellan

## Using L1 Semantic Prompts

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### Quick Guide

» **Keywords:** L1 prompts, speaking support, learner confidence