

The benefits of extensive reading in the ESL classroom.

Author's affiliation and email address:

Melania Di Napoli
melania.dinapoli@estudiante.uam.es
Autónoma University of Madrid, Spain

Melania Di Napoli holds an M.A. in Comparative Languages and Culture, a PGCE in secondary education and she is currently doing a Ph.D. in Education at the Autónoma University of Madrid. She has been teaching EFL for seven years both in Italy and Spain. Her main research interests include SLA, Language Teaching Methodologies, TESOL in hospital schools and home classrooms.

SUMMARY

Inspired by Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition and his input hypothesis, and by the principal theories on the benefits of extensive reading, a four-month extensive reading (ER) program was set up. Using a wide and hooking thematic range of graded readers by Oxford University Press within their project *Read on!*, 48 students were involved from three middle school classes of ESL in a private school in Rome.

It was a student-centered learning experience, as the teacher only introduced the program, encouraging the reading, and supervised. The books were arranged in a "traveling trolley library," which students could manage autonomously once a week. They could choose personally the book they wanted to read, depending on their interests and linguistic skills. They could read in class and at home whenever they wanted being utterly responsible for the book. Reading was not stressful or tiring, as they did not have to do any exercises or take any exams on the books. Furthermore, thanks to the audiobooks, the program engaged a dyslexic student, who used to have many problems with curricular ESL classes.

Six research tools were used to monitor effectively the progress of the project:

1. Initial motivation for reading questionnaire and a final one for feedback.
2. Student personal worksheet.
3. The best reader and greatest book list.
4. Biweekly debate.
5. Teacher's log.
6. Oral and written exams.

It was detected that the more students read, the better they used to write and speak. Their academic performances improved. Despite their own linguistic level, everyone seemed more self-confident when communicating in English and could stand out. During the term, the students succeeded in getting more and more familiar with the project, and their reading habits and motivation increased. Eventually, the program supported the integration of a student with special needs.