Close encounters of the human kind: Using Reading Circles to engage and motivate L1 ESOL Learners to achieve.

Rational & Questions

Effective reading skills are essential for ESOL learners to achieve in their Skills for Life (SfL) exams, to progress to further courses and for everyday life but it appears Hull College students are reluctant to read extensively outside the classroom, where texts are focused on exam tasks.

• What support do students need to develop a reading habit and reading skills?

• Do Reading Circles (RC) provide the support needed?

Data collection and analysis

9 L1 ESOL students from 2012/13 made up the research group to identify:
• barriers to extensive reading and to developing the skills required to meet the L1 Standards for Adult Literacy tested in SfL exams.
• their self-assessment of pre-existing ability.

They took a self-assessment and an initial assessment (IA) at the beginning of the RC, and another self-assessment and a formative assessment (FA) at the end of 6 RC sessions. All assessments were marked against the L1 Standards for Adult Literacy tested in SfL exams. The results are shown in the Self-Assessment and Reading Assessment Charts opposite. The Standards are detailed overleaf.

The findings and recommendations are drawn from student feedback & assessment results.

Reading Circles: Engaging & motivating L1 ESOL Learners

Fiction / Non-Fiction
• Pre-RC: 14% / 86%
• RC: 42% / 58%

• Clarify meanings of whole text & specific vocabulary
• Develop summary skills & pronunciation
• Widen **cultural** perspectives and **human** experiences

Wider reading

Dedicated reading time

Support

Discussion work

Time

Text levels

Achievement

Peer support

No support

Graded readers

• IA – 44.6%
• FA – 77.5%

Barriers

Outcomes

Skills gaps

Texts not interesting

Assessment: Self, Initial & Formative

Selection of stories

• Ways of reading: Text, Word, Sentence and **Cultural/Human** levels.
• Self-confidence increased for all Standards.

Self-awareness & Confidence

Support

Task Completion

Outcomes

• 93% of RC activities completed

Reading Circles: Supporting L1 ESOL Learners to achieve

Student Self-Assessment
■ Pre-Reading Circle ■ Post Reading Circle
Ability — Standards for Adult Literacy L1
Ra, Rb, Rc, Rd, Wd, We, Wf, Wg, Wh, Wi, Wj

Ability Codes:
5 – I can do this unaided
4 – I can do this with a dictionary
3 – I can do this with peer support
2 – I can do this with teacher's help
1 – I can't do this

L1 Reading Assessment Results
■ Initial Assessment ■ Formative Assessment
% Pass — Standards for Adult Literacy L1
Ra 0, Rb 0, Rc, Rd X, Wd 0, We 0 X, Wf X, Wg 0, Wh, Wi, Wj X

Results of Standards:
0 – 0%
X – Not tested

Standards for L1 Adult Literacy overleaf.

Intervention Method (M. Furr, 2004 & 2009)

1. **Teacher selected texts** – Furr. M, Ed. (2007) *Bookworms Club Gold: Stories for Reading Circles*, Oxford: OUP
2. **Small reading group** – 9 students in one RC group
3. **Group read the same text** – one story each week for 6 weeks
4. **Individual reading roles** – Students read from 6 different perspectives: Discussion Leader, Summarizer, Connector, Word Master, Passage Person & Culture Collector
5. **Students made notes to aid discussion** – used RC role sheets and reading diaries
6. **Weekly group meetings** – set day & time for one hour discussion
7. **Student-led discussion topics** – open conversations about the text and related topics of personal interest
8. **Teacher as facilitator only** – Students guided the discussions & allocation of RC roles
9. **Evaluation: self-reflection, peer evaluation & teacher observation** – RC diaries; questions literal & higher & prompts reminder, scaffolded & example (S. Clarke, 2001)
10. **A spirit of fun** – RC is not meant to be serious: Informal talk

Read • Think • **Connect (to text)** • Ask • **Connect (with group / people)**

Findings

RC stimulates process activates the 'drive to speak' by:
• promoting oracy & story telling practice
• engaging with texts by escaping safely into other worlds / experiences and
• enabling readers to explore personal experiences in an impersonal way

This supports skills development by:
• providing an atmosphere of peer acceptance and support
• peer discussion & questioning to 'close the gap' in language & life knowledge
• developing learner autonomy / self-evaluation
• exposing readers to the shape and feel of language before independent use
• Interest, engagement and conversation

References
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Furr, M. (2004) *Literature Circles for the EFL Classroom,* Dubai: TESOL Arabia
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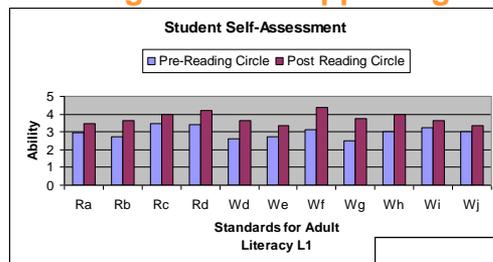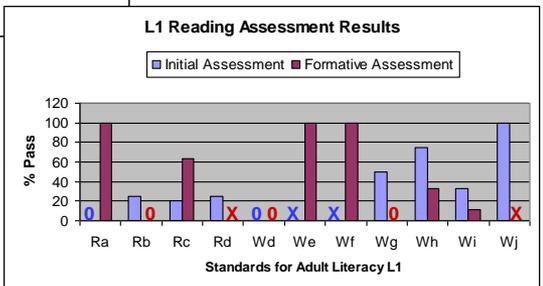
Recommendations

• A wide range of texts is required to maintain readers' interest.
• Students should agree the texts they read with the teacher.
• Students should have individual copies of the texts.
• RC works best with small groups.
• On-going extensive reading & discussion programme.

Actions

• Findings & RC intervention method fedback to ESOL staff for use in class.
• A tutorial session has been written to introduce RC to students.
• Readers in the library have been re-arranged by level.
• RC to be included in 2013/14 Schemes of Work for E3 – L2 ESOL courses.

Strengths of the project: The project followed BERA guidelines and focused on the student view of reading and what students and teachers could learn from this. Findings will be shared with the research students, across the ESOL team, college departments and via LSIS conference & website.

Limitations of the project: This was a small-scale project with a sample drawn from one 6 hour a week L1 ESOL class. The time-scale of the project limited the range and number of texts read. The frequency and type of standards tested in the sample SfL exams used for IA & FA vary, so an exact comparison of achievement is not possible.

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Key and Basic Skills Specification References

Standards for Adult Literacy Level 1

Key Skills Reference	Basic Skills Reference	
1.1	AL1R	**Reading**
1.1.	AL1Ra	• trace and understand the main events of continuous descriptive, explanatory and persuasive texts
1.1.	AL1Rb	• recognise how language and other textual features are used to achieve different purposes, eg to instruct, explain, describe, persuade
1.1.	AL1Rc	• identify the main points and specific detail, and infer meaning from images which is not explicit in the text
1.1.	AL1Rd	• use organisational and structural features to locate information, eg contents, index, menus, subheadings, paragraphs
1.2	AL1W	**Understanding writing techniques**
1.2.	AL1Wd	• use language suitable for purpose and audience
1.2.	AL1We	• use format and structure for different purposes
1.3		**Proof Reading**
1.3.	AL1Wd	• use language suitable for purpose and audience
1.3.	AL1Wf	• write in complete sentences
1.3.	AL1Wg	• use correct grammar eg subject-verb agreement, correct use of tense
1.3.	AL1Wh	• punctuate sentences correctly and use punctuation so that meaning is clear
1.3.	AL1Wi	• spell correctly words used most often in work, studies and daily life
1.3.	AL1Wj	• proof-read and revise writing for accuracy and meaning