

Extensive Reading: Indispensable... but how do you do it?

Daniel Stewart / Richard Ascough

Extensive reading(ER) is indispensable for Japanese students was the premise for the May presentation at Omiya. Stewart and Ascough, experienced teachers and pioneers of a well-established ER program, gave a lively and stimulating presentation, fielding many questions throughout from an interested audience.

They first gave a brief introduction to ER: students (1) read fast, (2) read many books for pleasure, (3) choose their favorite books, (4) rarely use dictionaries and (5) individually read different books. Stewart cited evidence from his MA Thesis research to emphasize that contrary to some opinions, occasional dictionary use may be beneficial in ER. In addition, they described several reasons why ER is becoming popular. ER provides students with motivation, comprehensible input, and a chance to instill habits for lifetime learning. Students also build their vocabulary and learn about other cultures.

Stewart and Ascough outlined their reading program at Kaisei Academy. Students had been reading 20-40 books a year: the more they read, the better they performed. From this April however, junior 2 students have started the year with a lesson each week allocated for in class reading in the first month, dramatically increasing the number of books read. Integral to the ER program is comprehension checking which is done through use of the text in group dramas and other activities.

The presenters explained the nuts and bolts of setting up a program: (1) start the program early, (2) buy many different books, (3) use easy books, and (4) get a wide variety of books. They showed samples of books used in their ER program and the pictures of their book carts. Despite the success and popularity of ER, in reality it is difficult to measure the benefit as students often learn English from other sources at the same time. The speakers hope to see research that takes into account outside influences.

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