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**IDEA SHARING: THE USE OF READ-SHARE-ACT
TO PROMOTE EXTENSIVE READING**

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Introduction

“I believe that there are three reasons why we should consider the importance of establishing a culture of reading. First, much of the information available in the world comes in the format of print. Most of the printed materials in the world come in English. In order to help students access more of the information available in English, the teacher must establish a culture of reading.” (Anderson, 2008, p.4)

Inspired by the above quotation, I believe that a reading teacher has an active role in cultivating reading culture or reading habit and in activating students to *want* to read. One way to do this is to integrate extensive reading into the classroom (Day and Bamford, 1998; Bamford and Day, 2004) where extensive reading can be enhanced if the teacher allows students to choose what they want to read and gives them a chance to share reading experiences (Harmer, 2007). Based on the proposed ideas, I decided to incorporate extensive reading as part of an existing reading course. An experiment involving specific extensive reading activities which would lead to an opportunity to read and share of what was read was designed. The technique of Read-Share-Act (RSA) was then developed and implemented as a means to promote extensive reading. Students’

perceptions towards the use of RSA were studied as well as whether it enhanced their reading habit.

This paper aims to share how RSA was carried out and how successful it was as reflected from students' perspective.

Purposes of using RSA

1. To promote extensive reading in English reading class
2. To introduce the technique of Read-Share-Act (RSA) as a means to perform extensive reading activities

Purposes of the study

This study attempted to answer two questions.

1. What are the students' perceptions towards the use of RSA in performing the extensive reading tasks?
2. Is RSA perceived to enhance their reading habit?

Scope and limitation

This study focused only on the perceptions or opinions of students participating in the RSA process. The assessment of reading ability improvement was not taken into consideration because as soon as marks come in, reading for pleasure becomes reading for credit. Also, extensive reading is essentially private activities and intended to be enjoyable, any attempt to make it seem like schoolwork is demotivating (Scrivener, 2005).

Subjects of the study

The subjects of this study consisted of 24 female Matayomsuksa 4 students (Grade 10) who were enrolled in the English Gifted Program during the 2nd semester of the 2012 academic year at a private school in Hat Yai, Songkla province, Thailand. All these students were screened by the school according to their English language proficiency.

Instruments

The instruments employed in this small scale quasi-experimental classroom-based research consisted of Read-Share-Act (RSA) designed as the treatment or training technique and an open-ended questionnaire to gather data related to the satisfaction levels and perceptions towards the use of RSA.

The treatment and data collection procedure

Two phases were involved, one tied to RSA and the other conducted to reflect the participants' perceptions.

Phase 1: Implementing RSA (See also the Appendix)

The RSA was integrated as a part of normal reading instruction offered 2 hours weekly through the 15-week semester. One hour of normal class (15 hours in total) was allocated for this extensive reading activity. The steps were as follows.

The R (reading) step

Each student selected a new book which she would prefer to read and to share from a list of graded readers recommended for EFL students. (See Appendix for the students' choice of books). The reading was done during their own time outside class time and it was agreed that individuals would share about 10-12 pages of their reading every week the class met.

The S (sharing) step

1st round sharing

During the time allocated for extensive reading activity, students formed 6 pre-selected groups each consisting of 4 members. For 6 consecutive weeks, individuals took turns sharing the content to the other three members of their group using English as the medium in telling parts of their stories. Members were encouraged to ask for clarification and to express or reflect feelings or impression related to the events or characters in the stories.

Each student also took notes of their peers' stories and revised their notes outside class time. They were assigned to maintain a journal of the 3 stories told by their peers. During this sharing step, the teacher, acting as the researcher, observed students' performance

and assisted them as required. It took 6 hours (6 weeks) to finish sharing the whole book. Students then submitted their journals and these were commented on by the teacher in regards to content completeness and language accuracy.

2nd round sharing

Students formed new groups of four consisting of different group members. Each shared the whole story to the new audience and at the same time had a chance to listen to 3 new stories. This took 2 hours (2 weeks) for the 4 members to finish the process. No notes or journals were requested at this stage of sharing.

3rd round sharing

Two groups merged into one consisting of 8 members. There were 3 groups at this stage. Each member spent not more than 7 minutes retelling her story to the group. This took approximately 1 hour. Later the group voted for one story that lent itself best to be performed as a play. The nomination and voting process taking 1 hour was conducted in the Thai language. Three stories were chosen for the subsequent acting stage.

The A (Acting) step

Preparation

Before acting, students were given 3 hours over 3 consecutive weeks to prepare the play scripts under the teacher's supervision and to plan for the production of the relevant stuffs and costumes. The three plays were to be performed in the final week of the semester. It was expected that each play would take 20-30 minutes. Individuals in the group would be assigned the specific role/character and also other related work. The rehearsal was conducted outside class time when the group members were available.

Play performance

The three plays which comprised 1) Secret Garden, 2) The Wizard of OZ, and 3) Rapunzel were performed in class by individual groups. While one group was on the stage, the others took their role as the audience.

Reflection

At the end of all the play performances, each group was asked to reflect on their own performance and to evaluate the others by contributing written feedback in English on the provided paper. The teacher also wrote her comments for individual groups. Then all the comments or feedback were circulated among all the groups.

Phase 2: Obtaining the participants' perceptions

An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to each student at the end of the semester. They were asked to express in Thai language their opinions and attitudes towards different aspects related to the extensive reading tasks. 30 minutes were allowed for responding to 11 questions (See the Appendix for the list of questions).

Data analysis

Data obtained from all the 24 questionnaires was categorized, and summarized. Frequency count was used as a statistical device. The 2 main findings are shown as follows.

Findings

1. Students' perceptions towards the use of RSA in performing the extensive reading tasks

Of the 24 students, all expressed positive attitudes towards specific aspects of RSA in completing extensive reading tasks. Table 1 illustrates their perceptions.

Table 1: Students perceptions towards the use of RSA in extensive reading

Stage	Activity	Perceptions (n=24)	
		Helpful	Not helpful
R (Read)	1. Reading a preferred book selected from a list of graded readers (10-12 pages per week)	24	0
S (Share)	2. Weekly sharing 10-12 pages in the pre-selected group.	24	0
	3. Maintaining a journal of the told stories.	24	0 0
	4. Forming a new group to share the whole story in one go.	24	0
	5. Merging of 2 groups to retell the story.	24 24	0
	6. Nominating the best story for the group's play performance.		
A (Act)	7. Writing play scripts.	24	0
	8. Play rehearsal	24	0
	9. Play performance	24	0
	10. Reflection of the play performance	24	0

Students' comments on specific aspects of RSA can be summarized as follows.

1.1 The free choice of book gave the students a chance to pursue the story that matched their interest and language level. It was stated that the right choice of book could motivate them to read more, to gain more enjoyment, and to learn more. The following comments reflected this perception.

“Choosing the book I liked was very good idea. I could choose ‘my own type’ of book which I found easy and enjoyable. I could get the most out of it and I could easily tell my friends about it. (Student (S) 13)

“I like to choose the story I’m interested in. I selected one which is famous and difficult in order to challenge myself. I was so proud I could understand it. It was so satisfying. (S11)

1.2 The weekly sharing in the pre-selected groups and maintaining journals of the stories were found favorable among most students. The sharing of 10-12 pages each week was not overwhelming but kept them active with an optimum level of reading as one student put it, *“To cover 10-12 pages weekly is fair enough. I could learn to be responsible to meet the reading plan.” (S1)* However, some who chose challenging stories (e.g. Phantom of the Opera) sometimes found it hard to manage especially if it was a busy week. Still, when looking at the whole process of sharing content and maintaining journals of the stories, all the students highly valued the opportunities to practice listening, speaking, and writing skills. They also became more aware of how to communicate ideas using simple spoken language, to take coherent notes, and to revise the notes to complete their journals. Some related comments were:

“I had to prepare what to say and how to say it before class. Sometimes I could not be fluent but I tried to use gestures to make my friends understand me. It worked even though the grammar might not have been totally correct.”(S19)

Another also commented that:

“I could practice a lot of listening and taking notes. Sometimes I mixed Thai and English in my original notes but I could later write journals with more understanding. This is a great rare chance for me to have a nice real practice.”(S15)

Nevertheless, many students complained that the only one hour weekly sharing was too short.

1.3 Forming a new group to share the whole story in one go was considered knowledge provoking as well as entertaining. All mentioned that they enjoyed listening to various stories from which they learnt more vocabulary. At this stage they could listen more and to different people. At the same time they could practice more speaking skills and enjoyed working harder to make themselves understood. This is supported by the comments like:

“We learnt more from listening to new stories and doing this brought more fun (S21) or “I learnt new words from new stories. I was very excited and touched by different moods in different stories. I could practice more listening. What I liked most was I could repeat my story. I think I could speak more fluently.” (S5)

1.4 Merging of 2 groups to retell the stories and nominating the best story for the play performance were said to give them the practice of summarizing the story and arguing for the nominated story. They also mentioned about learning to listen to and accept others' opinions. Many mentioned about engaging more consideration and being more confident in expressing ideas and feelings. One student said *“This stage of sharing enabled me to see a wider perspective. I had to activate myself to think when it was my turn to voice my opinion.” (S9)* At some point, however, when the discussion was far too complicated, some groups switched to Thai language to get the meaning across. One confessed that *“sometimes I had to speak Thai because it was too difficult to argue in English about some points. I did not know the words.”(S6)*

1.5 Writing play scripts was mentioned as the phase the students exploited their knowledge to the fullest capacity as shown in the next quotation.

“We had to use a lot of imagination about the characters, the action, the scenes. We worked hard and used all our grammar and vocabulary knowledge.”(S24)

Importantly, team working, brainstorming, decision making, willingness to listen to others, and being open-minded were learnt and highly favored during the stage of play writing. One student stated:

“We learnt to be more responsible and more helpful to others. Some of us contributed many cool ideas. We got to know and accept each other more.”(S7)

1.6 Play rehearsal and play performance were the stages perceived as the most exciting and enjoyable as far as the RSA was concerned. Although having problem of limited time for rehearsal outside class time, all shared one thing in common— the rehearsal was good fun. Many mentioned about the active cooperation of group members. As for the performance, all accepted their being nervous and excited. Despite this, they thought their shows went well and it was a nice experience. Most importantly, most students said the acting encouraged them to be more confident in speaking English.

1.7 Reflection of the performance was perceived by all as helpful and constructive as shown in these quotations, *“It helped us to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses so that we could improve ourselves in the future.” (S4)*, and *“The reflection enabled us to practise ‘observe’, ‘evaluate’, and ‘give suggestions for improvement’.” (S9)*

2. The perceptions of reading habits enhancement through RSA practice

The final question (11th) in the questionnaire was related to whether RSA could enhance students' reading habits. The analysis revealed that most students agreed RSA could drive them to read

more in English while some indicated that their reading habits remained unchanged. The responses are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Perceptions of reading habits enhancement through RSA practice (n=24)

The extent to which RSA could enhance reading habits	A lot increasing	Slightly increasing	Not increasing
	17	1	6

To elaborate the above results, those who tended to read more in English reasoned that the weekly reading made them more familiar with English books and English reading skill. Thus, they enjoyed reading more in English. This can be supported by the following opinions.

“My curiosity increased. I like to know more. I like to try reading more English books.” (S8).

“I never liked reading in English. But now I like it much more than in the past. I also feel good carrying an English book around and reading it.” (S10)

However, for those whose reading habit remained the same, their main reason was about not having time to read. Some stated that they did not like reading compared with listening and speaking skills.

Discussion

As shown in the findings, students have positive attitudes towards the stages of RSA practice and this experience is believed to enhance their reading habits in English. Results related to each stage can be discussed as follows:

The R-Reading stage allows students to select the right books for themselves in terms of readability and suitability of content. The correct choice enables them to read, to enjoy, to move on (Scrivener, 2005) and to meet the target tasks. This stage helps them to get into the cycle of growth instead of getting stuck in the cycle of frustration.

The S-Sharing stage not only benefits them in improving listening, speaking, and writing skills but also helps improve their study skills and form their personality. These students needed to arrange their reading plan, to initiate critical thinking and to adjust themselves in team working.

The A-Acting stage is the favorite part enabling the students to be more confident in expressing themselves in English. This similar result was also found in Phadung and Charumanee (2011) who reported that young students mostly preferred the role-play activity related to extensive reading.

In general, students seemed to find their reading pleasurable and the reading tasks involved were likely to drive their curiosity and to keep up with their reading. This is related to Harmer's (2001) viewpoint that enjoyment is more powerful than any other motivation. Enjoyable books will likely make students develop the reading habits and reading culture.

Implications for teaching English reading skills

1. Extensive reading should be encouraged to boost reading culture. As far as possible, students should have freedom in choosing their own readings.

2. Relevant extensive reading tasks should be prepared to allow students to share reading experiences. Based on this study, the most highly recommended tasks are telling stories and acting the whole or part of the story.

3. Sharing or reflecting reading experiences is a real-life task which should be incorporated in reading instruction whenever possible.

4. RSA can be adapted to suit specific reading contexts with varying levels of students.

Limitations and recommendations

The implementation of RSA in this study was designed as part of an existing reading course in which the researcher had a freedom of choice in preparing the reading instruction that matched the needs of this highly competent group. Thus the integration of extensive reading and intensive reading was possible. Despite the fore-mentioned academic freedom, some limitations existed in classroom practice.

The first was related to time management between the teacher-directed intensive reading and the independent extensive reading activities. While the students asked for more time in sharing the reading experience, the teacher seemed reluctant and sometimes could not afford it as she had to prioritize other requirements of the course. This problem could have been avoided if RSA had been implemented in a stand-alone extensive reading course. The issue of time constraint in this study may be associated with the length of the selected books (graded readers). In other situations where time is limited, the shorter readings are recommended. Short contemporary stories available on-line or in printed form can also be helpful resources. However, selection criteria should be advised so that students can obtain the reading texts that can lend themselves through the RSA process.

The second was the students' lack of the related skills in performing the tasks. During the very first sessions of the sharing stage, it was observed that some students "read" their notes to their peers instead of telling stories in their own words. This limitation could be overcome by introducing the techniques of organizing information in the form of an outline or mind-map as a supplementary instruction to guide students in being a story teller and being a note-taker.

The last challenge was how to keep students motivated through the whole process. To maintain students' interests and motivation, even though it is controversial whether "marks" should come in, my observation from this trial convinced me that allocating some scores for extensive reading (e.g. for classroom participation)

could have been an incentive for students to become alert as active participants. Most importantly, it should be noted that assigning scores should aim for motivating or rewarding students rather than penalizing them.

Concluding remarks

It is my personal interest as a teacher to try to grow reading habits among the young Thai students. I believe that the culture of reading can help save people and their country in today's knowledge-based society and, importantly, extensive reading or joyful reading, as called by Richard Day, can speed the development of such a culture.

The Author

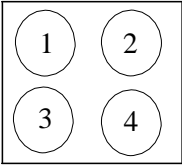
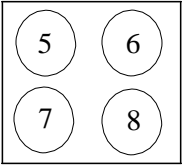
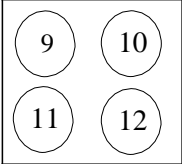
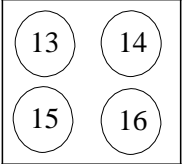
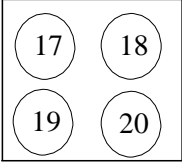
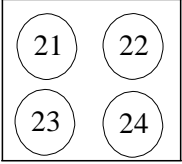
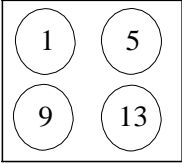
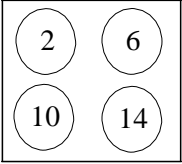
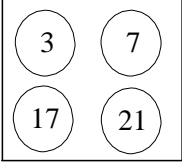
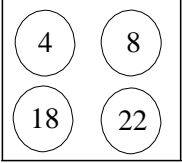
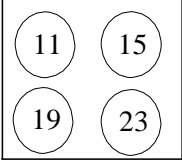
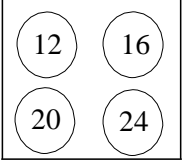
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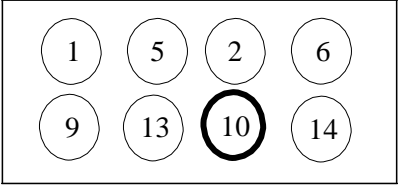
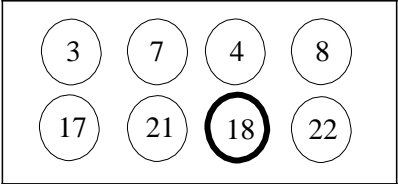
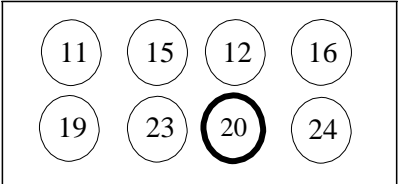
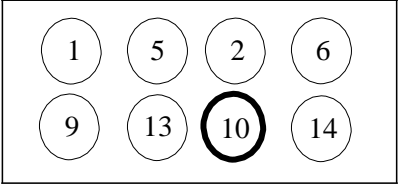
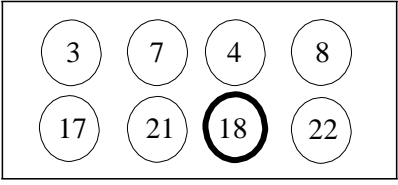
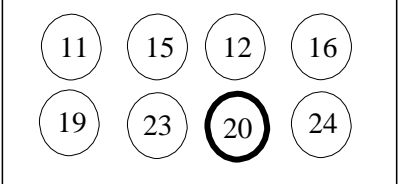
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Appendix

The RSA process

R(Reading) - Select 1 book - Read about 10 pages a week	Skill R	Individual
S(Sharing) 6 hours/ 6 weeks <u>1st round sharing</u> - Share a part of the story in groups. (10 pages a week) - Take notes of the others' stories. - Keep journals. - Submit journals.	R L S W	6 groups <div><div>A </div><div>B </div><div>C </div><div>D </div><div>E </div><div>F </div></div>
<u>2nd round sharing</u> 2 hours/ 2 weeks - Share the whole book with the new group.	L S	6 groups (New) <div><div>A </div><div>B </div><div>C </div><div>D </div><div>E </div><div>F </div></div>

<p><u>3rd round sharing</u> 2 hours/ 2 weeks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Merge with the other group. - Share the whole book in brief. - Nominate ONE book for the play performance. 	L S	<p>3 groups</p> <p>A</p>  <p>B</p>  <p>C</p> 
<p>A(Acting) 5 hours/ 5 weeks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write play scripts. (3 hours) - Rehearse (outside class time) - Perform the 3 plays. (3 groups) (1.30 hours) - Self-reflect and give feedback to others. (30 minutes) 	L S W	<p>3 groups</p> <p>A</p>  <p>B</p>  <p>C</p> 

The Selected Readings

Student number	Book titles	Student number	Book titles
1	The Moonspinners	13	The Piano
2	The Woman in White	14	Daddy Long Legs
3	Dracula	15	Voodoo Island
4	Christmas Carol	16	The Phantom of the Opera
5	Three Men in a Boat	17	Gulliver's Travel
6	Far from the Madding Crowd	18	Rapunzel***
7	Shepperd	19	Skyjack
8	Pride and Prejudice	20	The Secret Garden***
9	Great Expectations	21	The Black Cat
10	The Wizard of OZ***	22	Of Mice and Men
11	Huckle Berry Finn	23	Little Women
12	The Hound of the Baskervilles	24	Birmingham Girl& Shark Boy

Note: Books with*** are those nominated for the play performance.

The Questionnaire Items

Please kindly comment on the following points related to our extensive reading activities. Write your comments in the space provided.

1. The opportunity to select your own book.
2. The weekly sharing of 10-12 pages within the pre-selected group.
3. Note-taking and keeping journal of the told stories.
4. Forming a new group to share the whole story in one go.
5. Merging of 2 groups to retell one's story and to listen to more stories.
6. Nominating the story best for the play performance.
7. Group writing of the play script.
8. Play rehearsal
9. Play acting
10. Reflection of the play performance
11. The extent to which RSA could enhance your English reading habit – a lot, slightly, or not increasing. Why?