

Teaching Reading at Ferris: Using the New Ferris Reader

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In 2012, the third edition of the Ferris Reader was published. This edition was designed to provide reading materials of current and relevant global issues and activities as well which will facilitate the reading of the materials. With intentions to use the book effectively, feedback was sought out from students who had the opportunity to read the materials from the textbook a semester before it would begin to be used in all but one of the Reading courses in the Intensive Reading program (in the final Reading course teachers have the freedom to choose a textbook and/or use his or her own materials). According to the students, many of the articles were considered to be “difficult” so it was considered to be useful to include with the textbook further information on how to make the materials more accessible to the students. In this paper a proposal for how the new Ferris Reader could be used will be given. First, the relevant literature will be briefly reviewed. Then an example syllabus and plans for the first few classes will be provided. Finally, the feedback gained from the students will be presented and in conclusion, advice on how we can adjust our usage of the book according to their feedback will be outlined.

Brief review of relevant literature on teaching Reading

Fluent reading is considered to be: 1) a rapid process; 2) an efficient process; 3) an interactive process; 4) a strategic process; 5) a flexible process; 6) an evaluating process; 7) a purposeful process; 8) a comprehending process; 9) a learning process; and 10) a linguistic process (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). Quite similarly Nation (2009) explains what it takes to become a fluent reader and specifically refers to what should be included in a reading program, i.e. meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development. By considering meaning-focused input, it is meant that it is important to keep in mind and encourage a range of purposes for reading, that learners should be reading at their level, and that they should be reading in order to

develop their language proficiency. In order to develop their language proficiency they should understand approximately 98% of what they are reading. Meaning-focused output is related to not only focusing on developing reading skills but all of the language skills, including listening, speaking and writing. What is meant by language-focused learning is that the skills, knowledge and a wide range of strategies required for successful reading be made available. Also, learners should be exposed to a range of texts. As for fluency development, learners should feel pressure to continue reading as much as possible but at the same time enjoy and feel motivated to read. In particular there are three skills that are referred to by Nation as being specifically related to enhancing the development of reading skills, i.e. intensive reading, extensive reading and reading faster. By encouraging our learners to read intensively we are focusing on language-focused learning. When we do this we give our learners opportunities to focus on skills and strategies necessary for reading. By encouraging our learners to read extensively we are focusing on both meaning-focused input and fluency development. By encouraging our learners to read faster we are focusing on fluency development. These above recommendations were kept in mind when considering the materials to be used and how they will be used in the Reading courses at Ferris in conjunction with the new Ferris Reader.

An example Reading II Syllabus

The Reading course objectives are, as stated in the example syllabus, that “students will be mainly focusing on reading faster and developing their Intensive and Extensive reading skills. Students will do this while reading materials on a wide variety of current global issues from various perspectives”. The materials to be used in the course are listed in the syllabus as the Ferris Reader and other supplementary materials. In the final section of the syllabus the Assessment items for the course are explained. These will be explained with references to the course plan also included in the syllabus. As can be seen by looking at the course plan (see below), over the 15-week semester the following two topics covered in the book will be focused on during the first Intensive reading course (there are four courses all together and the book will be used in the first three courses): Human rights and Economic issues. The first assessment item listed on the course plan is

Reading fluency tests. According to the syllabus, “starting in week 2, every other week there will be a Reading fluency test which you will record on your Speed reading graph. You will submit your Speed reading graph at the end of semester for assessment”. The Reading fluency tests are tests which are included in Nation’s Speed Reading Course document available on his website:
<https://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/paul-nation>

Table 1. Reading II example syllabus course plan- autumn 2012

Week	Topic	Reading fluency tests	Oral book reports	Vocabulary quizzes
1	Introductions			
2	Human rights issues	Test one		
3			Oral book report one	
4		Test two		
5			Oral book report two	
6		Test three		
7			Oral book report three	
8	Economic issues	Test four		Quiz one
9			Oral book report four	
10		Test five		
11			Oral book report five	
12		Test six		
13			Oral book report six	
14		Submit Speed reading graph	Submit Reading log	Quiz two
15	Class summary			

The next assessment item listed on the syllabus is Oral book reports. According to the syllabus, “Starting in week 3, every other week you will discuss with a group a book you have read. You will submit the book reports after the group discussion and you will submit the Reading log at the end of semester for assessment”. Students are encouraged to choose books which look interesting to them and are at their level. In order to ascertain

which level the students are at, the first day of class students complete a Vocabulary Size Test, also available on Nation's website. After ascertaining their levels, together, as a class, we visit the library to peruse the Graded Readers available (these are encouraged to be used because they are written at their appropriate levels). Some examples of Graded Readers available are: Oxford Bookworms and Penguin Readers. Two further assessment items have been mentioned up until this point in connection with the first two assessment items, that is, the Speed reading graph and Reading log. Both of these items are used in conjunction with the first two assessment items when assessing their reading progress and one of the main purposes are to do just that, i.e. record their progress. As listed on the course plan, these items are due in week 14. The last assessment item listed on the course plan is Vocabulary quizzes. As can be seen, there are two quizzes at the end of each topic segment. Ten words are chosen from the 24 words included in the Learning the vocabulary sections of each chapter. Two final assessment items remain which are not listed on the course plan and they are attendance and tasks. In the syllabus the new Attendance policy is written for the students' information which is "Students must attend a minimum of 10 classes. This number includes "excused" absences. Also, if a student is late to class, she is considered to be officially late to class. If she is late for three classes this equals one absence. A student who has been absent may be required to submit additional work" and with regard to tasks, in the syllabus it explains that "each week you will be required to complete a task. The tasks to be completed are taken from the textbook. For example, it will be required that you submit the answers to the Checking the main points questions and to complete a Post-reading activity".

Class plans for the first three classes

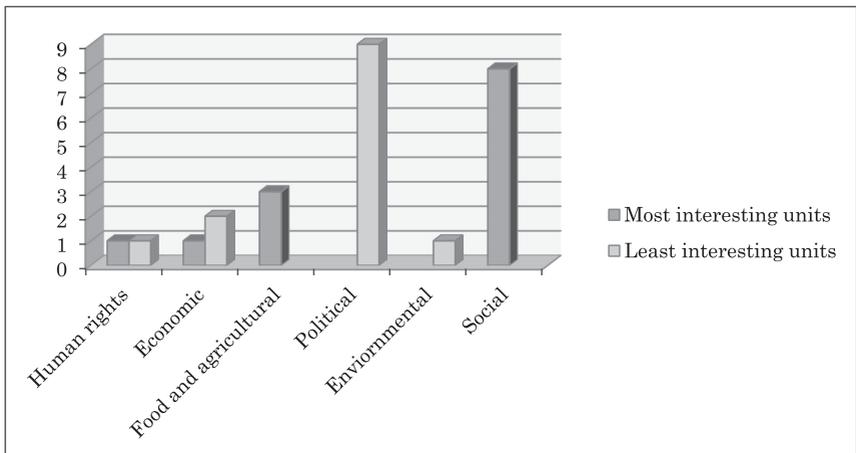
In order to give a specific idea of how the book could be used, next class plans for the first few days will be explained. Day one of the semester the syllabus is explained and then the students complete the Vocabulary size test mentioned earlier. After completing the test, the answers are gone through together and then the students know approximately what their levels are. Now that they have this information they are prepared to go to the library to see the Graded Readers available and to choose the first book they will

read. Before leaving to go to the library as a class, the students complete the Pre-reading activity for Chapter one and they receive information about their homework due the following class which is Checking the main points. They are to write their answers on a separate piece of paper with their name on it and hand it in at the beginning of the next class. Day two homework is collected and then the Reading skill section of the book is explained. After the explanation, students do the activity. While the students are doing the activity, their answers to Checking the main points are checked. Next the students complete the Learning the vocabulary section. Once all of the sections are done or after each section is done, possible answers are discussed as a class. Before the class ends whether the students have found a book to read is checked. Day three students first do the Post-reading activity assigned and then they discuss the books they have read. At the end of class students complete the Pre-reading activity for Chapter two.

Feedback from students on the Ferris Reader

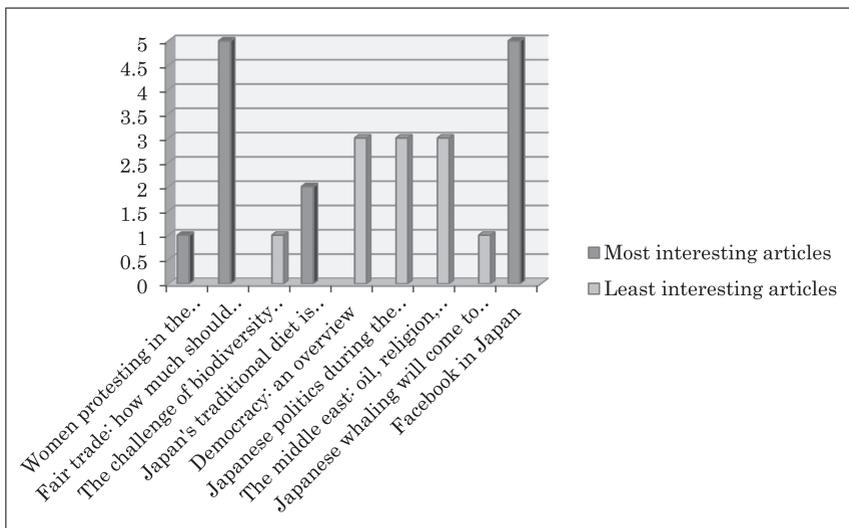
Last semester in my Reading V, J level, class we read all of the articles in the new Ferris Reader and did some of the activities in the book. At the end of the semester, I asked the 12 students to complete a questionnaire. The results of this questionnaire will be

Chart 1. Results of questionnaire - most interesting units



given next. First, students were asked to write down which units they felt were the most interesting and least interesting. They were also asked to rate each article according to the following scale: 1-Boring 2-Somewhat interesting 3-Interesting. Responses to both questions were taken into account when preparing the presentation of the following overall results above. Second, students were asked to write down which units they felt were the most interesting and least interesting. The rating information again was taken into consideration when presenting the results below.

Chart 2. Results of questionnaire - most interesting articles



Students were also requested to rate each article according to the following scale as well: 1-too easy 2-easy 3-just right 4-difficult 5-too difficult. Below I have listed the articles which were considered to be too difficult. On the right is listed the number of students who considered the article to be too difficult. At the end of the questionnaire there was a space for general comments. Here are a few which stood out:

◇ “...some students didn’t prepare this class....it made our class kind of

- wasting...”
- ◇ “...it’s really helpful to understand...if you prepare discussion those article enough...”
 - ◇ “...someone in our group did not do the homework so we cannot go ahead easily...”
 - ◇ “...we always have the same group...”

Table 2. Articles in the Ferris Reader considered to be too difficult

Japan’s economic stagnation is creating a nation of lost youths	1
The challenge of biodiversity for EU farmers	1
Japan’s traditional diet is number one	1
Democracy: an overview	3
The middle east: oil, religion, and conflict	1
How can I reduce my Ecological footprint?	1
Coal, climate and glaciers in Argentina	2
Japanese whaling will come to an end - the question is simply when	1
CARE priorities	2

From the results of the questionnaire, not surprisingly it was found that overall students felt that the Political articles were least interesting and that the Social articles were most interesting. However, as for which particular article was considered to be the most interesting, there were various responses. For example, the top two articles were on Facebook and Fair trade. The article on Facebook was a Social article but the Fair trade article was an article on Food and Agriculture. From students’ general comments it can be gathered that some students felt that it was necessary for students to be more serious about preparing for class and that they would like the opportunity to work in different groups. And finally, as mentioned earlier, students did consider overall that the book was difficult but there were few articles that numerous students felt were too difficult. For example, only three students felt that the article on Democracy was too difficult.

We can gather from the results of the questionnaire that as teachers we should encourage students to read the book with an open mind and refrain from referring to articles as being interesting, etc. as it really depends on the student whether an article is considered to be interesting or not. Also, we should encourage students to prepare for class. Since this has been included as part of assessment, i.e. tasks, as written in the example syllabus this should help. Finally it would be a good idea to provide opportunities for students to work with different groups so they have more opportunities to work with a variety of students and hopefully some of the students will be prepared.

In summary, we believed when creating the new reading book that we had put together to the best of our abilities and knowledge a book that would include current and relevant reading materials and would be challenging and yet interesting. Although it is impossible to satisfy everyone, including teachers and students, we have attempted to do so and with this mind we have provided further information, such as, an example syllabus, possible course plans for the first few days and feedback from students who have used the book already. We will have to continue to seek out feedback from our students and provide supplementary materials in order to use the new Ferris Reader efficiently.

References:

- Grabe, W. & Stoller, F. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Reading*. London: Pearson Education Longman.
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- Toyoura, A., Moore, J., Chaikul, R., Maruyama, E., Ferreira, D., & Ohata, K. (2012). *Ferris Reader*. Yokohama: Ferris University.