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# DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Extensive Reading in the lower grades: a field  
study“

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, im Juni 2010

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:  
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:  
Betreuerin:

A 190 344 347  
Englisch  
Univ.-Ass. Privatdoz. Mag. Dr. Susanne Reichl



## **Acknowledgement**

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor Mag. Dr. Susanne Reichl for her support, her help and the present of numerous commas I would not have found without her. Thank you also for the numerous interesting talks about books, literature and reading in general.

I also want to thank Dr. Rudolf Koch, the headmaster of the BG/BRG Klosterneuburg for the support of my field study. Thank you for letting me try things out. Furthermore, I want to thank my students who did an excellent job during this study and who really reinforced my belief that reading can be or can at least become fun. I am really proud of what they have produced and of the progress they have made, especially as far as their reading competences are concerned. I also want to thank my colleagues for numerous intensive and interesting talks about reading, reading strategies and also for the positive feedback you have given me.

I also want to thank my family, who has always supported and encouraged me in my studies and throughout my life. Thank you for all the strength you have given me. Thank you mum for all the stories you have read out to me, for letting me discover this wonderful and rich world of books. Thank you for encouraging my love of reading, for making me want to share this love, not only with my lovely daughter Léonie, but also with my students.

And last but not least I want to thank my partner Alexander Jiranek for his active support and the patience he has had. The relationship between my computer and me would have ended badly without you.



## **Abstract**

Reading is a crucial part of every foreign language classroom and usually students are taught various reading techniques and strategies. But these strategies are usually part of what is called intensive reading and serve mainly the purpose of analysing texts according to linguistic, structural or content features. Unfortunately the pleasure and fun reading can produce are hardly ever encouraged in the classroom and in the course of time reading becomes for the students just a means to an end, part of the course, something they have to do no matter if they want to or not.

Extensive reading is an approach that tries to work against this development by reducing reading to what it is. Reading for the sake of reading is the slogan of this approach. The students are told how much they are supposed to read in a given time frame, but they are free to choose what they want to read, when exactly and where. This is not only meant to encourage the pleasure of reading but also to strengthen the students' linguistic competences. Especially reading fluency is encouraged by this approach.

This thesis presents the concept of Extensive Reading and shows how it can, on a didactic basis, be integrated in the Austrian Curriculum for second language learning in the lower grades. Furthermore the benefits such an approach can have on the various levels of second language learning are introduced. The main focus is on the development of reading fluency in such an Extensive Reading Program.

The following field study serves the purpose of pointing out the positive effects Extensive Reading can have by comparing a test group to a control group. The conclusion drawn in this field study is that Extensive Reading can encourage reading fluency already at an early stage of second or foreign language acquisition.

Due to the benefits and the flexibility of Extensive Reading I would argue that this approach should be part of every language classroom and spread more widely among language teachers.

## Zusammenfassung

Lesen ist ein wichtiger Bestandteil des Fremdsprachenunterrichts und wird in diesem auch mit den verschiedensten Techniken und Strategien praktiziert. Meist handelt es sich im Unterricht jedoch um intensive Lesestrategien, welche darauf abzielen, einen Text nach sprachlichen, strukturellen oder auch inhaltlichen Kriterien zu analysieren. Die Freude und der Spaß am Lesen werden dabei leider nur selten gefördert und im Laufe der Zeit entwickelt sich das Lesen für die Schüler immer mehr zu einem Mittel zum Zweck, einem Teil des Unterrichts, zu etwas, das man tun muss, egal ob man möchte oder nicht.

Das extensive Lesen versucht, dieser Entwicklung unter anderem im Fremdsprachenunterricht entgegenzuwirken, indem das Lesen sozusagen auf sich selbst reduziert wird. „Lesen um des Lesens Willen“ ist die Parole dieses Ansatzes. Den SchülerInnen wird vorgegeben, wie viel sie in einem bestimmten Zeitraum lesen sollen; wann genau und wo sie das tun und auch was sie lesen, bleibt den Schülern jedoch vollkommen frei gestellt.

Durch diese „kontrollierte Freiheit“ sollen nicht nur der Spaß und die Freude am Lesen gefördert, sondern auch die sprachlichen Kompetenzen der SchülerInnen gestärkt werden. Das Vokabular sowie die Grammatik werden beispielsweise gestärkt oder erweitert, ohne diese bewusst zu lernen. Vor allem aber das Textverständnis und das flüssige Lesen werden durch den Ansatz des extensiven Lesens gefördert.

In dieser Diplomarbeit wird das extensive Lesen in seinen Grundzügen vorgestellt, und - basierend auf fachdidaktischen Hintergründen – gezeigt wie es in das österreichische Curriculum für den Fremdsprachenunterricht in der Unterstufe integriert werden kann. Weiters werden die Vorteile, welche das extensive Lesen auf den verschiedensten Ebenen des Fremdsprachenerwerbs zu bieten hat, kurz vorgestellt, um dann vor allem auf den positiven Einfluss des extensiven Lesens auf die Flüssigkeit und das Verständnis beim Lesen einzugehen.

In einer Fallstudie werden die positiven Auswirkungen des extensiven Lesens anhand einer Versuchsgruppe und einer Vergleichsgruppe verdeutlicht, um zu dem Schluss zu kommen, dass das extensive Lesen Flüssigkeit und Verständnis schon zu einem frühen Zeitpunkt des Fremdsprachenerwerbs fördern kann.

Auf Grund der vielen Vorteile und auch der Flexibilität des extensiven Lesens sollte dieser Ansatz sich meiner Meinung nach unter den FremdsprachenlehrerInnen weiter verbreiten und Teil jedes Fremdsprachenunterrichts werden.

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# 1. Introduction

Most of us have learned English at school and consequently witnessed some kind of second language instruction in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom. My personal experience was that Extensive Reading (ER), or reading for the sake of reading, did not get the attention it deserved. We certainly have encountered various kinds of intensive reading strategies and even a lot of class readers, but the idea of reading for the sake of reading never came up in my English classes.

Although ER has as we will see in the course of this thesis, positive effects on various levels of language learning in general and second language learning in particular, this approach of reading instruction does not seem to be encouraged in the curriculum due to various restrictions like lack of time or the need to focus more on specific language items.

Reading is a very effective exposure to the second language, which then usually is not part of the students' everyday life, because it is something students can do independently, at their own speed, according to their own tastes and outside the classroom. This should also make reading more than simple language training. Reading should become fun and the ESL classroom should encourage that reading becomes something students want to do simply because they like it. And as a consequence, language learning itself can become fun. Furthermore ER offers a huge variety of voices, in terms of nationality, gender, ethnicity, etc., styles and other language devices that might raise the students' interest and simultaneously raise their language proficiencies.

As a future second language teacher this individuality and independence of reading made the topic of ER extremely attractive and I started asking myself how reading could be integrated in the curriculum. I also wanted to find out about the practical implications, like what could be expected from the students,

how they could be encouraged and what an ER program could actually look like.

Furthermore I wanted to find out what impact ER can have on reading fluency, which is reading speed linked to comprehension. I chose this focus mainly because it is the only measurable component of the reading process and because fluency is one of the major aims of second language reading instruction in general.

This thesis is split up into two parts: a theoretical part that sums up the state of the art and a practice part that includes my own approach and the results of my field study.

From a rather broad conception of reading in general I will narrow down the topic to second language reading and concentrate on one way of teaching reading, namely ER. The benefits of an ER approach will be pointed out just like its practical implications. And finally all the theory will be put into practice in an Extensive Reading Project (ERP) I set up in an Unterstufe of the Gymnasium Klosterneuburg.

## 2. Reading in general

According to Wolf humans initially were not meant to read.

We were never born to read. Human beings invented reading only a few thousand years ago. And with this invention, we rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded the ways we were able to think, which altered the intellectual evolution of our species.  
(Wolf, 2007a: 3)

Although human history and its slow progress from an oral to a literary society certainly prove this, reading became a very important information processing tool that now serves the transmission of information and the extension of knowledge.

Reading takes many different forms and can therefore be viewed from different perspectives. As a consequence it is rather difficult to come up with a clear and straightforward definition, but still Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford came up with a quite useful one, namely that reading is “the construction of meaning from a printed or written message” and the process of connecting “information from written message to what we already know, to arrive at meaning” (Day and Bamford, 1998: 12). According to Urquhart and Weir, “[r]eading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print” (Urquhart and Weir, 1998: 22).

Nünning and Nünning try to explain the reading process in their model of literary communication. According to these two experts there is an author who encodes a message in a literary text. This message is transmitted to the reader via the medium of writing. The reader decodes the message by means of language and background knowledge, but also with the aid of the context in which the message occurs. (Nünning and Nünning, 2004: 13)

Three models of the reading process and the decoding involved, namely the bottom-up, the top-down and the interactive model seem to be the most dominant ones. They are mentioned by reading experts like Engelbert Thaler (2008: 47-48), Julian Day and Richard R. Bamford (1998: 12).

The bottom-up model focuses mainly on the language level of the text. According to this approach we get the meaning of a text by proceeding “from part to whole” (Thaler, 2008: 48), that is from the letter to the syllable, to the word, the sentence, the paragraph and finally the text. This model relies mainly on the formal features of the language (Thaler, 2008:47). The readers “take in stimuli from the outside world – letters and words, for reading – and deal with that information with little recourse to higher-level knowledge” (Treiman, 2001: 665).

The top-down model on the other hand proceeds “from whole to part” (Thaler, 2008: 48) and is very knowledge based. As soon as readers encounter a text their prior or background knowledge is activated and they start making hypothesis about the text. These hypothesis are confirmed and rejected in the course of the reading process in order to make sense of the text. Here the “uptake of information is guided by an individual’s prior knowledge and expectation” (Treimann, 2001: 665).

These definitions make it clear that there are two separate but still interrelated processes involved namely automatic word recognition and comprehension, in order to reach a final goal, namely fluency. So, although reading might at first glance look like a simple, passive process it actually is a very complex matter that “requires a great deal of active participation on the part of the reader” as it “involves many complex skills that have to come together in order for the reader to be successful” (Kushal, 2009/10: 175). Another definition pointing out this complexity comes from Frank Smith, who states that “[r]eading is asking questions of printed text. And reading with comprehension becomes a matter of getting your questions answered” (Smith, 1985: 96). In the Journal of the Reading Specialist, Kenneth Goodman puts it quite similarly:

Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Effective reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from cues necessary to produce guessing which is right the first time. The ability to anticipate that which has not been seen, of course, is vital in reading, just as the ability to anticipate what has not been heard is vital in listening (Goodman, 1967: 127-8)

Goodman's definition of reading is based on the top-down model of reading. But there is still another model that needs to be discussed, namely the interactive model of reading, which combines the basic features of the bottom-up and the top-down models. As Rebecca Treiman points out "[i]n most situations, bottom-up and top-down processes work together to ensure the accurate and rapid processing of information" (Treiman, 2001: 665-666). According to this model it is a combination of both processes that is required in order to understand a text (Thaler 2008: 47). This interactive model of reading is also described by Day and Bamford in their book *Extensive Reading in the second language classroom* (1998). According to these two experts "[r]eading begins with the accurate, swift, and automatic visual recognition of vocabulary, independent of the context in which it occurs" (Day and Bamford, 1998: 12). This "[a]utomatic recognition of a word allows lexical access" (Day and Bamford, 1998: 13) and "[t]he phonological representations of the words in a sentence hold the words in working memory long enough for comprehension to occur" (Day and Bamford, 1998: 14). "Comprehension [then] draws on the reader's prior knowledge of the language, of the world, of text types, and the topic" (Day and Bamford, 1998: 14). This explanation by Day and Bamford supports Thaler's idea that in order to understand a text we need language awareness, but also background information (Thaler, 2008: 48).

To summarise this complex nature of reading we could say that there are three major steps involved: first there is the identification of words in print, that is word recognition, then understanding is constructed from these recognized words, so called comprehension, and finally these two steps are coordinated in order to make reading automatic and accurate, which is referred to as fluency.

## 2.1. How reading works: differences and similarities between first and second language reading.

As already mentioned reading is a very complex process, that involves the accurate, swift and automatic visual recognition of vocabulary, but also background knowledge and “higher-order comprehension skills” (Taguchi et al., 2006: 2). Only then the brain starts working on these words and meaning is constructed. The three major processes involved when reading a text are word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

In the first language children already have a huge stock of vocabulary when their reading instruction starts. They “just” need to learn to match the words with their phonic representation. Once they get the letters together correctly they automatically have associations in their mind that make the meaning of the word clear for them.

Reading habits in the second language are cognitively quite similar to first language reading (Kamil et al. 2000: 797). However, in the second language it is not only the phonic relation they have to learn, but completely new words. Second language learners’ vocabulary is restricted quantitatively and qualitatively, that is to say that second language learners not only have less extensive vocabulary than first language learners, but also fewer associations linked to certain vocabulary items, and this lack of vocabulary leads to a lack of associative links (Alderson and Urquhart, 1984: n.p.). Even if students manage to decipher a new word the meaning is by no means obvious for them, it first has to be learned and practiced.

Unlike English L1 readers, who have tacit grammar knowledge and a tremendous amount of vocabulary knowledge even before they start learning to read, L2/FL readers are generally not exposed to the large amount of text in L2/FL necessary to develop automatic word recognition and some basic post-lexical access comprehension skills.  
(Taguchi et al., 2006: 9)

Still, we can say that the three major processes involved (recognition, comprehension, and fluency) are the same in the first and the second language and they will now be discussed in more detail.

## 2.2. Word Recognition

Basically word recognition is the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and to link them with their meaning (Stanovich, 1992: 4). Actually it is the central stage in reading acquisition, as it is the main component of fluent reading as it allows lexical access, that is the automatic calling up from memory of the word's meanings and its phonological representation (Stanovich, 1992: 4). As Marilyn Jager Adams points out in her book *Beginning to read*:

Only to the extent that the ability to recognize and capture the meaning of print is rapid, effortless, and automatic can the reader have available the cognitive energy and resources on which true comprehension depends.  
(Adams, 1994: 840)

An important element in word recognition is sight vocabulary, which are words that readers are able to recognize automatically because they have already encountered them several times. In a way the building up of sight vocabulary could be described as “over learning words to the point that they are automatically recognized in their printed form” (Day and Bamford, 1998: 16). And the best way of doing so is to read a great deal so as to encounter certain words repeatedly and to become familiar with them. As Day and Bamford point out, “familiarity breeds automaticity” (Day and Bamford, 1998: 16), and Extensive Reading is one way of encouraging this process.

Stephen Krashen's “The Clockwork Orange” study (Krashen, 1989: 446) supports the theory that ER increases our lexical knowledge by increasing the readers' sight vocabulary. In the course of “The Clockwork Orange” study adult second language acquirers were asked to read two chapters of *A Clockwork Orange*, a novel that contains a number of invented slang words that are supposed to sound Russian. These words were completely made up, but they had loose connections to Russian, German and other language. The result of the study was the incidental acquisition of these “Russian” slang words, which confirms that vocabulary can be acquired from reading (Krashen 1989: n.p).

### 2.3. Comprehension

But actually word recognition alone does not mean that a written text is actually understood. As Keith Stanovich states, “[e]fficient word recognition seems to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for good comprehension” (Stanovich, 1992: 4), which becomes particularly obvious with beginning readers. For them the process of linking the decoded words to their meaning is quite difficult because they have to focus on the decoding process and as the attention can be directed at only one process at a time they cannot focus on comprehension. As Koda puts it, “comprehension occurs when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known” (Koda, 2005:4).

Readers “work out the collective meaning of the chain of words in memory” (Adams, 1994: 857) and match it to the previous knowledge they already have in mind. If the reader is too slow the beginning of what is read is forgotten before even having finished the passage in question and so there is no way for comprehension to occur. Fluent reading is a rapid and efficient process in which various processing skills work together automatically and need to be coordinated.

### 2.4. Reading fluency

Reading fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Rasinski defines it as “the ability to read accurately, quickly, effortlessly, and with appropriate expression and meaning” (Rasinski, 2003). This “ability to read phrases and sentences smoothly and quickly, while understanding them as expressions of complete ideas” (Logsdon, 2007: n.p.) allows the reader to focus on content. It enables the reader to focus on “comprehending the text versus identifying the words in the text.” (Dunn, 2007: n.p.)

Fluency is the developmental process that connects decoding with everything we know about words to make the meaning of the text come

to life. Fluency is a wonderful bridge to comprehension and to a life-long love of reading.  
(Wolf 2007b: n.p).

Reading fluency is important for second language readers as it enables them to read a large amount of material at the appropriate level and to repeat language features encountered in the language learning process and to deepen this knowledge. It is however important to keep the language encountered in their reading at an appropriate level because if the text is too difficult their fluent reading will fail as they will have to concentrate mainly on the decoding, without any resources free for comprehension. This is due to the fact that automatic word recognition is particularly crucial in second language reading and that “inefficiency in these skills [...] makes reading in a second language usually a slow, laborious process” (Taguchi et al., 2006: 2). But according to Kuhn & Stahl “it is very likely that more than automaticity and accuracy in word recognition is needed to significantly contribute to successful comprehension. Readers also need an idea of the grammatical structures, of how the language functions. And one way of encouraging this knowledge in the students is to let them read extensively.

#### 2.4.1. The Matthew Effects in reading

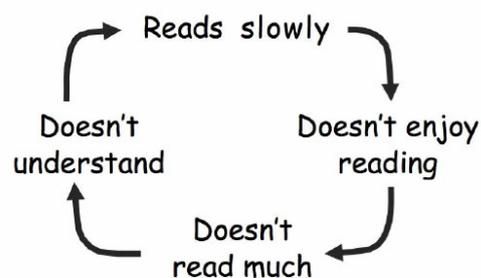
Another important factor, as far as reading and reading fluency are concerned, is the fact that in order to become a fluent reader one has to practice. As with so many other things, reading is best learned by doing it. Students can definitely improve their reading ability by reading a lot and the more children read, the more they gain in language ability and reading comprehension. Unfortunately many children are not used to reading; they do not have a real reading tradition at home and are rather reluctant readers at school. Regardless of a child’s socioeconomic background, sex, race, or nationality the child who reads the most will read the best and achieve the most. This phenomenon is also known as the Matthew effects in reading. Keith Stanovich came up with this theory in his article “Matthew Effects in Reading: some Consequences of Individual Differences in the Acquisition of Literacy” (Stanovich, 1986: n.p.) and it is

actually based on a parable told by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 25:29, New Revised Standard Version, The idea behind the parable has worked its way into the maxim, "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer." Keith Stanovich applied this maxim to reading and stated that good readers read more, and therefore become even better readers, whereas poor readers shy away from reading, which increases the gap between good and poor readers even more.

#### 2.4.2. The vicious and the victorious circle of reading

Another expert who came up with this problem is Christine Nuttall. She introduced the concept of the vicious circle of the poor reader and the victorious circle of the strong reader. The idea behind this concept is basically the same as that behind the Matthew effects. A weak reader caught in the vicious circle cannot enjoy reading and as a consequence he does not read much. This lack of reading practice results in little or no improvement and the reader continues to dislike and avoid reading.

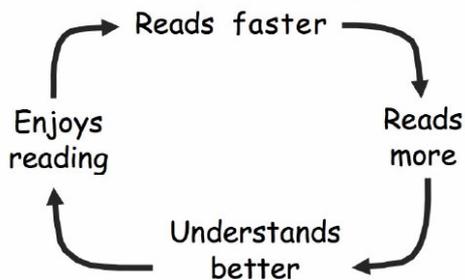
The **vicious** circle of the *weak* reader:



**Figure 1: The vicious circle of the poor reader (Nuttall, 1996: 127)**

Fluent readers on the other hand usually enjoy reading and therefore read more. They become more motivated to read and continue to improve their reading skills.

The **victorious** circle of the **good** reader:



**Figure 2: The victorious circle of the good reader (Nuttall, 1996: 127)**

As poor reading skills affect all areas of a student's academic life, it is important to somehow fight against the Matthew effects and the vicious circle of reading and one way of doing so is by encouraging reading and working on reading fluency with the help of Extensive Reading, which is the main focus of my thesis.

## 2.5. Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis

This is also supported by Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis. This is actually one of five hypotheses Krashen came up with in his theory of second language acquisition (Krashen, 1988), the others being the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis.

According to Krashen there are "two independent ways of developing ability in second languages" (Krashen, 1985: 1), namely acquisition and learning. Acquisition is an unconscious process where language is acquired via interaction and listening, like in the mother tongue. It is a natural process, where the acquisition of the various language items follows some natural sequence.

Learning on the other hand is about the conscious process of learning the grammar, the vocabulary etc. of a language.

We learn to talk a language by being exposed to it According to Krashen "[s]peaking is a result of acquisition and not its cause. Speech cannot be taught

directly but 'emerges' on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input" (Krashen 1985:2).

The input hypothesis, which is the most prominent of Krashen's hypothesis, tries to explain how learners acquire a language as opposed to learning a language. According to this hypothesis students improve and progress according to a natural order when they receive comprehensible input, which is input that is one step beyond their current stage of linguistic competence. This level generally is described as 'i+1' with 'i' being the current stage of linguistic competence. The essence of this hypothesis is that the input needs to be comprehensible and challenging enough to lead to an improvement in linguistic competence. (Krashen, 1985: n.p.)

Let me finish this chapter with a quote by D.E. Eskey, who states that

Reading ... must be developed, and can only be developed, by means of extensive and continual practice. People learn to read, and to read better, by reading.  
(Eskey 1986: 47, 194)

### 3. Reading in the Austrian second language reading classroom

According to the Children and Young Adult Section of International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the basis for reading in general can be found in the family and the family's relationship to reading already before children learn to read themselves. Children learn and are motivated by imitation, by parents or other members of the family who read out to them. This could be described as the first stage in literacy. The second stage is the process of actually learning how to read. (IFLA) That's what is done at school, but unfortunately students hardly ever become motivated readers because of their school experiences. As Pennac points out in his Essay *Wie ein Roman*<sup>1</sup> (2004: 93) it is "schwierig Literatur zu unterrichten, wenn das Lesen doch Zurückgezogenheit und Stille erfordert."<sup>2</sup>

As far as foreign language reading is concerned there hardly ever is a private frame for getting involved in it. Usually it is introduced at school and especially in the lower grades it is always dominated by the aim of teaching the foreign language, of learning from the text. That is why some students would not even identify their dealing with course book texts as reading. But I would argue that one should start reading in a foreign language as soon as possible in order to make students eager to read.

Unfortunately in the language teaching classroom reading is still generally considered a passive or receptive process, with a receiver trying to decode a message encoded in a text by a sender. The problem is that most reading classes do not actually provide enough opportunity for the development of reading skills, as students tend to not read much in reading classes, as there usually is not enough time available.

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<sup>1</sup> Like a Novel

<sup>2</sup> „it is hard to teach literature as reading requires seclusion and silence” (translation ER)

The rather curious situation has arisen whereby, despite universal acceptance of the view that one becomes a good reader through reading, reading lessons where most time is actually spent on reading (as opposed to discussion, answering questions, etc.) are relatively rare. (Moran and Williams, 1993:66)

Thaler however points out various reasons why literature should be included in the ESL classroom. The “6 arguments for teaching literature” (Thaler, 2008: 23) Thaler emphasises are “language development, intercultural learning, personal enrichment, motivational value, interpretational openness [and] social prestige” (Thaler, 2008: 23). As literary texts expose students to various different styles and text types students’ language ability can be improved. Furthermore literature can open new horizons for the students as far as cultural boundaries are concerned. Via literature we can discover different countries, cultures, etc. and learn to understand the others better. Motivation can be increased by the fact that reading might be “a welcome change from the everyday classroom routine, raising interest and suspense” (Thaler, 2008: 24). The interpretational openness of literature, the fact that “rarely will two readers’ understanding of a text be identical” (Thaler, 2008: 24) encourages communication between the different readers and this might also be encouraged by the social prestige reading still seems to have in our society. Reading is associated with intellectuality and education, although it seems to have little value in the educational system, at least as far as second language education is concerned. To summarize these advantages of teaching literature in the second language classroom could be summarized as “Literary Communicative Competence” (Thaler, 2008: 31), which combines knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Another problem is that reading in class is purely controlled by the teacher and that it is only part of what is done in class. Reading fluency is not usually a stated aim of reading classes. As already mentioned most reading classes will not provide adequate opportunity for the development of reading because of the time limitations, but also due to the fact that the conditions are controlled by the teacher and because classroom reading by definition contradicts the nature of reading, which is a very private and individual activity.

### 3.1. The Austrian Curriculum

What does the Austrian Curriculum actually say about reading in the foreign language classroom? Actually the Ministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur offers a rather general and vague view on foreign language learning.

Ziel des Fremdsprachenunterrichts ist die Entwicklung der kommunikativen Kompetenz in den Fertigkeitsbereichen Hören, Lesen, An Gesprächen teilnehmen, Zusammenhängendes Sprechen und Schreiben. Sie soll die Schülerinnen und Schüler befähigen, Alltags- und Unterrichtssituationen in altersgemäßer und dem Lernniveau entsprechender Form situationsadäquat zu bewältigen.  
(BM: UKK 2000a:1)

Although there is the view that there should be a balance concerning the skills (BM: UKK 2000a: 2), the communicative aspect seems to be more emphasized as „übergeordnetes Lernziel“(BM: UKK 2000a: 2), especially at the beginner level.

[i]m Anfangsunterricht sind die Teilfertigkeiten des Hörverstehens und der mündlichen Kommunikation durch regelmäßige Hörübungen sowie durch ein möglichst häufiges Angebot an Sprechanschlüssen verstärkt zu fördern.  
(BM: UKK 2000a:2)

This curriculum is based on the Common European Frame of Reference, a common European basis for describing the competence levels of foreign language learners. The aim of this frame of reference is to make education more transparent by clearly defining the different competence levels. It was created for teachers, trainers, course book authors and curriculum creators and it somehow defines what students need to know and be able to do in order to successfully deal with a language. According to this framework language is a means to an end and it is a very activity based approach that is concerned with what students might need the language for. This is also emphasized in the curriculum where it says that we should help our students develop certain autonomy to deal with written foreign language texts. (BM:UKK 2000a:1) It also says that it is the teacher's task to: “die Schülerinnen und Schüler [...] möglichst früh in den eigenständigen Umgang mit Lehr- bzw. Lern- und Übungsmaterialien [...] einzuführen” (BM:UKK 200a: 1).

This task based approach can also be found in the Austrian Education Standards English Grade 8, which focuses on the lower grades, the so called Unterstufe. These standards, which are based on the Common European Framework of Reference and the Austrian Curriculum, take into account the pan-European development in Education and try to ensure quality on all levels of education, which is class level, school level and above, the transparency and objectivity of education and a sustainable development of competences.

As far as the competence levels, again based on the CEFR, are concerned there are three broad groups, namely the basic user, the independent user and the proficient user. All three of them can be further subdivided into two groups, so that we end up with the following grid.

Proficient user	C2 (Mastery) C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency)
Independent user	B2 (Vantage) B1 (Threshold)
Basic user	A2 (Way stage) A1 (Breakthrough)

(Common European Frame of Reference)

The descriptors associated with these levels actually focus on what students can do, on the qualitative aspects of production. They define what the students must be able to do to reach the average level. Those descriptors exist for all five skills, that is listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing, and focus on such aspects as vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, phonological control, orthographic control, turn taking, thematic development, cohesion and coherence and the general linguistic range.

For the reading skill the descriptions of the different proficiency levels are the following:

- A1: I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.
- A2: I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements,

prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.

- B1: I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or ob-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters
  - B2: I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
  - C1: I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instruction, even when they do not relate to my field.
  - C2: I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstracts, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary words.
- (Common European Frame of Reference)

In these descriptions various purposes of reading are included as for instance the search for information, quick understanding, reading to learn or to integrate information, and reading for general comprehension. Most of these can be practiced in some way, but reading for general comprehension, which is linked to interest and entertainment is a rather complicated matter as far as the ESL classroom is concerned. Reading for pleasure or general understanding is generally carried out privately and more or less automatically with apparently few processing difficulties, at least as far as the first language is concerned. In the L1 reading for general comprehension “becomes seemingly effortless because of the extraordinary number of hours devoted to automatic word recognition, syntactic parsing, meaning formation, and text-building comprehension processes, all of which take place under very intense time constraints”. (Grabe, 2008: 10). In the second language it is exactly this fluency under intense time constraints that makes it more difficult because they are less exposed to L2 print. That is something Extensive Reading tries to work against. According to a commentary accompanying the curriculum the four main goals of reading are that students can develop efficient reading strategies, that they gain and reinforce vocabulary and grammar, that they gain information and that reading is linked to pleasure (Matzer et al n.d.:23).

Especially the pleasure factor is important for our topic of ER, which can also be referred to as Pleasure Reading.

It can be seen that practically all documents dealing with reading in the second language classroom are very vague and leave a lot of freedom. Only in a commentary on the Curriculum, which has no legal character at all, a more explicit view can be found:

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler [sollen] dazu ermuntert werden, sich auch außerhalb der Unterrichtszeit mit fremdsprachlichen Texten auseinanderzusetzen. Insgesamt festzuhalten ist, dass Lesetraining zwar sehr zeitaufwändig ist, von seiner Wirkung her jedoch immer auch gewonnene Zeit bedeutet.

(Matzer et al n.d: 18)

Nowhere in the Austrian Curriculum is ER mentioned, and the vague statements that can be found on reading in general make it obvious that the use of ER in an Austrian school, especially in the Unterstufe, depends mainly on the willingness and motivation of the teacher. So we can say that in general terms there clearly is space for ER. According to Day and Bamford there are four ways of implementing ER in schools:

- as a separate course
  - as part of an existing reading course
  - as a non credit addition to an existing reading program
  - as an extracurricular activity
- (Day and Bamford, 1998:41-42)

ER as a separate course would mean that a new subject has to be created. It would require “a teacher, a syllabus, a classroom, materials, and a set time slot” (Day and Bamford 1998: 41). The problem with this approach is that it requires official admission from the ministry for education – therefore it is the least travelled way of implementing ER in schools. All other three options are more practicable. In an ERP that is part of an existing reading course students are required to read a certain number of books or pages in and out of the classroom. The ER activities are also included in the marking system. ER as a non-credit addition to an existing reading course is quite similar. Students are encouraged to read for pleasure but there are no consequences for the marks. And ER as an extracurricular activity means that there is a kind of reading club students can join voluntarily.

But according to Waring only the integration of ER in an already existing course is useful as “extensive reading should not be seen as supplemental or optional, but as a core and indispensable part of all language programs” (Waring 2006:n.p.).

## 4. One way of teaching reading in the ESL classroom- Extensive Reading?

As I have already mentioned reading is a very complex task, especially as far as its integration into the ESL classroom is concerned. One of the main problems in the second language classroom is that most reading exercises are not really concerned with reading. As Chris Moran and Eddie Williams put it:

The rather curious situation has arisen whereby, despite universal acceptance of the view that one becomes a good reader through reading, reading lessons where most time is actually spent on reading (as opposed to discussion, answering questions, etc.) are relatively rare. (Moran and Williams, 1993: 66)

One way of overcoming this problem is to integrate an ERP in the second language program. In this chapter I am going to define ER and a way to integrate it in the Austrian curriculum.

### 4.1. Approaching a definition of Extensive Reading

At first glance a definition of ER seems quite straightforward: it is just reading for the sake of reading. But going slightly more into detail it becomes obvious that one of the main features of ER is that it is easily adaptable to all kind of settings and therefore there is no clear and general definition.

In language teaching, reading activities are sometimes classified as extensive and intensive. Extensive reading means reading in quantity and in order to get a general understanding of what is read. It is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading. Intensive reading is generally at a slower speed, and requires a higher degree of understanding than extensive reading. (Richards et al. 1992: 133)

The first to come up with the concept of ER was Harold Palmer in his books *The scientific study and teaching of language* in 1917 and *The principles of language study* in 1921. He actually distinguished between Extensive and

Intensive Reading. According to Palmer the former refers to “rapidly” (Palmer, 1921/1964: 111) reading “book after book” (Palmer, 1917/1968: 137), with the reader’s attention on the meaning, not the language of the text. When reading a text intensively, on the other hand, we “take a text, study it line by line, referring at every moment to our dictionary and our grammar, comparing, analysing, translating, and retaining every expression that it contains” (Palmer, 1921/1964: 111).

[it] implies close study of short passages, including syntactic, semantic, and lexical analyses and translation into the L1 to study meaning [...] [and it] may be justified as a language lesson, but it may very well be counterproductive as a *reading* lesson  
(Susser and Rob 1990: n.p.)

According to Day and Bamford this

[d]ichotomy is still a useful one. Intensive reading often refers to the careful reading (or translation) of shorter, more difficult foreign language texts with the goal of complete and detailed understanding. [...] Extensive reading, in contrast, is generally associated with reading large amounts with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material. Readers are more concerned with the meaning of the text than the meaning of individual words or sentences.  
(Day and Bamford 1997: n.p)

In the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics ER is defined as “intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage the liking of reading” (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992: 133). And according to Marit Simensen, ER counteracts “a tendency among foreign language learners always to regard a text as an object for language studies and not as an object for factual information, literary experience or simply pleasure, joy and delight” (Simensen, 1987: 42). These are just some examples of the wide variety of definitions that one encounters when dealing with the field of ER. Two experts on ER are Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford. They actually came up with ten main characteristics of ER in their book *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*.

1. Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom.
  2. A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways.
  3. Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them.
  4. The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding. The purposes are determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the student.
  5. Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading.
  6. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words makes fluent reading difficult.
  7. Reading is individual and silent, at the student's own pace, and, outside class, done when and where the student chooses.
  8. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower as students read books and other materials they find easily understandable.
  9. Teachers orient students to the goals of the program, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the program.
  10. The teacher is a role model of a reader for the students – an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader and the rewards of being a reader.
- (Day and Bamford 1998: p. 7-8)

Basically ER means reading “widely and in quantity” (Day and Bamford, 1997:1) with “the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material” (Day and Bamford, 1998:1). There is no need to understand every single word, to get every detail, what counts is that one can enjoy the overall plot of a text. ER is “primarily about meaning” (Waring, 2006: n.p.). It is all about filling the gap between studying a language and learning to use a language. As Bell states, ER is “real-world reading but for a pedagogical purpose” (Bell, 1998: n.p.) as the language is put into context so that learners can get a feeling for how the language works. Reading is a rather personal and individual process and, due to the fact that learners are free to choose where and when they want to read, ER allows learners of different proficiency levels to learn at their own level and pace without being stuck in an inflexible class program.

[Students] can get access to language at their own comfort level, read something they want to read, at the pace they feel comfortable with, which will allow them to meet the language enough times to pick up a

sense of how the language fits together and to consolidate what they know.  
(Waring, 2006: n.p.)

Furthermore the fact that students can choose what they want to read according to their own interests increases the motivation and somehow makes the reading process a matter of pleasure rather than obligation, which often is the case when it comes to classroom reading. This becomes obvious also in the terminology of Stephen Krashen, who does not talk about ER but about “Free Voluntary Reading” (Krashen, 2004: n.p.). As Day and Bamford put it: ER offers “reading gain without reading pain” (Day and Bamford, 1998, p. 121).

As Rob Waring points out, ER also offers students the opportunity to bring together their theoretical knowledge about a language with the practical use of the same, that is to put the language into a context and to give students “a sense for how the language works” (Waring, 2006: n.p.). That is why the main focus of this paper is, as I have already mentioned, on fluency.

I would say that one of the main characteristics of ER is its flexibility as it “caters to the different needs and interests of individual students” and “allows them to develop their foreign language competence at their own pace.” (Hitosugi and Day, 2004: n.p.)

In an article on ER, the British Council’s department for teaching English comes up with another set of characteristics, which is a more teaching oriented. Graham basically takes over the characteristics Day and Bamford introduced. Students should read in class and out of class. “Extensive reading should not be incompatible with classroom practice and methodology” (Graham 2004, n.p.) Students should be given time to read in class but they should also be assisted in their reading outside of the classroom. The teacher performing as a role model and recommending books might be a good way to motivate students to read. The reading material should cover a variety of genres and levels and students should feel free to choose what they want to read. They should also have the option of stopping to read whenever they feel like it, because reading

should be for pleasure and information and if the reading material fails to interest them they should be allowed to skip to something else.

But Graham does not only recycle the characteristics offered by Day and Bamford, he also expands this concept by suggesting the establishment of a class library which might raise the chance that students borrow books. Furthermore Graham points out that “dictionaries should be avoided” (Graham 2004, n.p.) because looking up unfamiliar words would hinder their fluency and as a consequence the pleasure. And last but not least Graham suggests that a record of what they are reading should be kept either by the students themselves or by the teacher.

The practical implications of an ERP that are introduced in this article, that is the distinction between in-class and out-of-class reading or the class library, will be discussed in more detail in the practice part of the paper.

Another “Top Ten” list of principles for ER comes from Prowse.

1. Choice
  2. Ease
  3. Texts to engage with and react to
  4. No comprehension questions
  5. Individual silent reading
  6. No dictionaries
  7. Range of genres
  8. Use recordings
  9. No tests
  10. Teacher participation
- (Prowse 2002: 142-143)

These ten principles are quite similar to those offered by Day and Bamford, but Prowse leaves out the amount of reading to be done and the fast reading speed. But he adds the use of recordings in order to stimulate the students, to get them into books when reading is impossible, like for instance when they are in the car or out running, or to listen while reading in order to improve speed and pronunciation. (Prowse 2002: 144)

All the characteristics of ER mentioned so far seem to be mirrored and even made more explicit in “The 10 commandments for the active reader” Engelbert Thaler came up with in his book *Teaching English Literature* (2008):

1. Thou shalt read a lot.
  2. Thou shalt predict what is going to happen next in the text in order to combine what has come before with what will happen after.
  3. Thou shalt use your prior knowledge by activating background information and schemata.
  4. Thou shalt read as fast as possible by getting used to reading in chunks (groups of words), but also vary your reading speed according to purpose.
  5. Thou shalt love reading.
  6. Thou shalt have a clear purpose for reading.
  7. Thou shalt use different reading strategies for different kinds of reading.
  8. Thou shalt concentrate on the important points and skip insignificant pieces.
  9. Thou shalt pause at certain places while reading a text to absorb the material being read and sort out information.
  10. Thou need not understand every single unknown word but should guess its meaning from context, word family, or other languages.
- (Thaler, 2008: 51)

The fact that students can choose the material they want to “work with” the content of the second language classroom becomes completely individualised. But how can this individual corpus be integrated in the Austrian curriculum?

#### 4.2. Extensive Reading and the Austrian Curriculum

One of the main aims of second language reading instruction should be to “allow students to develop into fluent, independent, and confident second language readers” (Krashen, 2004: n.p.). But as the Common European Frame of Reference points out, there are various steps the students need to go through in order to reach this final aim. In the Common European Frame of Reference literary texts in reading are first mentioned at the level B2. Here the CEFR states that “I can understand contemporary literary prose” (CEFR: 27). This level of B2 actually is Maturaniveau, and not the level language learners have in the lower grades. But at the same time one has to bear in mind that Extensive Reading is a process and not an end-product and that this ability to

read fluently in the second language can be aided, for instance by the use of Graded Readers or Language Learner Literature.

The main idea behind ER is that “learners need a large amount of contact with the foreign language in order to become proficient in it” (Mutoh, n.y.: 2) and reading is one of the best ways to assure this contact. By reading a lot and encountering a lot of familiar language a number of important changes might occur in the learners. The JALT 1998 points out a variety of possible goals or possible changes, like for instance “improvement in reading, writing [and] general language ability”, or “improvement in [...] attitude toward foreign language reading” (Mutoh, Bamford and Helgesen, 1998: n.p.), which are closely linked to the benefits of ER, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

When children read for pleasure, when they get “hooked on books”, they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all the so-called “language skills” many people are so concerned about: They will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style and become good (but not necessarily perfect) spellers. Although free voluntary reading alone will not ensure attainment of the highest levels of literacy, it will at least ensure an acceptable level. Without it, I suspect that children simply do not have a chance.  
(Krashen, 1993:84)

To draw a conclusion I would say that ER is a very effective strategy for motivating second language learners at various proficiency levels as it takes into account the fact, that a classroom is never homogeneous, but always a hybrid of a vast number of individuals. I want to end this chapter with a definition of Extensive Reading offered by Suss and Robb, namely that

Extensive reading as a language teaching/learning procedure [...] is reading (a) of large quantities of material or long texts; (b) for global or general understanding; (c) with the intention of obtaining pleasure from the text. Further, because (d) reading is individualized, with students choosing the books they want to read, (e) the books are not discussed in class.  
(Susser and Robb, 1990: n.p).

## 5. The language learning benefits of Extensive Reading

Concerning the language learning benefits of ER, William Grabe states that “[l]onger concentration periods of silent reading build vocabulary, and structural awareness, develop automaticity, enhance background knowledge, improve comprehension skills, and promote confidence and motivation” (Grabe, 1991: 396).

As already mentioned reading is a crucial skill in the ESL classroom and one way of improving this skill is ER. Various experts like Stephen Krashen, Julian Day, etc. state that students involved in an ERP will become better readers in the target language. But Extensive Reading goes beyond the level of reading comprehension; it leads to gains in the overall language proficiency.

In this chapter I want to present what five different experts or expert teams found out about the benefits of ER, namely Elley and Mangubhai, Alan Marley, Davis, Day and Bamford, and Bell.

In general terms the benefits of ER can be divided into three categories. There are benefits on the language learning level that is on the level of vocabulary, grammar, etc. There are also benefits on the level of ideas that is knowledge of the subject matter, of the target culture or general knowledge. And last but not least there are benefits on the skills level, concerning accuracy and fluency.

As Elley and Mangubhai point out in their Fiji Book Flood Study, one of the first studies of the effect of regular reading on language growth:

The impact of the books is clearly positive, and, as one would expect, most marked in those English skills which the pupils had been practicing – general reading and listening comprehension. However, the effect did spread to related skills, as shown by the greater progress made in learning written English structures, and the ability to recite complex English sentences correctly.

(Elley and Mangubhai, 1981: 24-25)

The aim of this study was to find out the effect daily reading of interesting and well illustrated children's stories in the second language can have on students in grades four and five.

### 5.1. Benefits on the language level

As far as the language level is concerned ER can enhance learners' general language competence. As Marley puts it, "the only reliable way to learn a language is through massive and repeated exposure to it in context" (Marley 2009: n.p).

More specifically, ER can help learn new vocabulary and establish and enrich previously met vocabulary. This shows that two kinds of vocabulary growth need to be distinguished; either new, and previously unknown words are encountered, or the knowledge of words met before is strengthened. As only a small amount of vocabulary can be learned and absorbed while reading and as repeated encounters are necessary to really learn this new vocabulary the second kind of vocabulary growth is the more prominent and important one. These gains are strengthened in a long-term program where new vocabulary items can be encountered repeatedly in different contexts (Marley, 2009: n.p.)

This strengthening can also be observed with grammatical structures. Just like in the case of the vocabulary, multiple encounters with various grammatical structures help the students imprint these structures in their memory.

Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis also supports the argument that ER improves general second language proficiency:

We acquire language by understanding messages [...] more precisely comprehensible input is the essential environmental ingredient [...] to language acquisition, the best hypothesis is that competence in spelling and vocabulary is most efficiently attained by comprehensible input in the form of reading.  
(Krashen, 1989: 440)

## 5.2. Benefits on the ideas level

On the level of ideas the benefits of ER are mainly concerned with affect and motivation. According to Bell, ER “can motivate learners to read” (Bell 1998:n.p.) by offering them interesting information and enjoyment. In order to ensure this enjoyment factor it is important that ER provides comprehensible input in order to ensure motivation. According to Stephen Krashen, comprehensible input is important as it can lead to language acquisition if the language encountered is at the appropriate level, namely  $i+1$ , that is slightly above the current language level of the reader. (Krashen 1984: n.p.)

Motivation can also come from an interest in the text itself, and the fact that it is really satisfying to eventually understand a foreign language text. This motivation and positive connotation of reading can eventually result in a virtuous circle of reading as described by Christine Nuttall (see chapter 1: 9). This is also emphasised by Bell who states that ER “helps to build confidence with extended texts” (Bell, 1998: n.p.).

## 5.3. Benefits on the skills level: The impact of ER on reading fluency

On the skills level ER can help students improve their reading comprehension skills and help them become fluent readers by developing a certain speed of access to known language items and to strengthen and speed up reading skills.

To summarize what I have already said about reading in general in the first chapter I want to present a quote by McLaughlin, who said that “[r]eading means acquiring the intended meaning from printed or written symbols” (McLaughlin, 1969: n.p.).

The two major components of the reading process are the decoding of words and comprehension. Reading fluency actually is the link between these two components as it refers to the speed/rate of reading, as well as to the ability to read with understanding. It refers to reading a text with speed – that is words

read per minute, accuracy – with few errors, and comprehension – the ability to understand the text.

This required automaticity is much more developed in our first language and Paran states that

If L1 readers possess attributes in reading which L2 readers do not, then it is the task of the language teacher to develop ways of encouraging the development of these attributes  
(Paran 1996:30)

This means that it is the teacher's job to find a way of fostering automaticity. ER is one way of doing so, as it increases the sight vocabulary, which is the number of words students recognize automatically. By doing so it also increases fluency, that is, the ability to automatically recognize words and phrases. This is an essential step to comprehension.

In first language reading, [...] the larger children's vocabularies are, the better their comprehension. [...] Given our position that, from a cognitive point of view, there is no essential difference between fluent first and second language reading, the need for a large vocabulary is equally true in fluent second language reading.  
(Day and Bamford 1998: 17)

It is one of the main goals of ER to promote reading fluency and to increase reading speed, as "good reading is virtually impossible in the absence of accurate word recognition skills and reading fluency" (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass and Gorsuch, 2004: n.p.) Reading fluency actually affects how well students understand what they read as it increases students' capacity for attention on comprehension. If students spend too much time decoding a text comprehension might break down as the capacities of the brain or the memory are limited and as Samuels puts it "the essence of reading fluency is the ability to decode and comprehend a text simultaneously". (Samuels, 2006: n.p.)

Still, as I have already mentioned reading is a very personal process and it is hard to measure comprehension as it is something that takes place within the reader's mind. But there is a measurable dimension of the reading process,

namely reading rate or reading speed. It can be counted in terms of words read per minute and it is one of the crucial elements in reading fluency.

Speed affects how well readers understand what they read and it facilitates comprehension. Different experts came up with different norm reading rates, all to be found somewhere between 185 and 300 words per minute (wpm). According to Fry good readers can read about 350 wpm, with fair readers it is 250 wpm and slow readers can manage about 150 wpm (Fry, 1963: n.p). According to De Leeuw and De Leeuw 230 to 250 wpm are the average reading speed of the general public (De Leeuw and De Leeuw, 1965: n.p). Although the idea of speed reading becomes more and more popular Ward Cramer points out that

it is physiologically impossible to read more than 800 to 900 words per minute... Any speed greater than this involves omitting lines, the technique recognized by most authorities as skimming, not 'reading'. (Cramer, 1998: vii)

And Neisser puts it quite similarly by pointing out that

[a] person who reads at 2,000 or 20,000 words per minute is surely not identifying every word on the page... Rapid reading represents an achievement as impossible in theory as it is commonplace in practice. (Neisser 1967: 108, 137)

This somehow mirrors what Tinker said in his book in 1965, namely that "the only justifiable or valid definition of "speed of reading" is "speed of comprehension"" (Tinker, 1965: 87). The two of them have to work together in a balanced way. This strong link between speed and comprehension is also mirrored in the results of my field study. Although comprehension is hard to measure I tried to check on it by using a comprehension question and the results clearly underline the link between speed and comprehension.

There is a significant difference "between being able to decode words on a page and being able to derive meaning from the words and the concepts they are trying to convey" (Wren, 2005: n.p).

Reading fluency means not only that a text can be read quickly, but also that the reader develops some kind of comprehension monitoring: the ability to think about the text while reading and check whether it makes sense or not. As Sebastian Wren points out we can “read” a text although “most of the individual words probably have no meaning to [us]” (Wren, 2005: n.p). What makes our reading fluent is the comprehension.

Another benefit ER can have on the skills level is that it can help improve writing and speaking skills because the more we are confronted with a language, the more we use it and the more we learn about it.

#### 5.4. Some further benefits of ER

Another benefit of ER mentioned by Marley is that due to the fact that ER is rather independent of time and place, and can therefore be done whenever and wherever students want to; it develops learner autonomy by providing opportunity for learning to occur outside the classroom. This idea is also referred to in Davis four levels of benefits in terms of personal growth. (Marley, 2009: n.p.)

## 6. How to set up an Extensive Reading Program

How much material should students read?  
How can teachers evaluate students?  
Should students read in class or for homework or both?  
At what level of difficulty should students read?  
(Day and Bamford, 1998: 83)

Those and the question of what kind of material students should read are crucial when setting up an Extensive Reading Program.

But before answering them it is important to understand that Extensive Reading is no typical classroom situation if it can be described as a classroom situation at all. The teacher does not actually teach the students. Extensive Reading is all about “building a community of readers” (Day and Bamford, 1998: 126) and the teacher is one of the members of this community, who tries to help his students and assists them in their reading. So he or she is also the manager of the program, the book buyer, the organiser, the administrator, etc.

### 6.1. How much material should students read?

Extensive Reading means by definition reading a large amount. That is one of the crucial components of every Extensive Reading Program, but what makes an amount extensive? This actually depends on the reader. But as a kind of very general rule of the thumb I would say that extensive is everything that prevents students from trying to translate what they have read. In any case it is important to set a certain reading target, that is a certain number of pages or books students are supposed to read. As William Grabe put it:

Progress in reading is only recognizable over a period of time[...] Teachers must be willing to believe in the process[...] One clear indication of faith and commitment is to demand performance. Reading is a personal experience and the teacher cannot peer over the shoulder of the student. But the teacher can [...] place expectations on the students. Most students rightly interpret such behaviour as commitment and involvement on the teacher's part.  
(Grabe 1986: 44-45)

## 6.2. How can teachers evaluate students?

In the introduction of Extensive Reading it becomes quite obvious that it is not intended to test students' language proficiency. Still, it is important to keep record of the individual learners' progress by checking the number of pages read and keeping record via reading notebooks, reading diaries, book reports or reading tests in order to measure the growth in reading ability.

## 6.3. Should students read in class or for homework or both?

Concerning this question Albert Harris and Edward Sipay state that:

[i]f you do not demonstrate that reading is a worthwhile activity by providing school time, how can we expect children to value reading?  
(Harris and Sipay, 1990: 656)

But we also have to bear in mind, that reading is a very personal and individual process, that it is a matter of individual choice, where, when, and what we want to read. And it is exactly this individuality of the reading process – which is how it works in the first language too – that somehow turns reading in a foreign language into simply reading. Students' reports should not be read for the grammar or the spelling that is for all kinds of linguistic competence. The reports are just their reaction and a way for the teacher to check on their reading. Furthermore ER is by definition its own reward and there should be no or little follow-up exercises. (Day and Bamford, 1998: 6-7)

## 6.4. At what level of difficulty should students read?

In general I agree that “one of the primary goals of the program, building reading fluency, is achieved through much practice with easy texts” (Day and Bamford 1998: 92). Starting with easy books, that is to say books at the  $i - 1$  level, as opposed to the  $i+1$  level introduced by Stephen Krashen in his input hypothesis, has two major advantages, namely that it builds confidence and the

sight and general vocabulary. But I do not agree with those people who “believe that literary texts cannot be integrated into the classroom until students have reached a level that is advanced enough for them to understand linguistic subtleties and grasp the full meaning” (Thaler, 2008: 27). I would rather argue that reading can be a useful tool already at the beginning level of second language instruction. When introducing literary texts in this context it is however important to bear in mind “[t]he age and level of [the] group” (Thaler, 2008: 27) in order to choose the right material.

### 6.5. How to put it into practice

Let me cite Marc Helgesen here, who describes the reaction of his students to the reading target he set in his article “What one extensive reading program looks like”.

“We’re going to read. And read. And read. And read. And by July, you’ll have read over 500 pages of English.” Eyes open wider. You can see the shock on their faces.  
(Helgesen, 1997: n.p.)

The high reading target can shock students at first glance but it is important to set a high target in order to prevent students translating every word they read. With a high reading target they simply do not have the time to do so.

What are important things to bear in mind when setting up an ERP?

Rob Waring came up with a description of what an Extensive Reading Program looks like when it is fully functional. I will

- be an integral part of the school’s curriculum;
- raise the learners’ reading ability and general English levels and have knock-on effects on their writing skills, spelling, grammar and speaking;
- motivate the learners to read, and learn from their reading;
- have goals that set out how much reading should be done and by when;
- have a reading library from which learners can select their own texts;
- have systems in place for cataloguing, labelling, checking out, recording and returning the reading materials;

- have a variety of materials to read, not only graded readers and other simplified materials;
- show teachers, parents and the administration that you take ER seriously,
- have targets of both learner and program attainment that clearly show the success of the program;
- be bigger and more resilient than one teacher and have sufficient support that it will continue indefinitely.

(Waring, 2006: n.p)

Rob Waring furthermore offers five steps when setting up an Extensive Reading Program. In the first step it is important to somehow find a place for Extensive Reading in the curriculum; to set aims and goals in order to fit the program into a larger set of language learning program. Here it is important to bear in mind that Extensive Reading is just one way of reading instruction and that students need to be aware of other types of reading, such as intensive reading, as well.

In the second step everything needs to be planned and everyone, that is also the students, should be involved in this phase: they can help looking for sponsors and funding, they can think of a borrowing system, etc... Then, as a third step, we have to find the materials. If there is a well equipped school library there is no problem, but if there is not, money needs to be “found” in order to buy material. This can be done by funding, by sponsoring from the parents, from the students or via school events where money is collected for the class library. In any case students should again be involved in this process. It is also important to have a variety of materials in terms of genre and level. It is also important to organise the library in terms of level. The fourth step is about establishing a book management system that should be transparent for the students, as well as a borrowing system. And last but not least a way of checking on learners’ reading has to be found. (Waring, 2006: n.p.)

It is also important that learners know what the program is all about. Facts the teacher has to tell them are the goals of the program, the rules for borrowing (how many books, for how long, when and where?), the reading target and ways of evaluation. But what can the goals of an Extensive Reading program be?

## 6.6. Teacher's role

The teacher's role in an Extensive Reading Program is a rather unusual one. In an Extensive Reading program the teacher has the function of a role model; it is his or her job to get the students into reading. The three steps involved in this process are: wanting to learn, knowing how to learn and having a chance to learn. What does this mean? It is the teacher's job to motivate students, to give them good reasons for reading by reading him- or herself. Furthermore the teacher needs to teach the students reading strategies so that they know how to deal with different texts in different circumstances, and last but not least the teacher needs to give students time to engage in reading, to actually read. And in this phase the teacher should be just another member of the reading community he or she has established, and read as well. (Day and Bamford, 1998: 136-137)

Thaler summarizes the role of the teacher in a short list of things to do:

- Show your own interest of the ideas, stories, or language in a book being read.
- Read excerpts to your pupils regularly from a variety of good quality fiction.
- Tell them what book you are reading at the moment.
- Bring a pile of your own books into the classroom for pupils to browse.
- Inform your students about recent publications.
- Tell them where they can get quality fiction at low prices.
- Recommend suitable books.

(Thaler, 2008: 66)

## 6.7. Reading material

The reading material can be described as a crucial factor in establishing a reading program. It should offer a variety of genres and levels in order to address students' interest and in order to increase motivation.

### **Call for boys' own bookshelves**

Every secondary school should have a bookshelf of "boys' stories" to try to encourage them to read and close the literacy gap with girls, ministers say.

Education Secretary Alan Johnson said working class boys in particular were falling behind in English lessons. They should be encouraged to read with action and spy stories and to learn by fast-paced, practical lessons, he said. Mr Johnson also announced a drive to attract more men into teaching in primary schools, to act as role models.

[...]

"We need an educational strategy that builds a positive identity for working class boys, instilling them pride and love of learning." He said literacy was crucial to achievement in other subjects. "Boys like books which depict them in powerful roles, often as sporting, spying or fighting heroes – not just Jane Austen, but a necessary dose of Anthony Horowitz as well," he said. "To help get boys reading we need a boys' bookshelf in every secondary school library in the country, containing positive, modern, relevant role models for working class boys."

(BBC News, 2007)

Following Nuttall's concept of the victorious circle of reading I would say that students can become keen readers by having good or interesting material at their disposal.

Day and Bamford put it quite similarly by stating that:

varied reading material not only encourages reading, it also encourages a flexible approach to reading. Learners are led to read for different reasons (e.g. entertainment; information; passing the time) and, consequently, in different ways (e.g. skimming; scanning; more careful reading)

(Day and Bamford 2002: 137)

But what is the appropriate level for our students? A rule of the thumb would be that the text should not contain more than three or four unknown words per page. (Mutoh, Bamford and Helgesen, 1998: n.p.) This "guideline" makes it clear that materials originally published for a native public might be quite tricky in a foreign language reading program.

For beginning and intermediate students [...] the most suitable reading materials are books, magazines, and newspapers, especially those written for EFL learners. The literature is published in growing quantity, variety and sophistication by both local and global publishers.

(Day and Bamford 2000:n.p.)

The so called graded readers, that is “extended texts, mostly fiction, written in language reduced in terms of structure and vocabulary” (Hill 1997b: 57) make it easier to find appropriate material at the individual language level and ensure that everyone can read at his or her own level. This makes it easier for the students to read at ease without having to use dictionaries as students seem to “have a tendency to exaggerate the importance of vocabulary” (Gremmo 1985: 82) Therefore “for all but advanced readers, the best way to promote extensive reading is by means of graded readers” (Bamford 1984: 218)

[G]raded readers are not simply a source of pleasure but resources for language learning. [They are] stories written in language that learners can understand.”  
(Hill 2001: 301-302)

The relatively easy level of the graded readers mainly serves one goal, namely the increase of motivation. It furthermore increases reading fluency and helps develop language competence as it offers comprehensible foreign language input.

All kind of publishers offer different graded readers series like for instance Cambridge English Readers, Macmillan Readers, The Oxford Bookworms Library New Edition or Penguin Readers. Unfortunately these different publishers also have different grading systems and therefore one always has to check the individual levels.

I would like to end this chapter by quoting Wodinsky and Nation, who say that graded readers

provide learners with a chance to read without encountering large quantities of unknown words, and thus learners are able to read successfully and get pleasure from their reading.  
(Wodinsky and Nation 1988: 155)

## **7. Field Study – Getting things started**

### 7.1 Trigger and aim

In the theory part I have introduced the concept of ER, which is reading for the sake of reading, as an important part of second language reading instruction. I have also brought up possibilities of implementing ER in the Austrian curriculum, which is rather flexible as far as second language reading instruction is concerned. Furthermore I have presented the numerous benefits ER can have, with special focus on reading fluency, which is reading rate or reading speed in combination with comprehension.

As already mentioned reading rate or reading speed is the one measurable component in the reading process in terms of words read per minute, and as comprehension can also be checked quite easily the question underlying my field study is whether students' reading fluency improves through Extensive Reading, and if so, to what degree, and on what levels.

Furthermore I tried to narrow down the question by focusing on the use of ER in the lower grades, where, according to the curriculum, the focus is much more on listening and speaking, that is the oral skills, rather than on the skills reading and writing. I focused on the lower grades because most of the research dealing with Extensive Reading in second language reading instruction focuses on adult learners and I wanted to show that, although many experts seem to be sceptical concerning the usefulness of Extensive Reading in the lower grades, I am convinced that Extensive Reading and its benefits can be experienced already at a very early stage of second language acquisition.

### 7.2. Some background information

After having decided on the topic of Extensive Reading in the lower grades in May 2009 I had to find a school where I could carry my field study out. I was

myself a student of the Bundesgymnasium Klosterneuburg and I have always stayed in contact with my old teachers. Furthermore the school had become more and more involved in the support of teacher education. Therefore I decided to try to sell my project to Dr. Rudolf Koch, the headmaster. The outline of the project was still rather vague, as I thought it needed to be adapted to the subjects and the setting, but the presentation of the principles and benefits of Extensive Reading seems to have convinced Dr. Koch and he assured me that he would try to find two lower grade classes and supportive teacher in the course of the summer. Now I had a setting but still no subjects. So I started checking the school library for useful material and I was positively surprised to see that I and the students would have access to a huge variety of books. Furthermore I started reading various graded readers, English picture books and books written for children and/or young adults. In the course of time I set up my own little library with graded readers from level 0 to level 4, picture books and more difficult books.

Mid-August I finally got the information that I could most probably work with two second grades, but I still did not know with which teacher. This information helped me to restrict my choice of books a bit but it still did not help me to place the project within the curriculum as this would have involved the teacher as well.

At the end of August the whole project took a completely new turn: I was asked to take over three English classes at the Bundesgymnasium Klosterneuburg – one first grade and two second grades. So I got two parallel classes in which to carry out my research. And now I could finally start planning my whole project.

Klosterneuburg is a socially and financially well set town just next to Vienna. But still, on the level of the population there seems to be quite a gap as far as the social and financial standards are concerned. Klosterneuburg offers one “Gymnasium” and three different “Hauptschulen”. Especially in the Gymnasium there seem to be quite a lot of academic parents, most of which are quite engaged and try to support their children in their school career.

### 7.3. Subjects and setting

The background information already made it obvious that the field study was carried out in the Bundesgymnasium Bundesrealgymnasium Klosterneuburg. It is a public school with more than 800 students, and it is still expanding. The school offers international and bilingual classes and has a strong English focus. Every year students can take the Cambridge Certificate and there is the possibility of taking the international final exams. Exchange weeks with English or American schools are commonplace. The school also offers a big library that offers also a large stock of English books at a variety of levels, genres and topics.

As I have previously mentioned I wanted to focus on the effect ER can already have in the lower grades in order to show that it can improve students' general reading performance at an early stage. As I am currently teaching two second grades at the Bundesgymnasium Klosterneuburg I decided to take these two classes as subjects for my field study. Actually talking about classes is not quite appropriate. It is rather two English groups of nineteen students each, where students from two different classes respectively come together. Both groups are in their second year of English with four lessons of English a week and both groups had the same teacher in their first year. Due to a rather sudden change of staff I came to take over the two groups at the beginning of school year 2009/10. I actually wanted two groups at approximately the same level in order to be able to compare the results and pin down the measurable benefits ER has had in the one group as compared to the other.

In the 2AB group, the one where I have decided to introduce ER, there are twelve boys and seven girls, with two of the boys having to resit the second grade. In the 2CD group, where I have not introduced Extensive Reading in order to have a means of comparison, there are also 19 students: ten boys and nine girls. All of the thirty-eight students are eleven or twelve years old.

Selecting a group in which to implement ER was completely arbitrary and it was based on purely intuitive grounds. The 2AB group seemed to be calmer and more ready to deal with such a project that also has to do with taking responsibilities.

According to the curriculum second grade students should, by the end of the year, reach level A2 described in the Common European Frame of Reference. At this level they should be able to understand very short and easy texts and personal letters and filter basic information from these.

What I want to show in this field study is that ER makes them surpass this level. To my opinion students who participate in an ERP do not stick with easy texts, they start to read contemporary literature and this is already level B2:

B2: I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.  
(Common European Frame of Reference)

#### 7.4. Method

As I had the possibility to use my own English groups as “guinea pigs” for my field study I decided to work on a classroom research basis, which means that research is “carried out in the language classroom for the purpose of answering important questions about the learning and teaching of foreign languages” (Nunan 1990: n.p.) This approach takes its data directly from the second language classroom, and in the case of my field study the focus was on the learners, as I tried to look at the development of their reading fluency.

As classroom research is in no way empirical or representative there is no claim of representativeness or general validity.

As a classroom research this field study worked in four steps.

First of all I had to identify a problem. After having done a lot of research the question that seemed the most prominent one for me was to find out whether reading fluency would be enhanced by the use of ER.

In the second step, again with the background information gained in the research phase in mind, I came up with the hypothesis that Extensive Reading can actually help students improve their reading fluency.

In the third step I had to check my hypothesis by assessing it via tests to detect changes in my students' reading fluency.

And in the fourth and last step I finally analysed the results of my hypothesis and proved it to be right: Extensive Reading can be an effective way of improving reading fluency already at an early stage of second language reading instruction.

### 7.5. Procedure

Concerning the procedure, this field study needs to be split up into three different parts: the Extensive Reading project itself, the research and the analysis.

When setting up the Extensive Reading project I tried to follow the five steps Rob Waring came up with:

1. Finding a place for Extensive Reading in the curriculum
2. Planning
3. Material
4. Management system
5. Checking on learners' reading

I actually pulled steps one and 2 together and made the integration of the Extensive reading in the curriculum part of the planning phase and, due to some organisational problems I am going to explain when talking about the background of the field study, I could not follow these five steps consistently. But still I tried to keep the underlying principles in mind.

Important questions I had in mind when setting up my Extensive Reading Project were:

- What is the aim of this project?
- How can I integrate it into the school's curriculum?
- How much are the students supposed to read?
- What are the students supposed to read?

- Where can the students get the books from?
- When and where are they supposed to do the reading?
- What is my role as a teacher?
- What are the students supposed to do with the books, apart from reading them?
- . How am I going to check on their reading?

When actually carrying out the project I tried to put all those things I had theoretically planned into action. I tried to set up a clear structure, transparent to all the parties concerned, that is the students, the parents and the school authorities.

In the research phase, that is the more scientific part of this field study, I also had to answer some questions before I could start:

- What do I want to focus on?
- How can reading rate be measured?
- How can I check comprehension?
- What other possibilities do I have to check reading fluency?

Again I had to decide on a clear and transparent procedure before I could actually carry my research out in class.

And last but not least there was the analysis of the results. At this point I came back to my hypothesis and checked it with the results from the field study at hand. Apart from this factual analysis there was also the need for some kind of critical reflection on problems and unforeseen situations.

## **8. Field Study – The project: putting theory into practice**

As mentioned in Chapter 7 I tried to bear Rob Waring's suggestions for setting up an ERP in mind. Therefore the questions I have mentioned in Chapter 7 needed to be answered before I could finally start my ERP. (see page 39)

### 8.1. How can I integrate Extensive Reading in the curriculum?

According to Day and Bamford there are four different ways of integrating Extensive Reading in the curriculum. It can either be a subject of its own, with its own curriculum, its own teacher, its own grade, or it can be part of an existing program, either with implications on the marking or on a voluntary basis. And it can be some extra-curricular activity in the form of a reading club.

I personally agree with Waring as I also think that the best way of integrating Extensive Reading in the curriculum is to make it part of an already existing course as Extensive Reading can or should only be one part of second language reading instruction. (Waring, 2006: n.p.) Therefore I decided to integrate Extensive Reading in the normal course outline of the second grades and to make it somehow more official by taking it into consideration as far as the marking process is concerned. This importance of the marking works slightly against one of the main characteristics of ER, namely that reading is its own reward. But I personally think that it is an important point, especially when students from the Unterstufe are concerned. To my opinion students at the age of 11 or 12 cannot be asked to understand that such a program, which might at the beginning just look like additional work to them, does really help them. I think self-motivation and full awareness of the benefits an ERP can have on their language learning are utopic aims and making ER part of the grading might be a good way of encouraging students to read, especially those you are not used to it.

In my ER class quite some value was given to ER but I tried to work on other ways of teaching reading as well. I think it should be the aim of every teacher to

arm students for everyday use of what they learn in class and as I have already mentioned we can read for various reasons and therefore we need to learn various strategies that help us fulfil every day tasks. Skimming and scanning might be quite useful in order to get the main information from a text, intensive reading allows us to focus on specific language items. When we read for information we will most probably deal differently with the text than if we read it for pleasure. And I agree with Thaler that our “students must be able to choose an appropriate reading style (scanning, skimming, etc.)” (Thaler, 2008: 49).

## 8.2. How much are the students supposed to read?

As I have already mentioned reading extensively means reading a lot and this rather straightforward definition is obviously very vague. “A lot” is a rather flexible variable and it actually depends on the reader. For someone who does not usually read anything two books per semester might appear an enormous number but for real bookworms who read every day two books would be just peanuts.

In order to find out about the reading habits of my students I gave them a questionnaire. This questionnaire was in German and it was called “Ich und Lesen”. It focused not only on their reading habits in English, but on their reading habits in general and on also on the status of reading in their environment. It was anonymous and the students should grade different statements on reading habits with one to five, one meaning „I totally agree“ and five meaning „I do not agree at all“. I then tried to find the average of the class and in the 2AB, that is the Extensive Reading group, the results were the following at the beginning of the project:

Ich lese gerne.	4
Ich lese viel.	4
Meine Eltern fördern meine Leselust.	4
Meine Eltern haben mir viel vorgelesen als ich klein war.	4
Meine Familie spricht über Bücher	4

Meine Familie liest viel.	4
Ich gehe oft in Bibliotheken und Büchereien.	4
Ich mag Bücher lieber als Fernsehen.	5
Ich habe immer ein Buch dabei.	5
Lesen kann Spaß machen.	3
Ich lese langsam.	3
Es fällt mir leicht in Englisch zu lesen.	5
Ich finde es langweilig in Englisch zu lesen.	4
Ich lese nicht gerne in Englisch.	2
Ich würde gerne mehr in Englisch lesen.	4
Ich lese langsam wenn ich Englisch lese.	2

**Table 1: Reading habits 1**

I have to admit that I was quite surprised when I saw these results and I was also a bit disappointed by the obvious lack of interest in reading. Therefore I am very happy to announce that when I repeated this inquiry at the end of the field study, which is at the end of the term, I could state a clear increase of interest. In the second inquiry I left the more general questions concerning the reading habits of the family out and focused only on the students' reading habits. This time the results were the following.

Ich lese gerne.	3
Ich lese viel.	3
Ich gehe oft in Bibliotheken und Büchereien.	3
Ich mag Bücher lieber als Fernsehen.	4
Ich habe immer ein Buch dabei.	3
Lesen kann Spaß machen.	2
Ich lese langsam.	4
Es fällt mir leicht in Englisch zu lesen.	3
Ich finde es langweilig in Englisch zu lesen.	4
Ich lese nicht gerne Englisch.	4
Ich würde gerne mehr in Englisch lesen.	2
Ich lese langsam wenn ich Englisch lese.	3

**Table 2: Reading habits 2**

This shows that the students' attitude towards reading in general and reading in English improved in the course of the project and I think this is the biggest success such a project can witness. Learning a language should be fun and I think this questionnaire proves that it actually can be fun.

Now back to the reading target: due to the fact that the students' interest in reading was so little it was really hard to come up with a number of pages they were supposed to read in the course of one semester. In the literature I found suggestions that varied from 50 pages per week (Paulston and Bruder, 1976: 202) to 60 books a year (Bright and McGregor, 1970: 69). Day and Bamford mention that "David Hill's rule of thumb – a book a week if the books are short and simple – is a good point of departure" (Day and Bamford, 1998: 85). As Day and Bamford point out that "books written for native speakers can be read by suitably advanced students at the rate of approximately 30 pages per hour" (Day and Bamford, 1998: 85) I finally decided that 25 pages a week would be a realistic target for my beginner students who might first opt for adapted and graded texts. When I made a projection for the whole term I came up with 720 pages. I was well aware that this target might be too high for some students but still I thought that it was a good average to keep all the students reading. And anyway, reaching this target was not the main aim I had in mind for my students. I rather wanted to keep them reading on a regular basis and therefore a rather high target seemed to be crucial to me.

### 8.3. What are the students supposed to read?

As I have already mentioned, the right choice of reading material is crucial when setting up an Extensive Reading program. Therefore I really tried to get an idea of what kind of language learner literature and graded readers was available on the market. On the one hand I tried to read as many graded readers and books written for children and young adults as possible, and on the other hand I tried to get hold of some theoretical guidelines or framework that might help me choose books appropriate for my students. Unfortunately I had to realise that those two different points of view, that is the theory and the practice, are far

from being easily integrated into a virtuous circle of reading as introduced by Nuttall. (see chapter 1)

From a theoretical point of view I completely agree with Day and Bamford, who state that

[f]or beginning and intermediate students [...] the most suitable reading materials are books, magazines, and newspapers, especially those written for EFL learners. The literature is published in growing quantity, variety and sophistication by both local and global publishers.  
(Day and Bamford 2000: n.p)

Furthermore I am absolutely aware of the fact that materials published for native speakers might be too difficult for foreign language students as their language proficiency is far from that of a native speaker. Therefore I really see the point of using graded readers which offer the opportunity to get into contact with the language on a safe level that assures some kind of success as they can be easily understood. I definitely agree that it is better to keep things simple in order to make sure that students are challenged but also that they can cope with what they are reading. After having read through various theories about the literature to use when introducing Extensive Reading in a second language classroom I definitely was of the opinion that for my second grades I would need a lot of graded readers and only few texts written for native speakers.

However when I went to the school library and had a look at the graded material available there I was quite disappointed, I have to admit. Most of the graded readers I've read through seemed to be not only restricted in language but also in content and I really could not imagine my students being euphoric about any of those readers. Still, I had to bear in mind that my level of English and my reading habits were completely different from those of my class and therefore I decided to include both, graded and "authentic" material, in my Extensive Reading program.

#### 8.4. Where can the students get the books from?

Now that I had made clear what I wanted my students to read – namely anything they wanted to read – I had to decide where I wanted the students to get the books from. As the school has a very big library it was obvious that this would be an option for them. I was however aware of the fact that there were always some problems with the electronic borrowing system as far as the English books with their old bar codes were concerned, but still, the huge variety was a striking argument to me. Simultaneously I also wanted to bring the project directly into the classroom in order to increase students' motivation to borrow books, and therefore I decided to set up a kind of reading basket. I would have set up a class library but as we kept changing classrooms I opted for a shopping basket in which I brought in a variety of books from my private library. Those books ranged from picture books by Axel Scheffler to graded readers from the penguin series to the Twilight saga. Those were books I had read myself and so I knew about the topic, the language level etc. and I could advise my students. In the first two weeks I brought the basket in every lesson, to make it part of my students' every day procedure, but then I slowly tried to reduce it to twice a week and in the end I only brought it in once a week.

In the course of the semester I realized that some of the books were more widely read than others and that some books were never borrowed at all. Among the most popular books were Roald Dahl's *Mathilda* (2009) and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2007), Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2009), and the Disney comics about Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. Students tended to choose books they had already heard about and had some familiarity with. And many chose stories they already knew from movies. This familiarity made the books more easily accessible and raised students' motivation. This frequency will be further analysed in the appendix. (Appendix 13.1.: 85)

#### 8.5. When and where are the students supposed to read?

Reading is a very individual process; it is something you do on your own, at your own speed, when you feel like it. Therefore it is really hard to set up

guidelines of when and where to read. Reading habits vary greatly: there are people who love to read in the morning, people who read just before going to bed, people who can spend whole afternoons reading, people who only read at home, people who love to read on the train, people who love to sit in the sun to read. But there are hardly any people who like to read when they have to.

Therefore I decided to give the students the freedom to choose themselves when and where they wanted to read. In the beginning I gave them reading time in class just to get them going, but we quickly agreed that it made more sense to let them read individually outside the classroom. So they could read what they wanted to read, whenever they wanted to read, where they wanted to read.

#### 8.6. What is my role as a teacher?

As already mentioned in Chapter 6 the role of the teacher in the ER classroom is not a traditional one. In an Extensive Reading project there is no clear-cut distinction between the teacher and the students. All are part of one big reading community and it is not the teacher's job to guide the students or to structure their reading. The teacher can of course give advice and help students find appropriate books, but the main function of the teacher in the Extensive Reading Project is that of a role model. I would argue that it is the teacher's job to show the students that reading can be a very positive experience and pleasurable, that it can be done by everyone at any time and everywhere. Therefore I also tried to read throughout the project and I also presented some of the books I had read to my students to show them that I was involved as well.

#### 8.7. What are the students supposed to do with the books, apart from reading them and how am I going to check on their reading?

Extensive reading is reading for the sake of reading and by definition there should be no real follow-up activities involved. Still, as marked part of the

language course and because everybody needs to be aware of the improvements there needs to be some way of monitoring the students' reading. I decided on two ways of keeping track of their progress. On the one hand I asked them to keep a reading diary, a list of the books and pages read.

On the other hand I asked them to write reaction reports just to make sure that they have really read those books. We agreed on two different types of reaction reports: they could either write a short summary of the book, or draw one scene of the story and explain why this scene is so important. We also agreed that the students should not spend more than ten minutes writing these reports and that they could write them in German. Why German? Because I wanted them to focus on what they had read, and not on their English. Writing is a productive skill whereas reading is a receptive skill. And our receptive capacities are always above our productive capacities. Therefore we can understand more than we can produce. And as the focus of this whole project was on the receptive skill reading I wanted them to concentrate on their understanding of the books. The reaction reports were not a language learning exercise but just a means of keeping track of their progress.

#### 8.8. What the students needed to know

I actually tried to involve my students as much as possible in this project and I never tried to hide the fact that they somehow were my guinea pigs. I told them so from the beginning and they seemed to be quite thrilled by the idea of being part of a diploma thesis. I also told them what the whole project was about, namely that I wanted to show that Extensive Reading could increase reading fluency and I also told them that this would affect their general language competence. I told them that this could improve their vocabulary knowledge or help them with writing. Then we worked out clear guidelines. The main questions we had to work out were: how much do they have to read? Where and when do they have to read? What do they have to do after having read a book?

I was very clear about the number of pages they had to read: 720 pages in the first term. How did I come up with this number? I just tried to calculate 25 pages a week. It was only a frame that should motivate them to read, and read, and read... I also told them that everything they read in English counted and that it was their free choice what they wanted to read. I also gave them the freedom to stop reading if something was too boring or too difficult for them. All I wanted them to do with these books was to mark in their reaction reports why they had stopped reading.

The question of where and when was also rather straight forward. We decided on Tuesday as our Extensive Reading Day. This was not about reading all Tuesday long, but I brought our Book Basket – with books from myself the students could borrow – every Tuesday and they could borrow and return books then. I also gave them the opportunity to work on their reaction reports every Tuesday. Furthermore they did not get any homework on Tuesday, in order to leave some time in their rather full schedule for reading.

There was also the opportunity to borrow books at our school library, which is really well equipped with English books. Unfortunately there are always some problems as far as the borrowing system is concerned, so most students decided to borrow the books directly from me. In the appendix I will offer a list of the books to be found in my reading basket and also a short analysis of the frequency with which some books were borrowed.

And last but not least, what did I ask the students to do after having read a book? I wanted them to write short reaction reports in German because I agree with Thaler who states that “[k]nowing beforehand that such a final result is expected will increase reading motivation” (Thaler, 2008: 64). I wanted to give them as much freedom as possible. The main requirement was that the reaction report included some personal reaction to the book. Together we decided on two main possibilities: they could either write a short summary of the book followed by their personal opinion, or describe an important scene or character and a personal reaction to the book. I just wanted them to focus on the

understanding and they should write for ten minutes maximum. But if they had any additional ideas they were free to do something completely different.

We also introduced a Best Reader Award. Once a month I collected the number of pages read by each individual student. Then I determined which student had read the most in the previous month and this student got one homework off. This Best Reader Award was a very motivating factor for the students who all seem to like the competitive edge it gave the whole project.

So much about the procedure in class, but how did I check the development of students' reading fluency? I did so by means of a reading rate test in combination with one comprehension question. For the reading test I gave them a text taken from a graded reader at an appropriate level for everyone in the class and let them read for 1 minute. This was at the beginning of the term and I let them mark how far they had got in this one minute. Then I let them write their names on the sheets and recollected them again. I also asked them to write a short German summary of what they had just read on a sheet of paper and to hand it in as well.

At the end of the project I repeated this reading test, but this time they had two minutes – as the first bit of the text was already known to them. Again they had to mark how far they had got and to write a short summary.

## 9. Field Study – The research

The aim of this field study is to show that ER can have a positive effect on students' reading fluency already in the lower grades where their general language ability is not yet very high. I wanted to show that ER can not only make students read faster, but that they also learn how to deal with a bit more challenging texts, that they can learn to get the main ideas of a text without understanding every detail.

The underlying questions of the research phase were:

- How can reading rate be measured?
- How can I check on comprehension?
- What other possibilities do I have to check on reading fluency?

### 9.1. How can reading rate be measured?

Reading rate is the one measurable component of the reading process, in terms of words read per minute. This can be done quite easily by means of a reading test. In the case of my field study I took an extract from a Level two Penguin Reader – *Babe – The Sheep Dog* (King-Smith, 1999: 1-5)– (13.2.: 86) and let the students read for one minute. After that minute they had to mark how far they had got. At the end of the project I repeated this test but this time they could read for two minutes. I then divided this number by two and got the average words per minute rate.

### 9.2. How did I monitor comprehension?

To check on comprehension is not as straightforward as measuring reading rate but still it is feasible in terms of comprehension questions. In the case of this short passage I just let them write down in German – as the receptive

component was more important than the productive one – what the passage was about, what they had read so far. They wrote down the answer to this question in their School Exercise Books and handed it in. So I could check who had read with understanding and who had just rushed over the words without worrying about the sense behind them.

That is what Wren means when he says that there is a difference “between being able to decode words on a page and being able to derive meaning from the words and the concepts they are trying to convey” (Wren, 2005: n.p).

### 9.3. What other possibilities do I have to monitor reading fluency?

As already mentioned the aim of this field study was not only to show that the students' reading fluency increases but linked to this also that ER helps them deal with difficult texts, that they could get the meaning of a text without understanding every single detail.

Therefore I let them work on a rather difficult text about superstitions taken from the website of the British Council. (13.3.: 87) In groups they had to filter the main ideas of every paragraph and summarize it with their words. Later we combined the different parts of the summary and every student got one to work with for the rest of the unit. Before starting the group work however we went through the text together intensively in order to clarify the most important language and vocabulary points. Their individual reading of the text therefore was more a re-reading than a first encounter.

## 10. Field Study – Results

The aim of this field study was to point out the effect Extensive Reading has on reading fluency. The results will be presented as follows: first of all I will analyse the results of the Extensive Reading group. I will focus not only on their reading rate and comprehension task, but also on the number of pages they have read, the reaction reports they have written and an activity I introduced in the middle of the term in order to check how they deal with slightly more complicated texts. Then I will compare these results to those from the non-Extensive Reading group in order to come to the conclusion that Extensive Reading can indeed improve students' reading fluency.

### 10.1. The Extensive Reading group

As I have already mentioned there were 19 students in this group, 8 girls and 11 boys. Out of these 19 students two – the ones who resit this class – have not handed in anything, that is no reading diary or reaction reports. They kept on promising that they actually have read something, but unfortunately no proof has been presented. This mirrors their general attitude, not only in English, and I dare say that it has nothing to do with the 'attractiveness' of the reading program.

#### 10.1.1. Students' performance: number of pages read and reaction reports

The aim for the students was to read 720 pages in one term and to write reaction reports for every book. Every month I collected the overall number of pages read by each individual student and let them hand in their reaction reports. The following table summarizes the numbers of pages read by the individual students.

	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.
1	215	297	428	531
2	-	-	-	-
3	74	98	157	174
4	39	58	175	312
5	138	250	428	540
6	59	140	593	868
7	48	65	310	504
8	0	165	476	504
9	42	209	502	635
10	187	255	361	431
11	44	172	458	770
12	23	60	324	517
13	69	112	148	160
14	103	207	301	395
15	104	120	201	254
16	106	157	329	513
17	30	220	403	540
18	-	-	-	-
19	151	180	245	374

**Table 3: Number of pages read**

This chart shows that the goal of 720 pages has been reached only by two students out of nineteen. One student has read more than 600 pages and seven out of the nineteen students have read over 500 pages.

So, ten out of 19 students, that is more than half, have read more than 500 pages. Out of the nine remaining students one has read more than 400 pages, three of them have read more than 300 pages, one more than 200 pages, and two more than 100 pages. Only two students have not read anything at all.

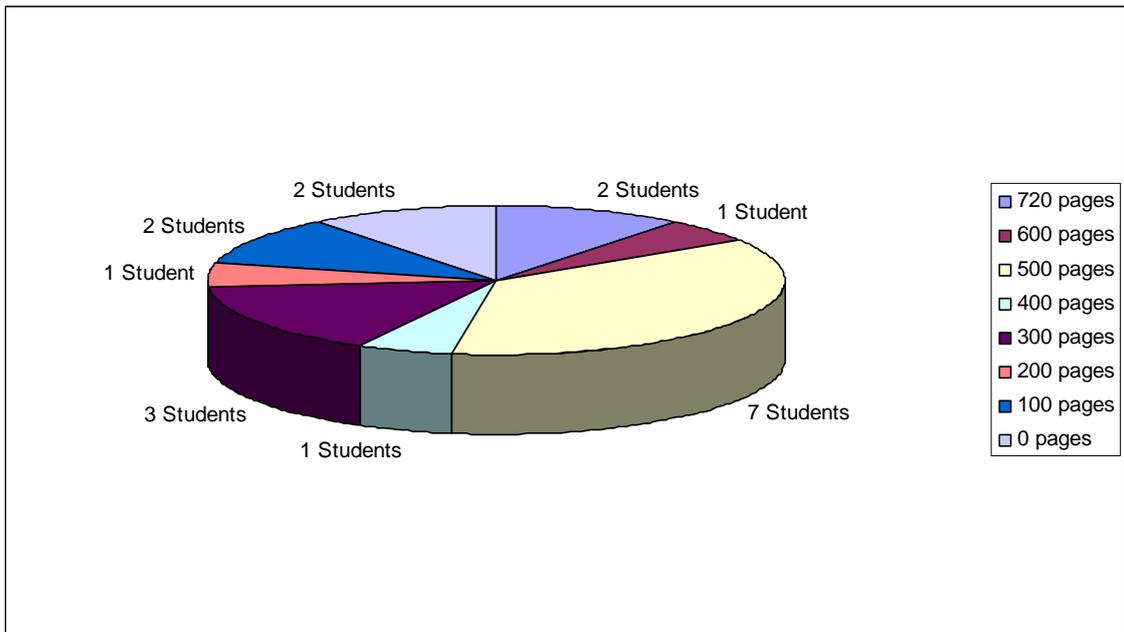
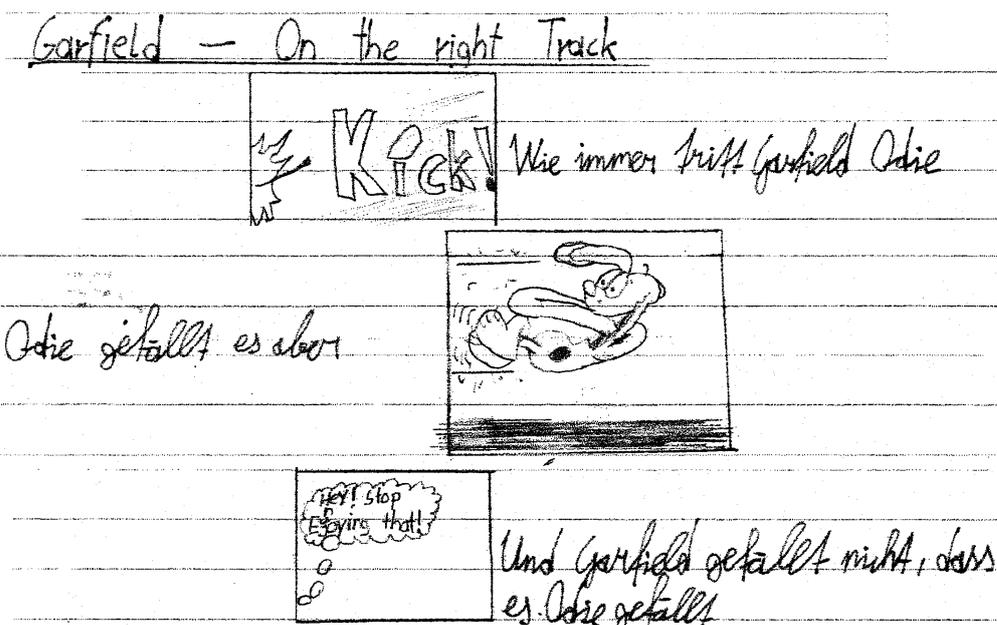


Figure 3: Number of pages read

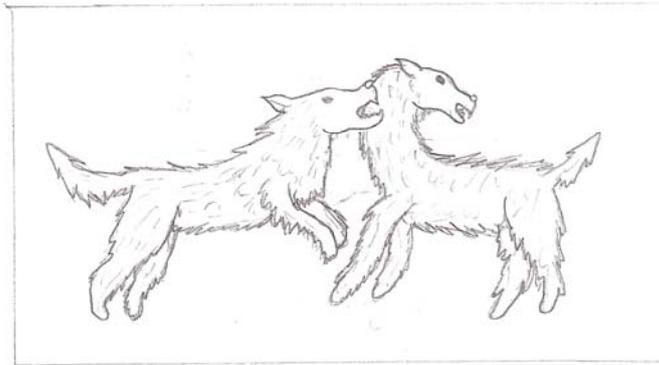
The aim of setting a high reading target was not that all students read those 720 pages, it is to make them read on a continuous level, and I would say that their reading diaries show that most of the students did so.

They also came up with some very nice reaction reports, some of which I want to include because they show that they really thought about the books and tried to produce something meaningful.



Der miesepetrige Garfield ist eine meiner Lieblings-  
Comicfiguren, und so hat mir auch dieses Buch sehr gut gefallen.  
Lesenswert!

### The Call of the Wild



Buck springt den Rudelchef Spitz an und eröffnet damit den letzten Kampf. Viele Minuten vergehen. Buck ist erschöpft und hat viele Wunden. Spitz dagegen ist noch topfit. Doch dann geschieht das Entscheidende. Buck packt Spitz Bein und bricht es. Spitz versucht sich auf den Beinen zu halten, doch Buck springt gegen ihn und Spitz fällt um. Nun attrahieren die anderen Hunde Spitz und töten ihn schließlich. Buck ist der neue Chef.

#### 10.1.2. Reading rate and comprehension

I carried out the reading rate test at the beginning and at the end of the term. But reading rate alone does not make reading fluent, the comprehension criteria has to be fulfilled as well. Therefore I counterchecked the results of the reading rate test by adding a comprehension question. After the reading rate test I asked the students to quickly summarize what they had just read in German and in order to make the development of students' reading comprehension more obvious I established five different categories of comprehension.

Very good comprehension:	students understand every detail of the text
Good comprehension:	students understand the main ideas of the text and even get some additional details
Fair comprehension:	students understand the basic ideas of the text
Poor comprehension:	students understand some ideas of the text, but do not get the main ideas
No comprehension:	students do not understand anything about the text

The following answer is an example of very good comprehension. Not only does the student summarize all the main ideas of the passage, she also mentions various little details:

“In diesem Text geht es um Mr und Mrs Hogget. Die beiden haben eine Farm. Eines Tages hören sie ganz lautes Geschrei. Mr Hogget sagt, dass das von einem Schwein kommt. Dann geht Mr Hogget in die Stadt und ein Mann bietet ihm an das Gewicht des lauten Schweins zu schätzen. Wenn er richtig schätzt kann er das Schwein haben. Im zweiten Teil geht es darum, dass der Schäferhund von Mr Hogget Schweine für dumm hält. Das erklärt der Hund auch seinen Jungen. Anscheinend hat Mr Hogget also das Schwein gewonnen.“

The words per minute results from the first round are presented in the following table, but I want to keep them anonymous. As one of the students missed the reading test at the end of the term I only include 18 students in this table.

Gender	Words per minute, first round	Gender	Words per minute, first round
B	127	G	127
B	257	G	179
B	280	G	165
B	108	G	176

B	182	G	110
B	110	G	137
B	203	G	290
B	163		
B	203		
B	148		
B	330		

**Table 4: wpm 1 ER**

In the first round, that is at the beginning of the project, the average of words read per minute was 183.

Gender	Words per minute, second round	Gender	Words per minute, second round
B	145	G	129.5
B	168	G	165
B	289.5	G	224.5
B	128	G	284
B	128	G	128
B	132.5	G	126.5
B	165	G	335
B	124.5		
B	200		
B	339.5		
B	327		

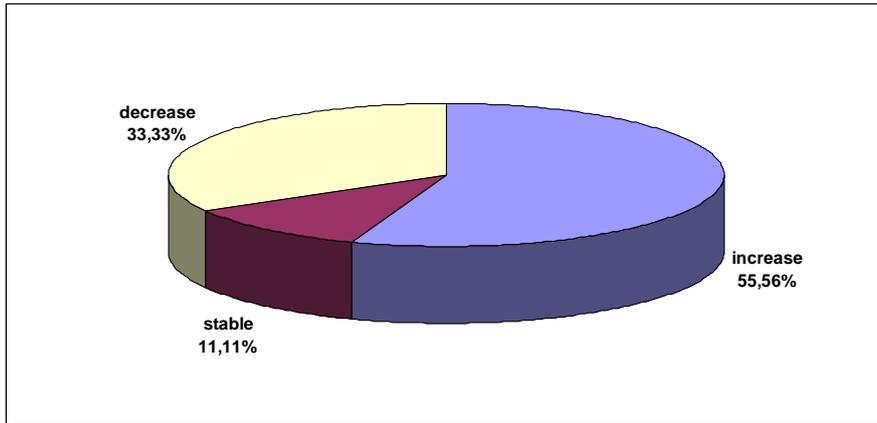
**Table 5: wpm 2 ER**

In the second round, at the end of the term, the class average of words read per minute was 197.

Gender	Words per minute, first round	Words per minute, second round
B	127	145
B	257	168
B	280	289.5
B	108	128
B	182	128
B	110	132.5
B	203	165
B	163	124.5
B	203	200
B	148	339.5
B	330	327
G	127	129.5
G	179	165
G	165	224.5
G	176	284
G	110	128
G	137	126.5
G	290	335

**Table 6: wpm comparison 1 and 2**

Comparing the results of the first and the second round it can be observed that out of eighteen students ten, that is 55.5% could actually increase their reading rate, two of them, that is 11.1% remained at a stable level and six of them, that is 33.3% of the students decreased in their reading rate

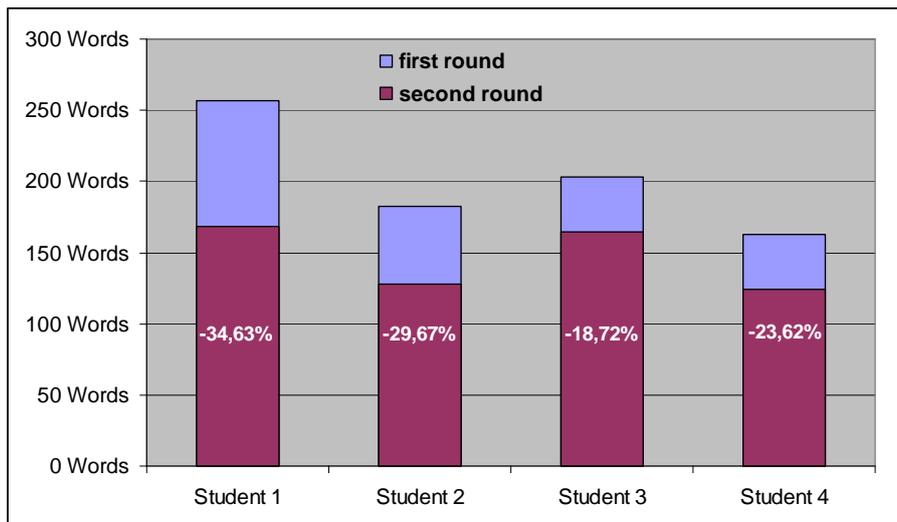


**Figure 4: development wpm ER**

The decrease might at first glance seem rather disappointing, especially in the case of four very drastic drops in reading rate. The reading rates of these four students dropped of approximately 20 to 35%.

Gender	Words per minute, first round	Words per minute, second round	Decrease, %
B	257	168	34.63%
B	182	128	29.67%
B	203	165	18.72%
B	163	124.5	23.62%

**Table 7: special cases ER**



**Figure 5: special cases ER**

But taking into consideration the comprehension aspect as well, it becomes obvious that these students' reading fluency has increased although their reading rate has drastically declined.

In the case of the four special cases mentioned previously the reading comprehension was non-existent in the first round. One of them did not answer the question at all, which I consider a case of non-comprehension.

The three others came up with the following answers:

- "Keine Ahnung"
- "Habs nicht verstanden."
- "Ein Schwein."

After the second round these students' understanding of the text was much better:

- "Im ersten Kapitel geht es um Mr. Hogget der in die Stadt fährt und dort schätzt wie viel das laute Schwein wiegt. Im zweiten Kapitel geht es um Hunde."
- „Mr Hogget gewinnt in der Stadt ein Schwein und seine Hunde halten das Schwein für dumm.“
- "Ein Schwein das dauern schreit und einen Mann der schätzt wie schwer es ist. Aber was ist mit den Hunden?"
- „Ein fettes Schwein und blöde Hunde“

In all four cases the comprehension improved. Two of the students reached fair comprehension in the second round and one was even on the edge of good comprehension. Only one student could not go beyond poor comprehension.

A similar development can be observed with one student whose reading rate remained stable, with 330 wpm in the first round and 327 wpm in the second round. In the first round he did not understand the text. He was very confused and the story did not make sense for him. We later found out that his major

problem was that he had mixed up the pages and read the text in the wrong order. This non-understanding did not keep him from reading on at a relatively high speed. He read without monitoring his comprehension. In the second round he kept his reading speed from the first round but this time he knew the order in which the text was supposed to be read and this time he understood what it was about.

The general comprehension results of the ER group after the first round were the following

Very good comprehension	1
Good comprehension	4
Fair comprehension	7
Poor comprehension	2
No comprehension	4

**Table 8: comprehension 1 ER**

In the second round the students did better in the comprehension question:

Very good comprehension	4
Good comprehension	8
Fair comprehension	5
Poor comprehension	1
No comprehension	0

**Table 9: comprehension 2 ER**

	First round	Second round
Very good comprehension	1	4
Good comprehension	5	9
Fair comprehension	7	5
Poor comprehension	2	1
No comprehension	4	0

**Table 10: comprehension comparison 1 and 2 ER**

Comparing the results of the two rounds it becomes obvious that most students could improve their comprehension. Three students remained stable, eight students improved their comprehension of one level and six students could even improve of two levels.

The results of the reading rate and comprehension test show that although reading speed did not improve in all cases, the general reading fluency did, as comprehension joined a good to very good reading rate. In some cases comprehension problems in the first round could be solved in the second, by means of slowing down. Reading fluency also has to do with finding one's own reading rate and therefore I would say that practically all students in the Extensive Reading group could improve their reading fluency in one way or another.

#### 10.1.3. Other effects of the ERP

I also observed this general increase in my students' reading fluency in a lesson where students had to deal with a relatively difficult article about superstitions. This lesson was part of a unit about mascots and the article just fitted perfectly not only into the topic, but also into the ERP.

I wanted to see how the students deal with a difficult text, if they are able to extract the most important information, without getting stuck whenever a new or unknown vocabulary or structure appears. In order to prevent a too detailed analysis of the text I limited their working time to twenty minutes. In four groups they had to work out four different paragraphs and summarize them in their own words for the rest of the class.

To my opinion the summaries they produced in this short time and that can be found in the appendix contain the most important information and the fact that they it in their own words and made it understandable for others shows that they really understood what the text was about. The summary can be found in the appendix (13.4.: 89).

I think the success of this task is at least partly an effect of the ERP. The students from the ER group are used to not understanding every single word and they have learned to deal with these “black holes” unknown words or structures might represent. But they have also learned that one does not have to understand every single word in order to get the main ideas of a text.

## 10.2. The non-Extensive Reading Group

In the non-extensive reading group there were 19 students, 9 boys and 10 girls, just like in the extensive reading group. Again I want to keep the results anonymous, and in four cases no clear evaluation of the reading rate test was possible. Two students unfortunately missed the second round and the two other students refused to participate. Therefore only 15 out of the 19 students, that is 7 boys and 8 girls, can be taken into consideration in the analysis process.

### 10.2.1. Reading rate and comprehension

Gender	Words per minute, first round	Gender	Words per minute, first round
B	341	G	189
B	341	G	330
B	220	G	144
B	168	G	168
B	203	G	257
B	249	G	124
B	203	G	107
		G	249

**Table 11: wpm 1 non-ER 1**

In the first round that is at the beginning of the term the average of words read per minute was 219.5.

Gender	Words per minute, second round	Gender	Words per minute, second round
B	225	G	139.5
B	217.5	G	297
B	208	G	150
B	208.5	G	208.5
B	132.5	G	173
B	152.5	G	132.5
B	189.5	G	117.5
		G	242

**Table 12: wpm 2 non-ER**

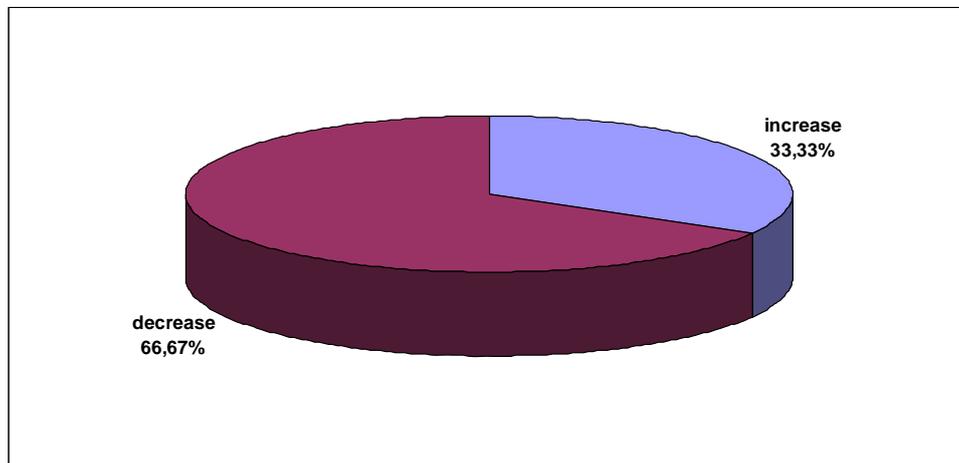
In the second round, at the end of the term, the average of words read per minute was 186.2 words per minute.

Gender	Words per minute, first round	Words per minute, second round
B	341	225
B	341	217.5
B	220	208
B	168	208.5
B	203	132.5
B	249	152.5
B	203	189.5
G	189	139.5
G	330	297
G	144	150
G	168	208.5

G	257	173
G	124	132.5
G	107	117.5
G	249	242

**Table 13: comparison wpm 1 and 2 non-ER**

Comparing the results of the first and the second round it can be stated, that only 5 out of the 15 students, that is 33.33% could at least slightly increase their reading rate and the remaining 10, that is 66.66% decreased in their reading rate.

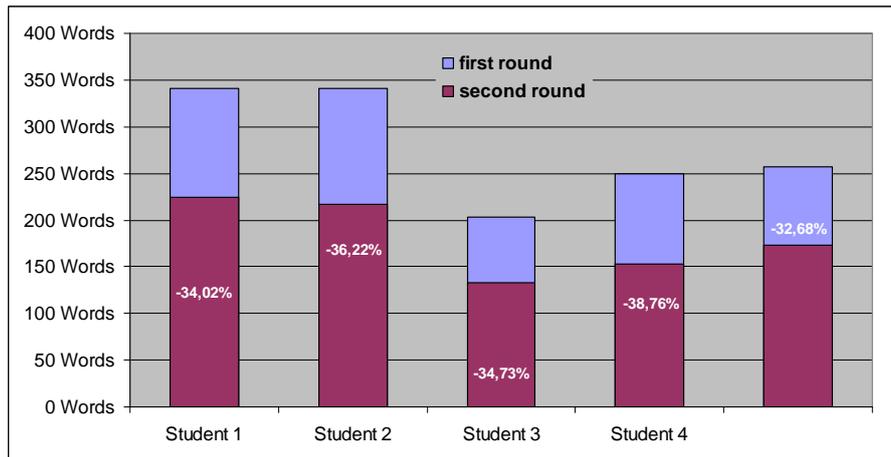


**Figure 6: development wpm non-ER**

In 5 cases the drop was quite drastic.

Gender	Words per minute, first round	Words per minute, second round
B	341	225
B	341	217.5
B	203	132.5
B	249	152.5
G	257	173

**Table 14: special cases non-ER**



**Figure 7: special cases non-ER**

The reading rate of these five students decreased of 34%, 36%, 35%, 39% and 33% respectively and again this huge gap between the first and the second round can be explained by means of comprehension. Those five students did not hand in any summary after the first round; they just told me that they did not understand what the text was all about.

In the case of the non-ER group I also classified the answers to the comprehension questions in the five categories very good, good, fair, poor and no comprehension. These are the comprehension results after the first round:

In the case of the non-ER group the comprehension of the students in the first round was as follows:

Very good comprehension	2
Good comprehension	3
Fair comprehension	4
Poor comprehension	1
No comprehension	5

**Table 15: comprehension 1 non-ER**

In the second round the results were the following:

Very good comprehension	2
Good comprehension	4

Fair comprehension	3
Poor comprehension	15
No comprehension	1

**Table 16: comprehension 2 non-ER**

	First round	Second round
Very good comprehension	2	2
Good comprehension	3	4
Fair comprehension	4	3
Poor comprehension	1	5
No comprehension	5	1

**Table 17: comprehension comparison 1 and 2 non-ER**

Comparing the results of the two rounds it becomes obvious that in the non-ER group ten students remained stable in their comprehension and only 5 could improve their comprehension of one level.

#### 10.2.2. Other differences to the ER group

The result of this reading test, that is the comprehension problems, can also be found in the analysis of the superstitions task. I also used the text in this group to see whether there would also be differences on this level, and there were. The Extensive Reading Group had, as I have already mentioned, hardly any problems getting the main information from the text. The non-Extensive Reading Group on the other hand could hardly handle this task. They were completely lost, could not get any useful information from the text and they got stuck with every single unknown bit of language. I had to stop this task in this class and switch to something easier in order to prevent general disappointment.

I wanted to show that ER can not only make students read faster, but that they also learn how to deal with a bit more challenging texts, that they can learn to

get the main ideas of a text without understanding every detail. And comparing the results of the ER group and the non-ER group it becomes obvious that although reading fluency increased in both groups it was more obvious in the ER group, not only in terms of words read per minute, but also as far as general reading comprehension is concerned. This proves my hypothesis that ER can have a positive effect on second language reading performance already at an early stage of second language acquisition right and the success of my project incited me to not only continue it in the ER group but also to extend it to the non-ER group in the second term.

But I also want to mention that to my opinion some of the comprehension problems were due to the time constraint students had in the reading rate test. They somehow considered this task a kind of competition and wanted to read as many words as possible, without really thinking about comprehension. Furthermore one or two minutes of reading leave hardly any time for comprehension monitoring and self-regulation. I think that in a normal reading environment there would not have been so many problems because students would have adapted their reading speed automatically.

Although the field study developed at its best there remain some points that might need to be explicitly pointed out, modified or thought through in detail and these points will be discussed in a critical reflection in the conclusion.

## 11. Conclusion

When I introduced ER in my class the groans that went through the classroom were enormous: shock, anger and mere incredulity were displayed on most of my students' faces.

“Wie soll ich 720 Seiten auf Englisch lesen? Ich les ja nie!“, „Wie soll das gehen?“ and „Das schaff ich nie.“ were common reactions. As the questionnaire on their reading habits mentioned in chapter seven pointed out, most of the students did not use to read. It was nothing they did for pleasure, in their free time, just because they wanted to. But somehow they found a way to cope with this new situation and after some time their reactions and opinions started changing. Suddenly interest was raised in some of them, they started talking about interesting books they had just read, recommended books to each other and suddenly reading had become more than just a duty, something they had to do in order to get a good mark: it had become fun and they grew real proud of themselves.

“Ich hätte nie gedacht, dass ich echt englische Bücher verstehen kann.“ or „Cool, das Buch ist ur schwer, aber ich hab trotzdem verstanden worum es geht.“ now were commonplace reactions.

The same development could be observed with the parents. “Ich frage mich nur ob die Kinder das schaffen.“, „Ist das nicht ein bisschen sehr viel Aufwand für die Kinder?“ and „Wie sollen die Kinder das in ihrem Stundenplan denn auch noch unterbekommen?“ were the most common fears mentioned by parents who came to see me. Furthermore they were aware of the lack of interest their children had in reading. Some of them really thought it impossible to make their children read. When parents came to see me in my office hour I tried to weaken some of their fears by telling them that they did not get homework on Tuesdays in order to give them time for reading, and also by explaining to them the benefits such an ERP could have on the general language abilities of their children. Some remained sceptical but in the course of the semester many parents came to see me and told me how amazing it was that their sons and

daughters, who had not touched a book for ages, now were eager to read and that suddenly an English book had become an appropriate Christmas present.

My ERP also raised interest in the staff room, especially because of the book basket I kept carrying around. Many colleagues, especially other English language teachers, came to see me and wanted to know more about my project. And many of them introduced ER in their classrooms as well. One colleague set up a reading box with graded readers for her first graders, another one started a library project and set up a review catalogue. But also some German teachers came to see me. Most of them had already tried some kind of ER in their classes and just wanted to know if the effect was the same in English and in German. Unfortunately we could not draw a real conclusion because the reactions differed greatly.

All these reactions are on a rather positive tone and all in all I have to say that the project was really successful and went about without any major complications. There were however some minor problems I had to deal with in the course of the program and especially in the conversations with my colleagues I got some ideas I might include in following ERPs.

The main problem I had to face was a mere organizational problem concerning the borrowing system. On the one hand we had some problems with the library as most of the English books had an old bar code that could not be read by the borrowing-system. So students had to wait for the responsible teachers, who run the library, to come and help them. We could not change anything about this situation immediately, but we set up a plan to improve this situation in the future. As our school is about to expand, the library will have to be emptied and re-organized in the course of the next year and we decided to start a project among English teachers to renew the bar codes during this phase so that in the new library there will not be any technical barriers anymore.

But also concerning my personal borrowing system I have to admit that it did not always work out the way I had planned it. It was quite easy to keep track of the individual books, but somehow I lost track of the number of books every single student had borrowed. At one moment the basket was nearly empty and

this meant that every student must have had an average of three books at home. With one class this was no problem and I could easily gain an overview again, but I think that if such a program is run with more than one class some other way of keeping track of the books must be found. And maybe such a book basket just is not appropriate for more than one class.

Another problem was to keep up the students' motivation. At some point every single student had a motivation low and this was not restricted to the ERP. These lows concerned all areas of their school life and I realized that an ERP needs to respect such lows and give them some limited but still valuable room. Therefore we agreed that everyone had the right one such low that could last up to one month and in which they just did not read at all, but after that time they had to start working again. The interesting point about this is that nobody actually needed the whole month. Most of them started reading again after one or two weeks.

Concerning the additional work and expense I have to say that I do not really think that it is that much of an addition to regular classes, neither for me nor for the students. It does not take too much time because in essence it is something the students do at home, and leaving one homework a week does not really harm my realisation of the curriculum. Furthermore I think that going to the library is something that definitely should be part of any language course because students need to know where to find material. Far from taking anything away and restricting my course I would say that ER is a valuable addition to the normal course that offers students a new way of discovering language.

In schools that do not have well equipped libraries additional work and expense might be a real problem. In this case the financial aspect might be the biggest obstacle, and in this case sponsors and funding might be required.

However, the efforts that such a program might require are certainly payed off by the benefits it has on all levels of the students' language progress. And that is what I actually wanted to show with my field study.

My hypothesis was that ER has a positive effect on reading fluency and the results of the field study certainly prove this hypothesis right. Furthermore the study also showed the effect ER can have on students' attitude toward reading. Reading can be fun and raise students' self confidence.

In the case of my field study my hypothesis was proved right and I am convinced that ER would be valuable in other settings and situations as well. In order to keep the benefits and the fun my students have with this reading project I am certainly going to continue including ER in my English classes.

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## 13. Appendix

### 13.1. Top Ten List of borrowed books

1. Axel Scheffler: Tiddler, the story-telling fish
2. Axel Scheffler: Room on the broom
3. Walt Disney: Donald Duck Adventures: Number 3
4. Axel Scheffler: A squish and a squeeze
5. Walt Disney: Mickey Mouse Adventures: Volume 1
6. Jim Davis: Garfield – On the right track
7. Roald Dahl: Matilda
8. Michael Bond: Paddington and the marmalade maze
9. Roald Dahl: Fantastic Mr. Fox
10. Kaye Umansky und Anna Currey: Sophie and Abigail

This list makes it obvious that picture books and comics were very popular among the students. Roald Dahl and Michael Bond were read a lot as well, but I would argue that this was due to the fact that they all knew these “more difficult” stories already, either because they had read them already in German, or because they associated a film with the book. This is also true for the comics. I personally would say that comics are rather difficult to understand, but still students picked them up because they already knew the humour of Disney and Davis.

## 13.2. Reading rate test

### Chapter 1 Fourteen Kilos of Pig

'What's that noise?' Mrs Hogget asked. She looked out of her kitchen window. 'Listen, can you hear it? What's happening?'

Farmer Hogget listened. Then he looked at his watch and said, 'It's the party down in the village. Starts at two o'clock.'

'I know that,' his wife said. 'But what's that other noise?'

'It's a pig,' said Farmer Hogget.

'A pig!' Mrs Hogget listened again. 'Yes, it's a pig! But who's got pigs in our village? Everybody's got sheep round here, not pigs. Well, well... take this food for the party with you, and have a good time.'

Farmer Hogget drove to the village in his big truck. He went to look for the noisy pig. He found it in a small sheep-pen near the church.

'Morning, Farmer Hogget,' the man with the pig said. 'Do you want this pig? Can you say how heavy he is? Come on! Buy a ticket... it's only ten pence.'

'I'm a sheep farmer... I don't have pigs,' said Farmer Hogget. Then he looked at the little fat pig in the corner of the sheep-pen. Carefully, Farmer Hogget took the little pig in his arms. The pig was very quiet. It made no more noise.

'Well, well, he likes you! Come on, how heavy is he?'

'Fourteen kilos, I think,' he said.

The man wrote '14' in a book next to Farmer Hogget's name and telephone number. Farmer Hogget paid his ten pence and got his ticket. Then he drove home.

1

### Chapter 2 A New Mum for Babe

Fly was Farmer Hogget's black and white sheepdog.\* She was the mother of four young dogs. They were going to be sheepdogs, too. Fly looked at them and was happy.

'They're good, clever dogs. Soon they must leave me, but they're learning their lessons well,' she thought.

'Good boys,' Fly said. 'Stop now. Here's the boss.'

Farmer Hogget drove his truck into the yard. He took a box out of the back and carried it across the yard into the stable.

'What's in the box, Mum?' one of the young dogs asked.

'A pig,' Fly said.

'What's the boss going to do with a pig?' another dog asked.

'Eat it. People eat stupid animals,' Fly said. 'They don't eat clever animals. Dogs are clever animals.'

'So pigs are stupid, right, Mum?' the smallest dog asked.

Fly stopped and thought for a minute. Were pigs stupid? She didn't know a pig, but she wanted her children to think that she was clever and knew everything.

'Yes, they're stupid. Now, come on, let's look in the stable.'

In one corner of the stable there was a big box for Fly and her family. Now there was another box next to it. The young dogs looked into the box and saw the little pig.

The pig put his head up and looked at the dogs. It wasn't afraid, but it was very unhappy. Fly looked at the pig.

\* *sheepdog*: a farmer's dog. A sheepdog works with sheep. It moves them round the field. A sheepdog is a very clever animal.

3

'Well, he's only a very small pig,' she thought. 'Maybe he's not stupid. Perhaps I made a mistake.'

Quietly, Fly said, 'Hello. Who are you?'

'I'm a Large White pig.'

The four young dogs started to laugh. 'You're a Large White pig! How big's a small white pig, then?'

'Be quiet!' their mother said. 'What's your name, little pig?'

The little pig was very sad. 'I don't know. My mother called all my brothers and sisters the same name. She called us all "Babe".'

The young dogs started to laugh again. 'Stop that noise! Go outside and play in the yard, I want to talk to this pig,' Fly said.

The dogs ran into the yard. Fly jumped into the big box next to the pig. 'Babe's a lovely name,' Fly said. 'Can I call you Babe?'

The pig started to cry. 'I want my mum,' he said very quietly.

Fly looked at the pig. 'Listen, Babe. All animals learn to leave their mothers. My young dogs are going to leave me soon. They're going to work in another village. I'm going to be sad. But you can live here with me. The boss isn't bad, we can have a good time here together.'

Babe looked at the big black and white sheepdog. 'She has four children. She's a good mother,' he thought. 'And I liked that boss man...' Suddenly Babe wasn't sad. 'Thank you, Fly,' he said. 'Perhaps I can be happy here with you.'

Later that evening, Farmer Hogget and his wife came to the stables to look at the pig. Babe was in the big box next to Fly and the young dogs.

'Well, what a picture,' said Mrs Hogget. 'The pig and Fly are sleeping together. That little pig has a new mother! He doesn't know he's soon going to be on my dinner table.'

4

Farmer Hogget didn't look at his wife. He said nothing. Mrs Hogget left the stable and went back to her kitchen. The farmer opened the door of Fly's box and called his dog's name. Fly came and sat next to him - and the pig came too.

'Sit,' Farmer Hogget said.

Fly sat. Babe sat. Farmer Hogget looked at the two animals.

'Now what's happening here?' he asked.

### Chapter 3 Learning About the Farm

Fly now had a family of five, not four. Fly showed Babe everything on the farm and he met all the animals in the yard. He did not see the sheep. They were all in the north field far away from the yard.

Then Fly remembered something. 'Babe,' she said. 'You mustn't go into Mrs Hogget's kitchen. I can go in, but you must wait outside.'

'Why can't a pig go into the kitchen?' Babe asked.

One of the young dogs said very quietly, 'You wait, little pig. One day Mrs Hogget is going to take you into the kitchen!'

'Pigs don't go there, that's all,' said Fly. But she thought, 'One day, perhaps, why not? Babe is as clever as my dogs!'

Every night Babe slept in the box with Fly and her family.

'You're a good... boy,' Fly said. She smiled. 'I nearly said a good dog!'

Next morning Fly said, 'Babe, I'm going with Farmer Hogget. We're working with the sheep. You stay here with the boys.'

Fly and Farmer Hogget went to the north field.

'What's sheep?' Babe asked the young dogs.

5

### 13.3. Article on superstitions

**Do you get nervous when a black cat walks in front of you?**

**Do you avoid walking under ladders?**

**If you broke a mirror would you expect to get 7 years bad luck?**

**If the answer is, 'yes' to any of these questions then you are clearly a very superstitious person.**

Superstitions can be defined as, "irrational beliefs, especially with regard to the unknown" (Collins English Dictionary)

They cause us to act in strange ways, believe in odd things and leave us unable to explain the reasons why.

Many superstitions may seem silly, even stupid to us today, but they continue to influence our behaviour and many people would argue that there are in fact some very good reasons for avoiding black cats and walking around ladders.

#### **Common Superstitions Explained**

In most cases the reasons behind common superstitions can be traced back to medieval or even ancient times. They are quite often even more peculiar than the beliefs they attempt to explain.

Black cats are the source of literally hundreds of unlucky superstitions. It's a sign of bad luck if they walk in front of you. It's unlucky to step on their tails. They even bring bad luck into a house if they sneeze inside!

This unfortunate connection with misfortune dates back to the Middle Ages when they became associated with witches and were thought to harbour evil spirits.

There are very practical reasons for thinking twice before walking under a ladder, but a more mysterious explanation can be traced back to ancient Egypt. The early Egyptians believed that the shape of the Pyramids had a special power. It was considered very bad luck to break the 'power' of this shape and that's exactly what walking under a ladder would do!

In Roman times people had the habit of looking at their reflections in pools of water. Some believed that these reflections were in fact 'glimpses of the soul'. Any disruption to the water, such as a stone being thrown into the pool, would bring bad luck to the person looking in. This superstition lives on with the fear of bad luck from breaking a mirror.

#### **Superstitions Groups**

Certain groups of people involved with dangerous or unpredictable activities tend to be very superstitious indeed.

#### **Actors**

There are lots of Do's and Don'ts to be followed backstage in the theatre.

One of the biggest Don'ts concerns the name of Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's most famous plays. If anyone says the name backstage then the cast will have all sorts of unlucky problems and the show will certainly fail. Also, actors never wish each other, 'good luck' before a performance as it might have the opposite effect. It's safer to tell an actor heading for the stage to, 'break a leg'!

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### **Sailors**

Long, dangerous journeys on wild and unpredictable oceans have made sailors very aware of lucky and unlucky signs. Bad luck is caused by stepping on board a ship with your left foot, starting a cruise on Friday and throwing stones into the sea. Good luck will follow a ship if there are dolphins swimming nearby or there is a naked woman on board! Think about the figureheads on old sailing boats with a naked woman at the front, calming the seas.

### **Athletes**

The great Michael Jordan wore his old college shorts underneath his Chicago Bulls uniform for an extra bit of good fortune on the court and Tiger Woods favours wearing the colour red on Sundays for similarly superstitious reasons. Amateur golfers can have a successful day on the course if they start their round with odd numbered clubs and don't use balls with numbers higher than 4! It's also lucky to set out on a rainy day, but definitely not okay to borrow your partners umbrella.

Football players don't let the side down and have numerous eccentricities of their own. West Hams' ex-player Paolo Di Canio always puts his shinpads on his left leg first. Steven Gerrard and the Liverpool players like to touch the, 'This is Anfield' sign in the tunnel on their way to the pitch, but nothing tops Chelsea's ex-player Eidur Gudjohnsen, who goes to the loo just after the warm up, kisses his shirt twice (for two goals) and says a prayer thanking God for his health and the health of his teammates as he runs onto the field!

### **Global Superstitions**

Finally, here are a few curious beliefs from around the world.

If you don't cover your bald head it will start raining - Afghanistan

If you shave your head on a Saturday, you will be in perpetual debt - Africa

You'll 'cut off' fortune if you use scissors on new years day - China

You shouldn't wash your hair the day before an exam - Russia

If you go to the bathroom in the night with no clothes on, insects will fall on you – Japan

*What do you think of this article? Do you have any strange superstitions? Are there any strange superstitions from your country?*

## 13.4. Summary of the article about Superstitions

### **Summary: Superstitions**

**2AB**

Most superstitions are very old, some come from the Middle Ages. Black cats often bring bad luck. It's unlucky to step on their tails and they bring bad luck if they sneeze inside a house. People think that they bring bad luck because in the Middle Ages black cats were the pets of witches and people thought that they harboured evil spirits. It's unfortunate to walk under ladders because the early Egyptians believed that the shape of the pyramids had a special power. And to break this shape would bring bad luck. In Roman times people thought that there was a part of the soul in the reflections of people in the water. That's why they thought that it would bring bad luck to destroy this reflection by throwing a stone into it. That's also the reason why people think that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck.

#### **ACTORS**

Actors are very superstitious. There are a lot of rules to follow. One of the most important don'ts for actors concerns the name of Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's most famous characters. Nobody should say the name backstage because this will bring bad luck and the show will certainly fail. To wish an actor "Good luck" would have the same effect. It's safer to tell an actor heading for the stage to "break a leg".

#### **SAILORS**

Sailors are also very superstitious and believe that certain things bring bad luck, whereas other things bring good luck. Stepping on a ship with your left foot first brings bad luck. This is also true for starting a boat trip on a Friday or throwing stones into the sea. Dolphins swimming next to the ship as well as naked figure women on the other hand bring good luck.

#### **ATHLETES**

Athletes also have strange habits. Michael Jordan wore his college shorts under his Chicago Bulls uniform to have some extra luck. Tiger Woods preferred wearing red on Sundays for the same reasons. Amateur golfers think that the material and the weather can influence their luck. Football players are no exception: Paolo Di Canio always puts his shinpads on his left leg first, Seten Gerrard and his teammates touch a special sign in the tunnel on their way to the pitch and Eidur Gudjohnsen kisses his shirt twice for two goals and says a prayer before every match.

#### **GLOBAL SUPERSTITIONS**

- **Afghanistan:** if you are bald (without hair) and you don't cover your head it will start raining.
- **Africa:** if you shave your hair on a Saturday you are in big trouble.
- **China:** if you use scissors on New Year's day you cut off your luck.
- **Russia:** you shouldn't wash your hair on the day before a test.
- **Japan:** if you go to the bathroom at night, without any clothes on, insects will attack you.



# Curriculum Vitae



## **Elisabeth-Maria Renner**

Geb. am 06.07.1985 in Klosterneuburg

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### Ausbildung:

Jänner 2007:	1. Diplomzeugnis (siehe Beilage)
seit WS 2003:	Universität Wien: Englisch und Französisch auf Lehramt
2003:	Matura mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg BG/BRG Klosterneuburg
2002:	Matura am Lycée Douanier Rousseau, Laval
2001/2002	Lycée Douanier Rousseau, Laval
1995 - 2003	BG/BRG Klosterneuburg, Neusprachlicher Zweig mit Schulversuch Französisch ab der 3. Klasse
1991 - 1995	VS Anton Bruckner Gasse, Klosterneuburg

### Berufliches:

1997 - 2007	NAGY's Internet und Marketing: allgemeine Bürotätigkeiten, Übersetzungen
2007 - 2009	Karenz
seit Sept. 2009	BG/BRG Klosterneuburg

### Unterrichtserfahrungen:

SS 2005	PÄP Englisch, mit praktischen Einheiten im BG/BRG Klosterneuburg
WS 2005	Praktikum im Zuge der LV „Introduction to Language Teaching II – Mag. Dirnberger
WS 2006	Praktikum im Zuge der Didaktischen AG II – Mag. Pyka, FH Krems – Mag. Pyka
SS 2007	FAP Englisch, HTL Lebergasse, Mag. Holleis
WS 2007	Praktikum im Zuge der LV „Express yourself – productive skills in language teaching – Mag. Katzböck

WS 2007	Praktikum im Zuge der Didaktischen AG IV – Mag. Pyka, FH Krems – Mag. Pyka
SS 2008	Praktikum im Zuge einer Fachdidaktik LV – Mag. Mehlmauer-Larcher, BG/BRG Klosterneuburg – Mag. Kruczik
WS 2009	FAP Französisch, BG/BRG Tulln, Mag. Straka

Auslandsaufenthalte:

2000	Rom: Pfadfinderreise
2000	Schottland, London: Pfadfinderreise mit Aufenthalt in Gastfamilien
2001	Saint Malo, Paris: Schulreise mit Aufenthalt in Gastfamilie
2001/2002:	Laval, Frankreich: Austauschjahr im Rahmen von AFS
2004:	Neapel: Pfadfinderreise
2005:	Kanada
2009:	London: Studienreise

Sonstige Aktivitäten:

Seit 2005	Pfadfinderführung Stufe CaEx (13 – 16 Jahre) Heimstunden, Wochenendaktivitäten, Lager
Seit 2006	Betreuung meiner behinderten Stieftochter Jolanda