

Beniko Mason Interview
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Note: This interview is considerably longer than the others because Beniko and I got into an extended exchange of ideas with lots of examples and clarification. In editing the interview, I felt that drastic shortening would have left out too many insights into Beniko's thinking and approach, so I decided to err on the side of completeness. I hope you'll find the depth helpful.

Summary:

I asked each interviewee to start with a brief summary/overview of an ER program they are involved with.

One ER program I'm involved with is for pre-school education majors at IBU Junior College. The class meets once a week for 90 minutes. This is their only required English course. Almost all activities are comprehension based. Students read graded readers at home and listen to fairy/folk tales in class told by me. The goal is to gain 800 to 1000 words in two semesters from listening and reading, and progress from 200 word-level Penguin readers to 1100–1600 word-level Macmillan graded readers in two semesters. They are required to read 70 to 100 pages per week—all together about 1000 pages per semester. They listen to 20 to 25 different stories in class for two semesters for listening and vocabulary development. They read during the summer too. I suggest to them to listen to an additional story per week at my webpage on the IBU campus Internet where my colleagues and I do our storytelling on video.

After receiving the summary from each interviewee, we progressed into the follow-up interview.

Were you assigned to teach a “reading” and/or “listening” class, or did you decide to make your “general” English class into a reading & listening class?

IBU told me to teach a required course called “Communication.” They wanted me to teach conversation. I suggested to them that students should first learn to listen and read instead of speak and write because they would not be able to speak and write if they could not listen and read. I further stated that if this was the only English course that these students were going to take, the time had to be spent well. I stressed that input, not output, was the cause of language acquisition, and finally, that output was the result of acquisition.

I explained to them that students needed to acquire language and needed to learn how to learn (pick up effective methods for independent acquisition). I continued by saying that it was a waste of time to teach lower-level students phrases and expressions and have them memorize conversations, and that in such a class teachers go through the motions of teaching and students through the motions of learning. I made clear to them that it would not cause anything but indifference in English; that it was not education; that it was a waste of not only time, but also energy, money, and precious resources; that when students read, they would be able to write well; and that when they listened to English that they understood, they would start speaking.

The school (the administrators) eventually said O.K.

So, my students listen to stories in class and read books at home for a course called “Communication”. IBU changed the course title to “English 1” and English 2” last year (2007).

In class, students only listen to stories told by you? Are there any associated activities? Do they do any worksheets, vocabulary work, or interaction of any kind?

Students all receive a list of words that are used in the story that I tell in the class. They focus on these words while listening, and then we check their understanding on the meaning of the words in Japanese. Students receive a list of the words with a Japanese definition on a separate sheet of

paper. Students submit this sheet with their score, which gives me an idea of how much (story content and the words) they understood and it also serves as a record of attendance. Then, students read the story they've just listened to, and if we have additional time in class they do their free reading. They do not write or speak in English in class, but they do pay attention to words. There is some intentional learning here, but the words are used in the story. I give a review test the following week and also another vocabulary test (the final vocabulary test) at the end of the semester not only to check whether the words have been learned but also to give a chance to review the words in order to strengthen the memory.

Let me explain what I think about intentional learning and subconscious acquisition. You may say that what I do is contradictory to what the Input Hypothesis suggests. The Input Theory says that acquisition is subconscious, but I use conscious learning.

However, this conscious learning is not the same as the conscious learning in the traditional skill-building approach. Students have a list of words that they pay attention to during the class, and go home and review the words on the list to prepare for test the following week. What's important is when they look at the words at home, they remember the meaning of the words with the images that they attached to the words while they listened to the story in class. They only listened to a story. It was not a movie. They created images in their head while they listen to the story. The images of the words in one person's head are different from the images of the same words in another student's head. The activity is meaning-based acquisition and different from skill-based learning. The activity with a list may look the same externally, but internally it is different.

Let me further explain about the term free voluntary reading. You may also say that what students do in our reading class is not really free voluntary reading, but forced reading. I would refute that argument by saying that it is not forced reading, but guided reading. Good readers were all guided to reading, first by parents who read bed-time stories, and then kindergarten teachers who told stories, and then reading teachers who introduced them to easy interesting books in elementary school. No one is a free voluntary reader until they are guided to be one. When the term free voluntary reading is used for our EFL reading class, our students are not yet at the level of being able to read in English freely and voluntarily, but the aim of the reading class is to guide them to that autonomous reader level. There are a lot of people who do not read voluntarily in their native language. Many Japanese college students do not read much in Japanese, either. Reading is often a new task for them to learn. We are doing this in a foreign language, but when we succeed, non-readers sometimes become readers in both their native language and a foreign language. It is very important for them to acquire the skill of FVR to live a full life. Obviously, if children do not acquire reading competence, they will not be able to make it in this fast paced modern society. We cannot skip this level (easy graded reading) of literacy development in our language classrooms.

Students do ER at home. Are there any in-class activities associated with this? Any other homework?

Each week they fill in and submit a notebook that comes with the book I published in 2006, called *Free Voluntary Reading and Fairy/Folk Tale Listening*. In class, students do not talk about books they read. I do not formally ask them comprehension questions. As I read their notebooks and feel like asking something, I do. When students are falling behind or racing ahead of schedule (in amount or level of reading) or I see some other issue (e.g., cheating, copying, not understanding) to be addressed, I try to have a short chat individually—finding out about their situation and giving guidance as needed. There is no other homework besides reading and filling in their notebook.

ER is probably unfamiliar to many students entering your class. Any key points about how you "sell" ER to students? Orientation? Explanation of purpose/goals? Getting them into the books, etc.?

Yes, an orientation is absolutely necessary. In fact, each student in my course gets a Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) textbook, which I mentioned earlier. This book is an improved version of the pamphlet that I wrote a long time ago which is on the Extensive Reading website <<http://www.extensivereading.net/er/start.html>>. This book contains an explanation of the Comprehension (Input) Theory with its five supporting hypotheses, what the reading method is like, what students will be asked to do for the course, the evidence of the effects and efficiency of the reading and story-listening methods from research, and lastly the testimonials from former students. I want them to know before they start my course that the method has scientific evidence, and that it is not just my personal preference. I included all my research findings in there—I think it is about 16 studies. I talk about my studies as I think that the students are probably not interested in studies done in Singapore or England. The studies have been done here in Osaka using students who are just like them.

I ask my students to read the above textbook and write a reflection of the book and the course. Every year they tell me that they agree with the theory, and they are willing to cooperate with my guidance. They say they want to be like the former students who succeeded in the reading class. Most of them tell me that they failed in their past attempts to become good at English, and that therefore they would like to try this time with FVR and story-listening. I find this orientation very necessary for a rewarding ER course. When they do not understand its significance, accept it, and decide to cooperate with the teacher, they will soon complain and not read.

For example, I did a study with Masuko Ikeda at Tezukayama University in Osaka about 10 years ago. She was having trouble with her students. Her students complained and did not read much. Her ER group did better than her IR group but did not gain as much as my ER group at IBU. She wondered why it was so as the level of the students seemed to be similar, and what we concluded was that her students were not happy with what she was asking them to do. Her students did not understand the theory behind the method, why they were asked to read easy books and were not doing grammar exercises or speaking activities. They needed to understand the theory - they needed to understand the fundamental differences between the two approaches, skill-based and comprehension-based, why they needed to read a lot, what the outcome of their efforts would be if they cooperated, and how other students had benefited from the method.

I shouldn't paint too rosy a picture here. Although at the beginning students say they understand, and I think the information goes a long way toward making them willing to try, students also tell me later that they did not really believe me until they actually saw their improvements with the method. In the first semester they say they will try to cooperate, but many are still skeptical. However, at the end of the semester they have a chance to find out how much they improved by taking the post-test which is very similar to the pre-test. At the post-test they realize that they can read faster, write more, and know a lot more words. They realize that English words flow out while writing a summary in English while they could not squeeze much English out of their head when they took the pre-test. They also notice that they can read books one or two levels higher at the end of the first semester with faster speed. Then they know that this method is working.

Even then it is not easy. They read in the first semester, as they are excited about the new method and reading is still easy for them. However, when the second semester starts after a long summer vacation, they forget the real reason why they are reading and reading becomes a burden. They have many other concerns besides reading in English. The university festival is in the middle of the semester in November, and they go preschool training for two weeks where some may have some negative experiences. Furthermore, they are now used to their new college life, they have more social activities, and they spend more time working part-time. Finally, some students may have family troubles. So, the amount of reading usually drops in the second semester. Nevertheless, there are some students who truly understand the significance of the approach and are delighted with their

progress, so they read during the summer and keep reading in the second semester. Still it is a struggle. It is an on-going effort to encourage them to read and help them understand why.

Fortunately, we don't depend completely on belief in theory. I also tell them that if they do not read, they will do badly on the test. If they are interested in getting a better grade, they had better read as much as they can. I tell them that the Cloze test will be from an unfamiliar text at the 6th grade reading level. In order not to fail this required course, they need to read at least 70 pages per week. In other words, I threaten them.

This may sound quite harsh, but I am really quite gentle (I hope!). I tell the students that they can read at a level they can easily understand, and that they do not need to suffer with heavy, difficult texts, but that they do need to spend time reading everyday (at least 30 minutes a day). They can start at the 200 word level, but they need to move up to 600 word level, 1100 word level and at least 1600 word level (intermediate level) to make any significant change in reading competence and the Cloze test or standardized tests.

Every week I check their work and tell them that they need to read at least 10 books per week (reading 200 word level books) or 5 books (reading 600-word level books). Often they don't. I keep telling them that if they can reach the intermediate level by the end of the second semester, they'll be able to progress to the advanced level the next year. Then they'll be able to read whatever they want—Sydney Sheldon, etc. I tell them if they don't want to take on a challenge and improve their skills, what is the purpose for them to be in school?

In summary these factors all contribute to student success with ER/FVR:

- Introducing the theory and research results.
- Explaining that this is the only route to success in this course and the most important part of preparation for other English tests (TOEIC, TOEFL).
- Ongoing encouragement, monitoring progress and individual guidance.
- And the final key—at the end of the first term, students seeing for themselves their improvement in reading comprehension, reading speed, writing fluency, and grammatical accuracy. This is what really does the trick and convinces many of them to give a strong effort in the second term.

A note on nomenclature—I do not call this ER anymore, as it is confusing and misleading. ER co-exists with IR (Intensive Reading). ER existed in the traditional skill-building approach. ER is only expected to develop fluency, but the FVR proposed in the Comprehension Theory develops both fluency and accuracy. I was doing ER, too, for a long time, but recently I too declared independence from the traditional approach when Steve Krashen presented at JALT 2004 in Nara. FVR develops both fluency and accuracy, but ER cannot.

What do you see as the key differences between ER and FVR?

There are two fundamentally different views of extensive reading. I present here strong versions of each view. One is based on the skill-building hypothesis, the hypothesis that we learn language and develop literacy by first consciously learning rules and vocabulary items, and then practicing them in order to build Automaticity or easy retrieval. There are two forms of practice: output and input. Extensive reading, according to the skill-building hypothesis, is practice using input. The other view is based on the comprehension hypothesis, the hypothesis that we acquire language and develop literacy by understanding messages. According to the comprehension hypothesis, reading is the source of our knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, as well as other aspects of language.

The two views differ in important ways.

1. According to the skill-building view, the cause of our competence is direct instruction. Reading only helps make our performance smoother. According to the comprehension hypothesis, reading is the cause of both our competence and our fluency.
2. According to the skill-building view, reading for meaning is only possible after a certain amount of language has been consciously learned. According to the comprehension hypothesis, real reading can occur as soon as texts are comprehensible.
3. Skill-building assumes that our previously learned grammar and vocabulary determine the comprehensibility of a text. The Comprehension hypothesis says that we understand texts based on our previously acquired knowledge of language, what we have read so far, and our knowledge of the world.
4. Skill-building says: teach vocabulary and grammar, in order to make reading possible.
5. Comprehension says: facilitate and encourage reading in order to promote acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. Acquisition takes place when we understand text that contains aspects of language we have not acquired but are ready to acquire.
6. Skill-building thus thinks that the use of context to aid comprehension is cheating. The comprehension hypothesis says it is an important part of the acquisition process.
7. Skill-building limits texts to items that have already been taught. The comprehension hypothesis only insists that texts be comprehensible. If they are, they will contain aspects of language that readers are ready to acquire.
8. Skill-building claims that improvement is only possible with study. The comprehension hypothesis predicts that a reading habit will ensure continued progress.

Many ER proponents actually hold more to the skill building hypothesis, claiming that learners need to learn the rules and forms first and that ER mainly just develops fluency. They don't ascribe nearly as much power to reading. They say a balance of intensive reading (IR) and ER is necessary. They complain that much of the research on ER is flawed, but continue to tell people to implement ER in language programs. If they don't trust the research, how can they recommend it? They say that ER is good, but they say that Krashen is still wrong.

Many people propose ER PLUS other things - summary writing in English or Japanese, cloze exercises, vocabulary list learning, retelling of the story, summarizing of the stories read in the previous week in writing, discussing the content of the story, etc. I tried these activities. A colleague suggested that I do some of these things. I too thought that these other things might help ER be more efficient (I knew already then that it was significantly more effective than traditional skill-based approach). So, after trying them for several years, I found that these things were a waste of time.

There are two reasons why they are a waste of time. I found these reasons from my own research. One is that students don't like most of the skill-based activities, and two, forced (learned) knowledge is forgotten very quickly.

At this point, I need to be clear and qualify what I've just said. I am not saying that everything else is a waste of time and all students will ever have to do is reading or listening to stories in language classrooms. A teacher who wants to teach poetry can teach poetry in the third year, two years after students build a foundation of language competence. The problem we face right now in Japan is to help low level students to move up to intermediate or advanced levels hopefully within a couple of years. Most college students in Japan are at the low level. I have come to the conclusion that what these students need most right now is a lot of comprehensible input. Reading (and Listening) alone is necessary for efficient language acquisition and sufficient for them right now.

There are two versions of the Input Hypothesis - the strong version and the weak version. The strong version is that input alone is sufficient which is almost proven by just looking at many immigrants who become very proficient in speaking their second language without getting any formal instruction. The weak version also has enough evidence all over the world. The weak version is that you can introduce form-focused instruction as long as it is not the core of the program and as long as it helps the input become more comprehensible.

But the strong version of the skill building hypothesis (skill-building alone) does not work. Even the weak version, where skill-building is the center of the program and comprehension-based activity is added, it is not as effective when compared to the weak version of the comprehension-based program. There is no evidence showing that skill building is necessary and should be the core of the program. Krashen has argued this numerous times in his writings.

I think many instructors need a much fuller understanding of comprehension-based acquisition theory. Furthermore, they need to consider whether the language program they are pursuing is theoretically consistent and experimentally justified.

How do you make books available? Bring them to class each week? Available in the school library? Students come to your office? Students buy themselves and trade?

Books are in the classroom for display. For home reading, they check books out from the IBU library.

How were your books purchased? Library funds? Research funds?

Library funds and department funds.

You mentioned your ER/FVR research with groups of students. Do you regularly do some kind of pre- and post-testing with your students to gauge gains for evaluation and/or research?

Yes. Not only to evaluate my own teaching, I also conduct pilot studies every year on a current issue of concern. Twenty years ago, the question I had was whether ER was better than IR. I found that it was. Then the second question was the effects of ER on writing. The answer was that the effect was significantly positive. The third question was whether summary writing in English after reading caused more improvement in writing. The answer was vague. The design did not tell what was the cause of writing improvement, reading or writing summaries. So, I compared two groups who did summary writing in English and summary writing in Japanese. The answer was that those who did summary writing in Japanese did significantly better. What a shock! Then I switched to the effect of story-listening on vocabulary. Since my TOEFL study (2006), I have been interested in the efficiency of comprehension-based methods. This year the question was whether non-English major male students who are unmotivated and are absent 30% of the time in the course will have a statistically significant improvement on a writing test for fluency and grammatical accuracy when the instruction is meaning-based. They had two English classes per week. One was my class, and the other was a grammar based intensive reading class. The data analysis showed that their written fluency tripled and their accuracy went up from 35% to 54% in 11 weeks.

Another study that I did this year was that I compared two groups of students, English majors who had seven classes per week (126 hours in class) and Health Science majors who had only one class per week (18 hours in class). I gave them both a cloze test and a writing test. Please note that I never teach them writing nor talk about summary writing. I don't even ask for book summaries in Japanese. For each book they read, students jotted down just a few lines (at most) on what the book was about in their FVR notebook. There was no other writing practice, no grammar explanation, no

correction. The result was that the Health Science majors were much more efficient than the English majors, showing far more improvement for each hour of classtime (Mason, 2007).

I used to think that standardized tests were not suitable to check on the improvement made by reading. Although my students are required to read over 2000 pages for one year, the average used to be only 1500 pages (a little over 300,000 words). I was not sure whether such a small amount of reading done by my students would make any significant change on standardized tests.

Furthermore, students usually take all sorts of different English classes. It is hard to conclude what caused the gain even when the score goes up. Still I was fortunate to have several students who believed in the power of reading and read during the time when they were not taking classes or during their vacation. They gained significantly on the TOEFL from reading alone. The students read 100 to 150 pages per week and gained about 3.2 points on the TOEFL per week. That was about the same rate as that of international students at a TOEFL preparation course in the US (Mason, 2006, *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*).

There are many research reports all over the world about the effects of reading. There is no doubt that reading is good for improving language competence. However, I feel that some people have regrettably used these results to justify employing ER in skill-building contexts without appreciating the FVR/comprehension-based contexts in which the studies were done.

Returning to the issue of pre- and post-testing, another big reason to do it is that students like to see their improvement. For example, when they see that their fluency and accuracy in writing improves from only listening to stories and reading books, they are amazed. They start having more confidence in the method that they are using.

You've done a great deal of research with ER. What's driven you in that area?

I get joy out of finding an answer to my question from data analyses. Also, I think that it is my job. I believe that unless we try to find out whether Krashen's theory is correct, using studies, there will be no advancement in the SLA field.

Some teachers who teach SLA theory say that the Input Theory is old. I wonder what makes them say such a thing? Have they come up with a new theory? Can they offer something better than the Input Theory? I think that there are only two theories in the SLA field right now, the skill-based approach and comprehension-based approach. Other approaches are only derivations of the skill-based approach. No one has proven that the Input theory is wrong.

Some say that the Input Theory cannot be proven to be false therefore it is not a theory. I wonder why they give up on the theory so quickly without thorough investigation. Some say that what Krashen says is so obvious that it is not interesting. Then they go off and investigate the effects of trained self-feedback on revision (!) and forget about comprehensible input and do not use reading or listening in their course and have students do skill-building activities! If it is so obvious, why don't they use it?

A popular argument against the Input Theory is that Comprehensible Input (CI) works but it is inefficient (Long and Robinson, 1998). People agreed with this and other criticisms, did not investigate the issues, repeated them to others, and told others that the input theory is old. However, my studies show that CI is a lot more efficient than the skill-based approach. I have found that input alone is the most efficient. When I was reading Krashen's book that was published 20 years ago, I saw that he had already said this. This kind of finding uplifts my spirit.

Besides vocabulary knowledge, reading and listening gains what other results (types of language gains, student attitudes, awareness raising, etc.) are you hoping for from your ER program?

The central goal is that they will become Free Voluntary Readers after going through the program. As students continue with the FVR course, I observe many of them developing an interest in experiencing more activities in English—such as viewing films, reading, talking to foreigners, and going abroad. They seem to develop a better self-image, and become more confident.

What's your perception of how things are going / have gone? Any comments on student response, progress/benefits, attitudes, etc.?

This year (pre-school education majors) I've had almost 100% success with almost 100% of the students. Most of them improved and I felt good about the process and their accomplishments. This does not mean that 100% of the students reached the intermediate level. Some reached the intermediate level, most reached the elementary level, and some stayed at the beginning level, but most of them had a good impression of the course. My perception is that students' self-esteem about English study improved.

This doesn't mean it always ends well. It was easier 10 years ago, and it is getting more and more difficult these days. One small class of about seven or eight students several years ago completely refused to cooperate with me. They were four-year college English majors at IBU and taking other English classes. My methods were not well received by the students, and I did not get any cooperation from the other English teachers. Also, I have had students who performed poorly on the final exam because they did not read enough, but they blamed the reading method and believed that hard studying was necessary. I have heard that students go for IR because it is easier to earn credits in such a class.

Still, I know that when students understand the significance of the method and follow my guidance and read 70 to 100 pages per week for two semesters, there is amazing improvement not only in reading, but also in writing, vocabulary, and grammar.

Do you get a sense that some students really latch onto this as a key, ongoing strategy for learning/enjoyment? Do you observe students continuing to do ER beyond the end of your course?

I have taught at least several thousand students in my reading classes. I do not know how many of them are still reading in English. I still talk to one student who graduated in 1986 who is still reading. I know that several have married someone from other countries and live overseas. I know some students who went overseas to study, and they told me how well the training that they had in the reading class was helping them with their course work. I know some who work using English now in Japan and read in English.

How does ER balance/fit in with the other English work the students are doing in your course and/or in other courses?

Several years ago, a student in my class was also taking a TOEFL preparation seminar on the IBU campus for one semester. He gained a lot more points at the end of the seminar on the TOEFL. The TOEFL preparation faculty thought that it was their seminar that caused the significant gain. They published his score in order to advertise their seminar the following year.

How long have you been doing ER? What are the main ways your ER work/program has evolved? Reasons for those changes?

I began ER in 1984. My ER program changed every two to three years. I did a lot of things that everyone is talking about now.

- First I did not even know whether students would read a book in English. Students sat in class quietly and read in class, and I also read graded readers with the students in class. Students read books in class and they were happy and their reading competence improved.
- I compared how effective two ER teachers were, one who knew the theory and the other who did not know the theory. The students in the class of the teacher who knew the input theory read more and did better on the final exam. Teacher's knowledge of the theory is important.
- Next, I wondered whether some other things might increase the power of ER. So, I added cloze exercises for developing reading comprehension skills, but I found that cloze exercises did not increase the efficiency of ER.
- Then I added retelling of the story in order to improve speaking skills, but that did not work. Students could not retell in English. They used a lot of Japanese.
- Students' writing improved in the ER course, so, I added summary writing in English, hoping that writing ability will improve even more, but it did not. Students reported that they spent more time in writing summaries than reading.
- Then I added correction on summary writing, thinking that correction would help students write more accurately, but it did not. Students did not like to be corrected.
- I had students make a vocabulary notebook, thinking that they will remember more words, but it did not help.
- So, I dropped everything and went back to the basics— input alone. I have written reports on these studies (www.benikomason.net)

My experience is that these output activities were a waste of time. I did not understand the power of reading alone before, but now I do. In fact, I am thinking about abandoning story-listening now.

Why are you considering abandoning story-listening?

Students like to listen to stories, but it is distracting them from reading. At the end of the story, they sometimes spontaneously clap their hands. That pleases me, but students seem to misunderstand. They still must read books at home, but they don't. Story-listening is meant to be an activity leading students to reading, not distracting them from reading. I do not really want to abandon story-listening. I need to find a way to encourage students to do more reading at home.

If you drop the story listening, will students spend in-class time reading, as well?

It is possible, and story-listening could become homework. Story listening is very effective for increasing vocabulary size. I was hoping that students would learn close to 1000 words in one year from listening to stories.

A reason I hesitate to have students read in class is that I am not sure now that they will do it. As you know, the nature of college students has recently changed drastically. Research shows that about 7% of children at elementary schools have learning disabilities. They do not stop having disabilities suddenly when they enter college. I cannot make sure that they will receive CI if I allowed them to have free time to read. I am afraid that half of them will play with their cell phones. I want to make sure that students receive comprehensible input either aurally or visually in class.

Do you have any tape or CD materials available with your readers? Do you encourage students to get listening exposure in other ways, beyond what you do in class?

One of my intermediate students recently told me that he listened to the attached CD after he read the book, and he understood it better than when he listened to the CD before he read the book. So, it might be a good idea to read first and then listen to a CD.

What I have been doing is that I video tape myself telling stories and I have the videos available on my webpage (it is only available on the IBU campus for IBU students). My students can access it and watch me tell a story. I have done this because it may be easier for low level students to listen to someone they are familiar with than listen to someone they don't know.

Has the level of your students affected your decisions about whether and/or how to implement ER?

The students are becoming worse and worse every year in their ability, motivation, moral standard, academic skills, and manners. I will never abandon reading. Reading/Listening is the only path for language acquisition. I started bringing in the "Reading Tree" by Oxford to the class. Several years ago, someone told me that starting with the Heinemann 600-word level would be too difficult for college students, and I did not believe it, but it has become true. I have to be flexible with objectives. The objective for the first semester is for them to be able to read at the 1100-word level, but now it is the 600-word level for half of them. The required amount of reading is still the same. For evaluation purposes, I may need to create a different cloze test.

Is anyone else in your department/school doing ER? Any cooperation there?

Yes. The English department in the 4-year section of IBU has decided to implement ER beginning this year. The core instruction is Intensive Reading, and ER is supplementary.

Any comments on the response you've had to your approach from other faculty, administration, library staff, etc.?

I have worked as an adjunct at several different universities. At every school people (teachers, staff and students) welcomed the new approach. I was always given good support and the library staff was very cooperative.

However, at my main school, despite the evidence, some English teachers cannot understand the value and power of reading. They are mostly English literature teachers. They don't read our research papers. They trust their personal experiences and friends' opinions regarding teaching methods. When I tell them that we use statistics for data analysis, they are surprised.

Was there a particular experience, article, presentation, epiphany, etc. that got you started with ER?

1. I was assigned to teach a reading class at a vocational school in the early 1980's. They gave me a reading text for me to do intensive reading. Students were eager to learn. They came to class with a brand new textbook with a new notebook and a dictionary on the first day. The text was a collection of essays by an English philosopher. It was difficult. They stopped doing homework. Students lost interest. They copied translations in Japanese from others. They took the test and passed and left school. What they learned was that English was impossible to learn.
2. Bamford, J. (1984). Extensive reading with graded readers. *The Language Teacher*, 8(4), 3-14.
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4. Elley, W. B., & Mangubhai, F. (1983). The impact of reading on second language learning. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 19, 53-67.
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7. Krashen, S. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*.

I wondered if it was difficult at first for you to make the change to an almost totally comprehension-based model of learning and teaching.

No, it was not difficult. I was looking for something different that worked. When I was given a reading class to teach at IBU in the second semester of 1985, the English department let me do what I wanted to do. All the necessary conditions were met for the program to succeed then. In those days I received the school's support. I received a large amount of money from the university to buy many graded readers for the program. The students were motivated, eager to learn, very well behaved, and very cooperative. Dr. Krashen gave me very important advice in 1984 in Tokyo: Give students a lot of comprehensible input and keep the affective filter low. I followed his advice. I was very fortunate.

Can you point us toward anything you've published/written that might give further insight into your approach?

My published articles are at: www.benikomason.net

My book in Japanese is:

FVR – Free Voluntary Reading and Fairy/Folk Tale Listening. Kanagawa-ken: Seizansha.
(ISBN 978-4-88359-239-5)