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Northbrooks Sec School

# EL Classroom *inquiry*

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# Discovering the Joy of Reading

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Reading for pleasure is important for language learning and personal development (Clark & Rumbolt, 2006). A team of English Language teachers observed that their Secondary 1 to 3 students had low reading interest and needed to be encouraged to read. The team inquired into how these reluctant readers could be motivated to read. They designed an extensive reading programme guided by their analysis of their students' reading interests and preferences. The programme included using varied reading resources, teacher role modelling of reading, and students' personal response. The data gathered showed that the students' attitude towards reading improved. Their interest in reading was kindled and they responded positively to the reading experiences they engaged in. The students also valued the advantages of reading. The extensive reading programme was effective in motivating students to read for pleasure.

## Background

At the beginning of 2018, English Language (EL) teachers from Northbrooks Secondary School participated in ELIS's Professional Learning Programme (PLP) on Teaching Reading and Viewing which was conducted at our school. In addition, our team leader participated in the PLP on Teaching Extensive Reading which was conducted at ELIS. Together, we inquired into our own teaching of reading and viewing practices and the impact of our EL department's reading programme on our students. From our observations and interactions with our students, we noticed that they continued to face difficulties with processing texts despite being taught various learner strategies for reading. They were also not spontaneous readers and had to be persuaded to read. We discussed the role of extensive reading and its attendant benefits such as developing students' schema, vocabulary and reading fluency.

From February to November 2018, our four-member Professional Learning Team (PLT) collaborated with Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray, Master Teacher/EL on developing our students' interest in reading through an Extensive Reading Programme (ERP). We had compelling reasons to explore this area, as we were keen to develop our students as readers and reap its benefits in terms of language

learning. As a department, we had introduced the use of various learner strategies to our students but there was limited impact on students' text comprehension. We had learned from the PLP on Teaching Reading and Viewing that besides adopting a more deliberate approach to teaching students learner strategies and supporting them in reading comprehension, students need to have adequate schema and vocabulary to comprehend texts successfully (Wexler, 2018). Extensive reading facilitates the broadening and deepening of students' schema and vocabulary.

In a survey conducted by the team, we discovered that 80% of our Secondary 1 to 3 students had low reading motivation as they were not reading regularly and held negative attitudes towards reading. For example, they could not sit quietly to read and found reading boring. Hence, we wanted to explore how we could motivate our students to read extensively for pleasure. We strongly believed that we had to begin with the first stage of putting in place an effective ERP so that we could get our students excited about reading and grow them into spontaneous readers. Only then could we consider reaping its benefits such as the development of background knowledge and vocabulary to help students better interact with texts, thus facilitating their reading comprehension. We therefore embarked on the first phase of getting students motivated to read extensively, which became the focus of our inquiry.



## Focus of the Inquiry

### Research Question

To what extent does an ERP motivate Secondary 1 to 3 students to read widely and extensively?

### How We Proceeded with the Inquiry

Our team decided to inquire into how we could motivate our students to read widely and extensively through an ERP. We were guided by the theories and principles of extensive reading to encourage the reading habit among students. We engaged in many professional conversations with Jeya during our PLT meetings beginning from February 2018. We reflected on our beliefs about

reading and considered our learners' profiles. Given that our students did not read spontaneously or enjoy reading as much, we reviewed our ERP and explored how we could engage our students in more deliberate ways to read for pleasure.

We referred to the relevant Reading and Viewing Learning Outcomes (LOs) and Skills, Learner Strategies, Attitudes and Behaviour (SSAB) in EL Syllabus 2010. We were guided by the LOs and SSAB listed in Table 1 and designed an ERP to provide a variety of reading materials and experiences for our students. Although our focus was on extensive reading (LO 5b), we also included intensive reading (LOs 2, 3 and 4) as these LOs and SSAB, while different, serve complementary purposes in enhancing students' literacy development. Students applied close and critical reading skills, especially when engaged in post-reading experiences.

**Table 1: Reading and Viewing LOs and SSAB**

LO	SSAB
<b>LO 2: Close Reading and Viewing</b> Process and comprehend age-/year level-appropriate texts at literal and inferential levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use prior knowledge</li> <li>• Make inferences to draw conclusions</li> <li>• Summarise ideas</li> </ul>
<b>LO 3: Critical Reading and Viewing and Appreciation</b> Apply critical reading and viewing by focusing on implied meaning, higher-order thinking, judgement and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read or view a text closely and offer interpretations of it</li> <li>• Recognise writers' intentions (e.g., through their use of words, literary language)</li> </ul>
<b>LO 4: Reading and Viewing Literary and Informational/Functional Texts</b> Apply close and critical reading and viewing to a variety of literary selections and informational/functional texts from print and non-print sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify similar themes in stories and apply this knowledge to interpret the texts</li> <li>• Show awareness of how the writer's use of language varies according to the purpose and audience for the writing to achieve impact</li> </ul>
<b>LO 5b: Extensive Reading and Viewing</b> Sustain reading and viewing widely for pleasure, personal development and learning in the literary/content areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and view, demonstrating the ability to discriminate among a variety of reading-age-appropriate and more thought-provoking books and texts of different genres, from print and non-print sources, as an integral part of daily life</li> <li>• Present a critical response</li> </ul>

## Literature Review

From our reading, we learned that extensive reading is defined as reading highly comprehensible and interesting target language materials, which allows language learners to be immersed in comprehensible input. Learners in the process of reading these rich resources acquire literacy-related aspects of language (Krashen, 2018). Thus, reading extensively provides students with opportunities for linguistic and cognitive growth, and a positive motivation to read further.

According to Renandya (2007), students' ability to read fluently is best achieved through reading extensively in the language. Learners read a large number of books including series books (Renandya, Krashen & Jacobs, 2018) and other materials in an environment that nurtures a lifelong reading habit. In addition, through reading regularly and in quantity, students learn to read better and enjoy reading more. Students' vocabulary grows as a result of reading extensively and a vast vocabulary enhances their reading comprehension (Renandya, 2007; Myracle, Kingsley & McClellan, 2019).

Day and Bamford (2002) identified 10 core principles for teaching extensive reading that guide the implementation of a school-wide ERP. These principles point to the importance of providing students with a variety of reading materials to read widely, giving time for silent reading and having teachers as role models.

To encourage learners to read and reap the benefits of reading extensively, time and space have to be created for them to do so. Through Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or individualised extensive reading, time is set aside for classes or the entire school to read quietly together. Learners are also encouraged to continue reading outside the time allotted. During SSR, significant adults model the habits, choices, comments and attitudes that good readers develop over time (Gardiner, 2005). SSR helps students become better readers as it promotes the reading habit and reading for enjoyment.

While students read alone, opportunities have to be created for them to talk together with others about what they read as it enables them to develop new and deep insights about what they read (Lehman & Scharer, 1996; Renandya, 2007). Students develop a critical and analytical stance as they express their thoughts, explore new possibilities and challenge opinions.

## Process and Experience

During our PLT meetings, we discussed our plans for the design of the ERP that was scheduled to be implemented in March 2018. The team planned the ERP for the Secondary 1 to 3 students, informed by the literature that we had read. Our Secondary 4 students did not participate in the study because of constraints such as a packed curriculum that focused largely on preparing them for their upcoming national examinations. Nevertheless, we customised the ERP to meet their needs so that they too would benefit from reading extensively.

The design of the ERP for the Secondary 1 to 3 students took into account aspects of a successful ER approach (Day & Bamford, 2002; Renandya & Jacobs 2002; Renandya, 2007). We focused on the following considerations, as we believed that they were critical in addressing the readiness levels, interests and learning profiles of our students.

### Our Considerations when Designing the ERP

#### a) Choice of Books

We learned from the literature we reviewed that selecting suitable reading materials has a significant influence on students' motivation to read, reading confidence and ability. Our PLT had gathered input from both students and teachers on the types of books to select so that the choices offered were tailored to meet our students' needs. We wanted to focus on print texts initially instead of non-print ones as we wanted our students to have something tangible for their SSR period, known as Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.) Time. We compiled a list of books that was suitable for students from the different levels to read during the allocated periods and beyond.

Other types of reading materials were made accessible to our students. Besides the books, we also introduced other reading resources to keep our students interested and motivated to read. On some occasions, our students read complimentary copies of The Straits Times including the IN supplement during D.E.A.R. Time. Students also read materials from the National Library Board (NLB) or those prepared by other departments in the school.

#### b) Sustained Silent Reading

As reading is usually individual and silent, we created opportunities for students to engage in silent reading through D.E.A.R. Time. We believed that by offering students dedicated time for reading we would be able to influence their reading behaviour. During this 25-minute period at the start of the school day, students read their chosen novels. To emphasise the value of reading, our staff modelled the habit of reading by engaging in sustained reading. One or two teachers would walk around the school hall to monitor the students reading and ensure that they had reading

materials with them. On a few occasions when students did not have their novels with them, supplementary reading resources were provided to ensure that these students had something to read so that the use of the SSR period could be optimised.

Besides SSR in school, students were encouraged to read their novels whenever they had pockets of time to spare. There was also dedicated time within EL lessons to allow students to continue reading. If students were fast readers, they were encouraged to borrow books from the school or public library.



#### c) Post-Reading Activities

We created fortnightly book discussion periods within our EL instructional programme for post-reading activities. We explored ways to design activities that would enhance students' thinking and enjoyment of the books read and also promote further reading. To support students' understanding and enjoyment of the novels, we adopted a two-pronged approach to provide rich post-reading experiences, within and outside the classroom. The EL

level coordinators worked with the level teachers to design post-reading activities (see Table 2) that would best meet their students' needs. These post-reading experiences encouraged students to offer a personal response by reflecting on and questioning what they read. We were mindful that these learning activities were cognitively and affectively engaging for our students and would not contribute to 'readicide' (Gallagher, 2009), a systematic killing of the love of reading.



**Table 2: Post-Reading Activities**

In-Class Activities	Out-of-Class Activities
<p><b>Reading Circles</b> Students engage in a structured discussion, playing different roles that give them a purpose for reading. They discuss various issues that surface in the text read.</p> <p><b>Character in the Spotlight</b> Students explore the traits of characters in the books through various activities. For example, they create an Instagram profile of a character in the book to exemplify his/her character traits.</p>  <p><b>Reading Project</b> In groups, students engage in extended tasks related to the books read.</p> <p>For example: Readers' Theatre: Students write a script based on a scene from the book read and perform it.</p> <p>Video log: Students provide a video of themselves giving a book talk on the book read.</p> <p>PowToon presentation: Students identify a scene from the book and represent it using PowToon, a web-based animation software.</p>	<p><b>School-based</b></p> <p><b>Brooksian Book Buzz</b> Teachers and selected students talk about their favourite books during assembly.</p> <p><b>Brooksian News Champion</b> Students present their views on current affairs during assembly. At the end of the presentation, students participate in quizzes.</p> <p><b>Brooksian Character Day</b> Students and staff dress as characters from movies they watch or books they read.</p> <p><b>Print-to-Screen Movie Day</b> Students watch movies based on the novels that they read.</p> <p><b>External Partners</b></p> <p><b>National Library Board's Books-2-Go</b> The NLB offers a bulk loan of books that students can borrow from.</p> <p><b>National Reading Movement's Read for Books Charity Drive</b> This event requires that a minimum of 10 readers read for 15 minutes. As a token for the effort, a book is donated by a sponsoring organisation to needy children. Northbrooks Secondary students and staff "raised" 86 books for their reading efforts in 2018.</p> <p><b>Book Talk and Meet-the-Author Session</b> Local authors are invited for a book talk and meet-the-author session. The event promotes reading and enables students to gain deeper understanding of the writing process.</p>



## Monitoring of the ERP

To ensure that the ERP was implemented successfully, we considered ways to effectively monitor the programme without it being onerous for both students and teachers. We monitored our students' reading habits and interests, and engagement with post-reading experiences to ensure that the ERP met our students' needs. We also wanted to determine if there was a need to fine-tune the processes. We used the following sources of evidence, which were quantitative and qualitative in nature, to monitor our ERP:

### a) Students' Work

At our level meetings, we brought samples of our students' work from post-reading activities to discuss evidence of their reading and learning. We used these opportunities to streamline some of the activities planned and considered those that students preferred such as watching movies to tie in with the books read.

### b) Reading Survey

Our team conducted surveys to gather feedback on the ERP and further information on students as readers, and their habits and preferences. These surveys were conducted at the middle and end of the implementation of the ERP.

### c) Focus Group Discussion

To gather more detailed information about students' feelings, perceptions and opinions about the ERP, we randomly selected a group of Secondary 1 to 3 students to participate in a focus group discussion held at the end of the year.

### d) Reflections

Students reflected on their reading experiences and these reflections gave us insights into how they felt about reading some of the chosen titles or the activities they participated in. These insights helped us to determine what worked well and what needed to be improved.

### e) Department / Level / PLT Meetings

We held regular meetings with the Secondary 1 to 3 teachers to gather feedback on their observations of the ERP. These meetings helped to surface specific concerns and needs of students in terms of the books selected and post-reading activities. The PLT members collated the feedback and discussed ways to enhance processes so as to ensure that student learning outcomes were met.

## Findings and Discussion

We analysed the different data sources to study the impact of the ERP on our students' motivation to read in relation to a) reading interests and preferences, and b) engagement with silent reading and post-reading experiences.

In this section, we discuss the analysis of the data and identify the key learning points from our inquiry.

### 1) Design of the ERP

The 10 core principles for teaching extensive reading guided us in the design of the ERP (Day & Bamford, 2002). These principles also guided us in examining our own beliefs about extensive reading. The principled approach that we had adopted supported our students in growing their interest in reading extensively and displaying appropriate reading behaviours. The analysis of the data shows how the following key components in the design of the ERP influenced students' attitudes and behaviours about reading.

#### (i) Choice of Reading Materials

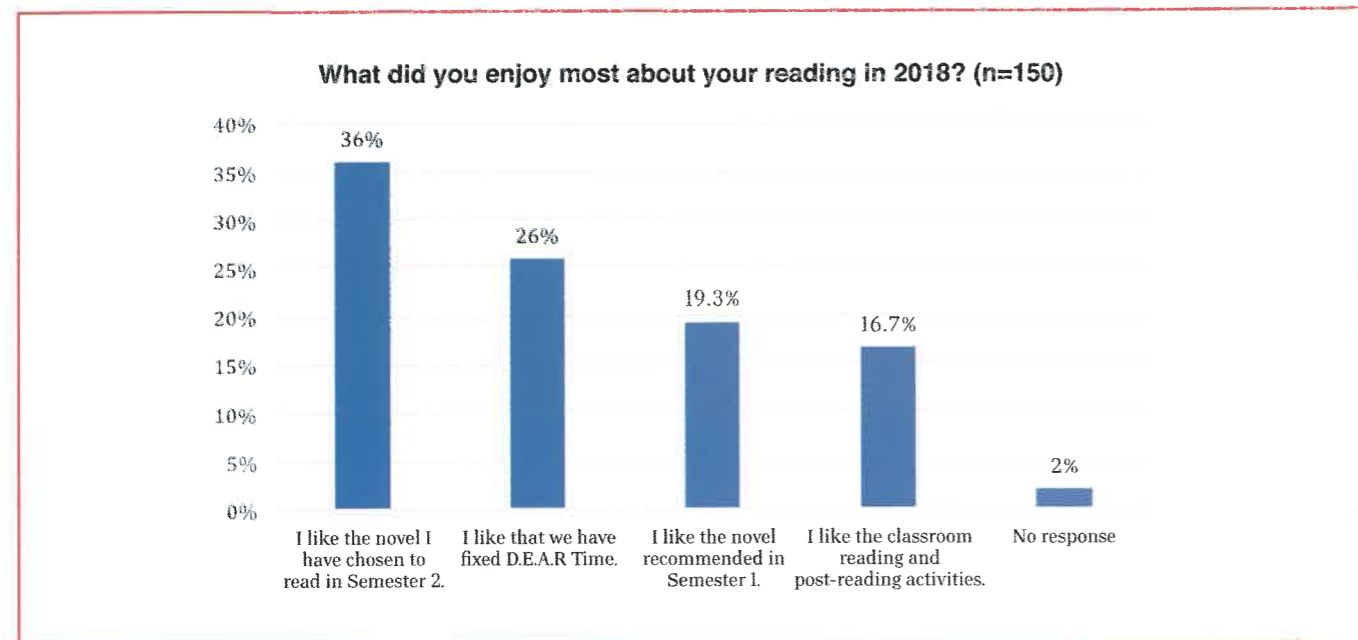
In designing our ERP, we were mindful of our students' reading interests, their profiles as readers and also reading readiness levels. While some novels that were recommended to our students might be deemed suitable for lower levels, we assessed them to be at a suitable readability level for our students. We felt that it was important to do so to help pique and sustain our students' interest in reading. In so doing, we ensured that our students did not feel frustrated when they were unable to access more complex materials. We were guided by one of the principles of teaching extensive reading that requires reading material to be accessible to students (Day & Bamford, 2002; Renandya & Jacobs 2002; Renandya, 2007) when giving reading choices to our students.

A few of the book titles recommended were also series books, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Percy Jackson*. We believe that such books would encourage our students to read other books in the series, thus further developing their competencies as readers (Renandya et al., 2018). These students would gradually widen their reading selections and read books on different topics by different authors.

Students were given more choices in the selection of books in Semester 2 as compared to Semester 1. We discovered that by offering them more autonomy, their enjoyment of reading increased. When asked to identify what they liked most about the reading programme during the year, the majority had indicated that they enjoyed the novels they had chosen in Semester Two (see Table 3). This sentiment was echoed by a Secondary

2 student in the Normal (Technical) course who said, "Reading a book that is not of your taste is hard to enjoy. However, with choices, I'm able to enjoy the book." One Secondary 3 Express student remarked, "I like the novel, *The Hunger Games*. I find it interesting and exciting." Another student added, "I watched the movie before. There are many details in the book that the movie didn't show."

**Table 3**



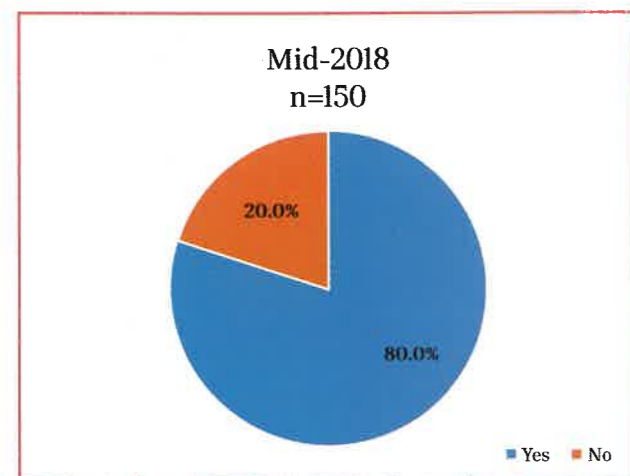
**(ii) Dedicated Reading Time in the Instructional Programme**

Prior to the implementation of the sustained reading sessions, students did not have dedicated time to engage in reading. However, students grew positively disposed towards the time created for them to read silently. In

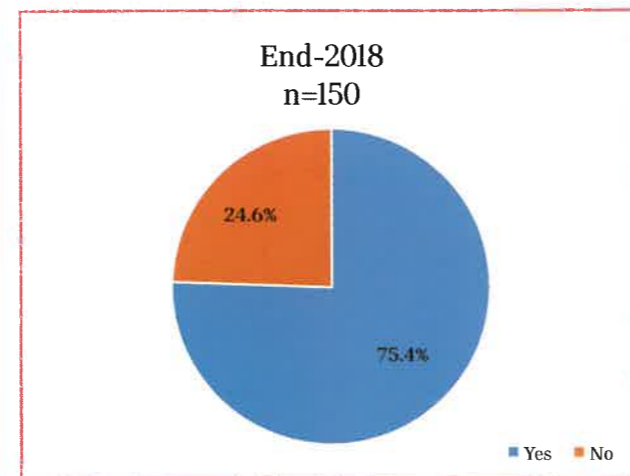
surveys (see Tables 4a & 4b) conducted at two different time periods, students said that they found D.E.A.R. Time beneficial because it had given them more time to read for pleasure. In addition, they mentioned that sustained reading had helped them to improve their knowledge of grammar and extended their vocabulary.

**Have you found D.E.A.R Time beneficial?**

**Table 4a**



**Table 4b**



Students said they found more time to read in their daily lives, and this also led to a positive attitudinal change towards reading. One Secondary 3 Express student said, "I don't usually have time to read as I have schoolwork and outings to cope with, so D.E.A.R. Time has given me time to read." Thus, the structured time created for reading enabled students to engage in consistent, independent reading that enhanced their reading enjoyment and attitudes.

**(iii) Post-Reading Activities to Develop Engagement, Accountability and Personal Response to Reading**

We created opportunities for students to respond to what they read and talk together with peers and teachers about it. While these interactions enabled us to monitor students' reading, we observed that they also presented students with opportunities to engage in productive talk, exploring perspectives, possibilities and challenging opinions. Some students felt that they had gained better understanding of the books read. The teachers reported that many of their students were willing to contribute ideas to the discussion and offered personal responses to what they read. They also observed that the students took accountability for the time they spent on independent silent reading.

The varied class and school-based activities that we had organised made reading come alive for the students. For example, the book talks by the authors enabled students to understand how writers gather inspiration for their ideas and subsequently turn those ideas into books. We simulated the experience of watching movies at cinemas during Print to Screen Movie Day by renting a popcorn machine so that our students could enjoy a snack while watching movies. Some students felt that the "classroom reading activities" made them "more interested in the books". Others enjoyed "the book sharing by teachers".

We constantly reviewed the purposes and expectations of the post-reading activities. We were mindful that they did not become onerous and unintentionally turned students off from reading.

**2) Shift in Students' Reading Attitudes**

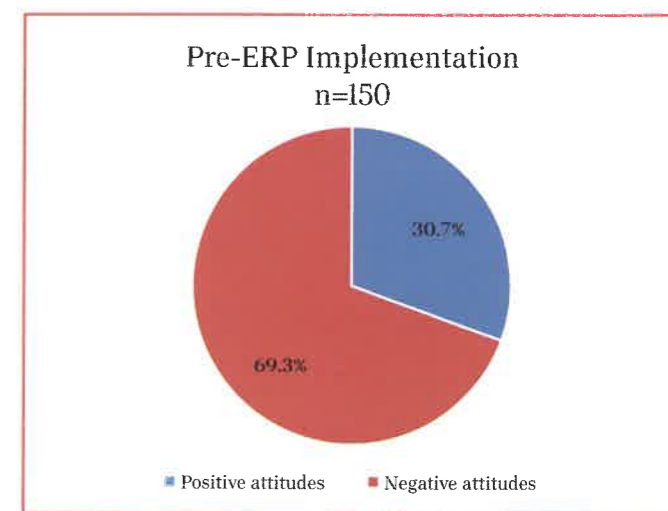
The design of our ERP including the post-reading experiences enabled us to bring about a shift in our students' reading attitudes. The majority of the students surveyed had expressed negative opinions towards

reading before the implementation of the ERP (see Table 5a). These negative opinions ranged from "boring" to "I hate reading". However, after the implementation of the ERP, there was a significant change in their attitudes towards reading (see Table 5b), with the majority of the students expressing positive opinions towards reading.

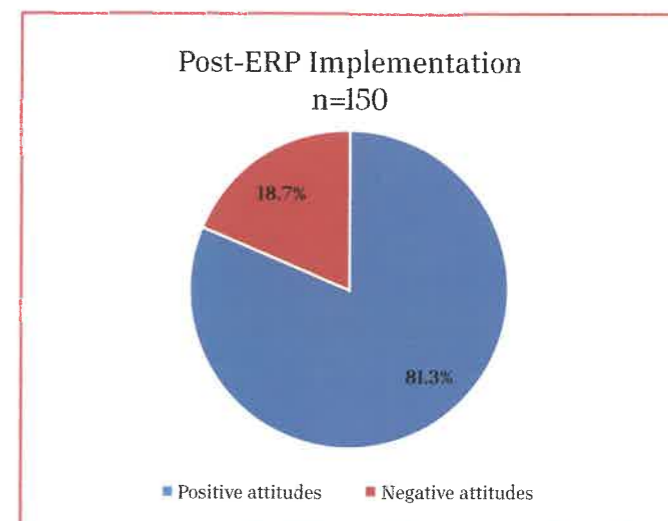
Here are some of the students' responses:

- "Reading has become one of my hobbies."
- "I have learned to appreciate reading."
- "It has helped to motivate me to read more outside of D.E.A.R. Time."
- "The reading programme has made me love to read books more as I get to improve my vocabulary."
- "It also gives me a lot of ideas for writing."
- "I think that spending time reading outside of D.E.A.R. Time is a good habit instead of always using social media."

**Table 5a**



**Table 5b**



### 3) Supportive School Management and Staff

To create a school-wide culture of reading, it is important to promote reading as a way of life in the school. Our school management and staff supported the EL Department's efforts to promote reading by modelling

the reading habit during D.E.A.R. Time. Students saw the principal and teachers of all subjects as readers because they role-modelled the love of reading. Hence, the students were motivated to read for pleasure.



### Students' Reflections

#### Sec 1E student:

"I thought (reading) was time consuming. Now I think it is very important."

#### Sec 2E student:

"The reading activities and project were fun to do. We did a PowerPoint presentation on some of the main characters in the book. That helped us understand the book better as we had to do a lot of research on the characters."

#### Sec 3E student:

"It has inspired me to write essays and short stories in my own time."

#### Sec 1NA student:

"Because of the reading programme, my desire to read and gain more knowledge has increased. I enjoy reading more now."

#### Sec 2NA student:

"Reading used to be boring, Now, not so bad."

#### Sec 3NA student:

"I have started liking reading more."

#### Sec 1NT student:

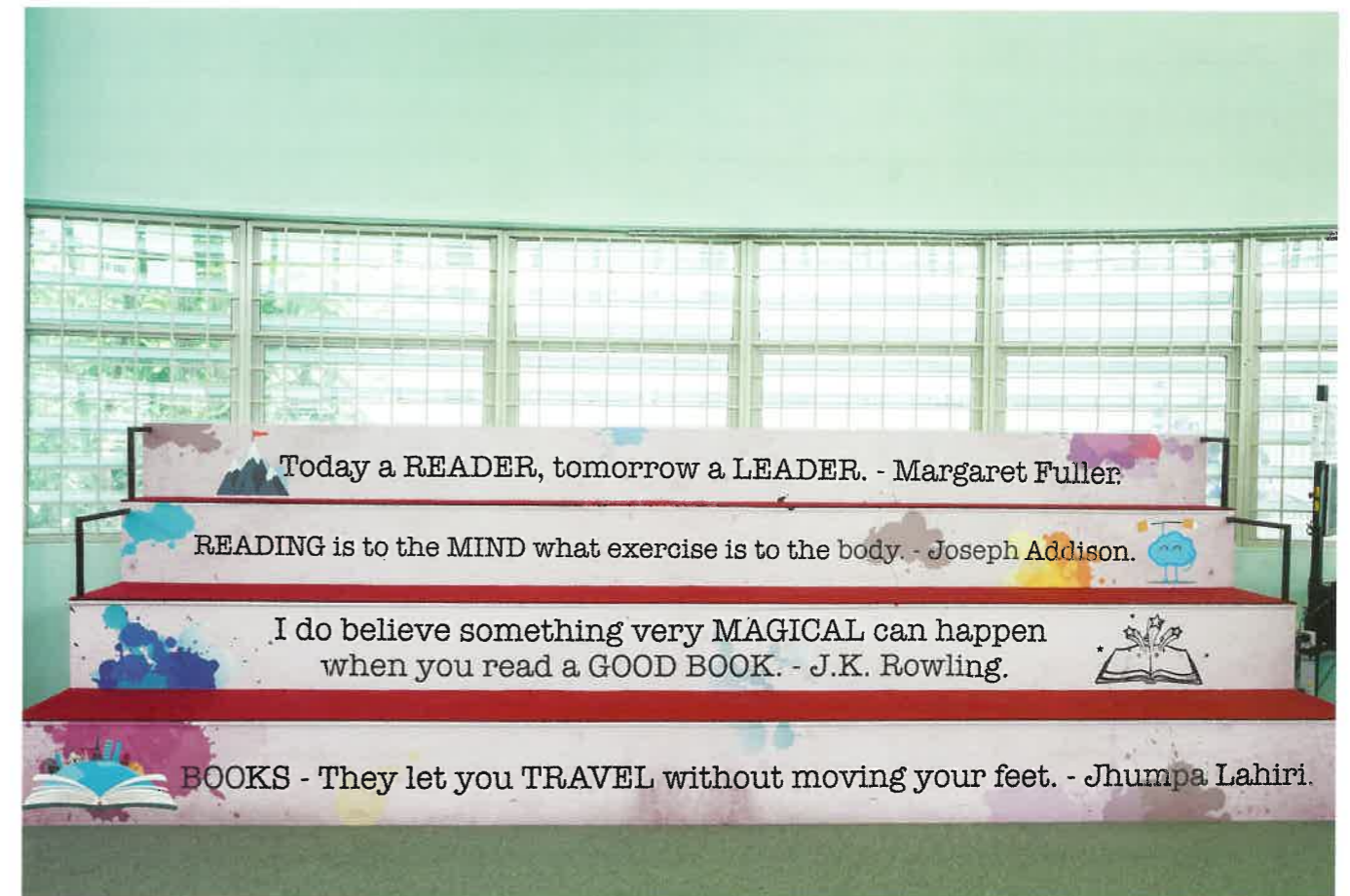
"I am more interested in reading now."

#### Sec 2NT student:

"Reading was boring but now I find it a bit fun. I get to absorb big words from the book."

#### Sec 3NT student:

"I am starting a new habit at home by slowly picking up reading and I finally am interested in reading."



## Our Reflections

### Carolyn:

Being a member of the Reading Programme PLT and crafting the ERP were part of an exciting journey for me. I feel that it is important to know your students well and know what may or may not work for them. From there, the selection of reading materials and customisation of the post-reading experiences can be done to ensure that students feel their needs are met and their journey as readers is well-supported.

### Sangeeta:

This has been an enriching experience for me as I learned how to plan and implement a reading programme with my teammates. The discussions we had were very insightful as we sat together to review the various initiatives and give our feedback. I have certainly gained much from learning alongside my team members and am grateful for the guidance given by Jeya.

### Cinda:

It was heartening to see my students engaged in reading during D.E.A.R. Time. In Semester 2, I could see that the students were more enthusiastic about reading a book that they had chosen. The Print-To-Screen movie screenings had also generated more interest in the books these movies were based on.

### Jasvinder:

After a mere four D.E.A.R. Time sessions, our students' interest in reading was kindled. This was amazing! It became a common sight to see students reading spontaneously in school, and not just during D.E.A.R. Time. To recognise our efforts in developing a reading culture, the EL Department was presented with the MOE Outstanding Contribution Award!

## Conclusion

It was certainly heartening to see our students being able to sit quietly and read for pleasure, not just during D.E.A.R. Time but also during the change of periods, and after curriculum time.

We began by guiding students in their choice of books. For many, this initiated them into reading, which they would not have embarked on themselves. Based on the evidence we gathered, the ERP has helped students to

improve their attitudes towards reading. Most students enjoyed the increased autonomy in selecting their reading materials. Their interest in reading was further sustained by the learning experiences during the post-reading phase.

The ERP has provided a good start towards developing a reading culture in the school. We will continue to review and refine our ERP and sustain the reading habit among our students. We also intend to study the extent of its impact on the development of students' literacy as part of another phase of this inquiry.

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