# Promoting EFL literacy through shared and individual classroom reading experiences of literature

*Ion Drew*

## ABSTRACT

I denna artikel undersöks hur gemensam och individuell litteraturupplevelse i klassrumet kan hjälpa elever i låg-, mellan- och högstadiet att utveckla sin engelska *literacy*, det vill säga sin förmåga att läsa och skriva på engelska. Det finns belägg för att elever på dessa nivåer får för få meningsfyllda läsupplevelser på engelska. I artikeln redovisas forskning som visar vikten av gemensam läsning, i form av lärares högläsning och Readers Theatre, en gruppaktivitet med högläsning. Forskning om individuell läsning, speciellt nyttan av extensiv läsning, som till exempel läsning av stora mängder självvalda texter, diskuteras. Det riktas speciell uppmärksamhet mot två undervisningsvarianter i literacy, The Early Years Literacy Program och Reading and Writing Workshops, som båda inkorporerar gemensamma och individuella upplevelser i sin praktik. Forskningen om dessa metoder i engelskundervisning är begränsad. Trots metodernas uppenbara nytta för utveckling av engelskspråklig literacy, kan ingen av ansatserna betraktas som ledande. Det finns starka argument för att en kombination av gemensam och individuell läsning borde ges en mer framträdande roll i engelsk klassrumsundervisning.

**Nyckelord:** literacy, gemensam och individuell läsning och högläsning

**ION DREW**
*Professor Emeritus of English language didactics*
*Department of Cultural Studies and Languages*
*University of Stavanger*
*E-post: ion.drew@uis.no*

# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore the role and importance of shared and individual experiences of reading literature for English foreign language (EFL) pupils in the process of their literacy development. The target group is particularly those in primary and lower secondary school (aged approximately six to 16). Although the focus is on EFL pupils, the experiences in question originate in first language (L1) educational contexts. Where appropriate, reference is thus made to these contexts, for example to relevant research and when outlining principles of approaches and/or practices.

Studies have shown that much EFL teaching in Scandinavian schools is limited in its classroom input of the target language (Charboneau, 2012; Hellekjær, 2007; Henry, 2013; Henry, 2014). EFL teaching in Norway, for example, has traditionally been heavily dependent on textbooks as the source of textual input (Charboneau, 2012; Hellekjær, 2007). The texts pupils are exposed to have thus been chosen by the textbook writers and are generally short in length, thus typical for *intensive reading*, with a focus on form (Day & Bamford, 1998). Hellekjær's (2005) research showed that a high proportion of Norwegian students entering higher education were lacking in adequate reading skills and proficiency to cope with the demands of reading English texts at that level, arguing that this was a consequence of limited reading input of English in school. In a study of English in grades 6 to 9 in neighbouring Sweden (Henry, 2014), many Swedish pupils claimed to learn more English outside than inside the classroom. Classrooms were characterised by a lack of English input (Henry, 2014), and pupils struggled to be motivated for English lessons because they lacked the authenticity and amount of input that characterised their out-of-school exposure to English, also known as *extramural English* (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Examples of extramural English were watching films and TV series, playing video/digital games, and surfing English-language websites on the Internet. The question in the present context is whether shared and individual reading experiences of literature in school is one way of providing substantial and meaningful classroom input in English to create a stimulating and educational language-rich environment that can enhance EFL pupils' growth in language and literacy.

The research questions addressed in the paper are:

- What are the benefits of shared and individual classroom reading experiences for EFL pupils' literacy development?

- What challenges do these experiences involve for teachers?

Some clarification of key terminology is necessary. First, although many kinds of literacy have emerged in recent times (Holme, 2004), for example computer literacy and banking literacy, literacy in the present context refers in the traditional sense to the ability to read and write. However, oral language has a close relationship to written language and stimulates its development (Mercer, 2004). Children develop language and literacy through, for example, listening to others, play, exploratory talk, classroom discussions, and dinner-time conversations with adults. Second, literature hereby refers in a broad sense to texts, both fiction and non-fiction, that are appropriate for pupils to read in terms of level of difficulty and interest at any given stage of their literacy development in school. This definition also incorporates works of literature. Third, shared reading experiences refer to a text being read aloud by one person or more to at least one other person, also including smaller and larger groups of people. Finally, individual reading experiences are considered as those whereby one

person reads a text independently and silently with a focus on its meaning as opposed to its form (Krashen, 1984), also classified as *extensive reading* (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009).

One pre-supposition in the present context is that school plays an important role in pupils' literacy development and that multiple experiences of individual and shared reading experiences will contribute to that development. Another pre-supposition is that societies generally value high levels of literacy among their citizens and therefore invest in schools to produce future citizens who are well-educated, literate, and who thereby possess a sufficiently high level of reading and writing that they can pursue their chosen career paths (Holme, 2004). The concept of *human capital* is closely linked to a country's socio-economic development and literacy education plays an important role in this context. Through human capital, countries invest in their population "in order to make them more skilled and more productive" (Holme, 2004, p. 12).

Thus, literacy plays an important role in society. The members of a society are generally confronted on a daily basis with large amounts of the printed word in many different forms and contexts, for example on social media, in instruction booklets for electrical appliances, and on the Internet. School plays an important role in equipping the future citizens of a society with the tools necessary to cope with the multiple literacy demands placed on them. Proficiency in the English language, both oral and written, is highly valued in a world where English is a lingua franca. It is important for societies, for example in Scandinavian countries, that its citizens have a high level of proficiency in English, whether they are, for example, in business, commerce, medicine, or academia.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Shared reading experiences are supported by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky emphasised that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive and language development. The development of higher mental processes in individuals originates in social processes. More knowledgeable others help individuals to develop within their *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978), namely what they are unable to achieve on their own but can achieve with the guidance of a more knowledgeable person. A common term for this guidance is *scaffolding* (Mercer, 2004). When an adult or teacher reads aloud to children, for example, the act of reading takes place in a social context and the reader can interact with the listeners to help them understand the text and monitor comprehension. Vygotsky argued that learning takes place on two levels: firstly, on the social (interpsychological) level through interaction with others, and secondly when integrated on the individual (intrapsychological) level.

In terms of individual reading experiences, Krashen's (1982; 1984) language acquisition theory is relevant, especially his acquisition-learning hypothesis, input hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis. The acquisition-learning distinction is arguably the most fundamental hypothesis in the theory. Language *acquisition*, a subconscious process, is contrasted with language *learning*, a conscious process (Krashen, 1982). Language acquisition is considered much more important than language learning. Through extensive reading, readers acquire vocabulary and forms of the language subconsciously by focusing on the meaning of texts rather than their form (Krashen, 1984). They do this when input is comprehensible to them, that is at a level that they can understand (the input hypothesis). In order to acquire language successfully, learners need to have a low affective filter (the affective filter hypothesis), namely they need to have a high level of motivation, be self-confident,

and not  feel anxious (Krashen, 1982). When learners can choose to read books in which they are interested and which are at their level of ability, their motivation will increase and their self-confidence will grow as they read more. They will become more proficient in the language and are not likely to feel anxious when experiencing reading in this way.

Krashen's input hypothesis is linked to the notion of *whole language*, which refers to the reading of whole texts with a focus on their meaning rather than details of form (Krashen, 1999). The different reading experiences addressed in this paper all relate to the reading of whole texts. Another perspective of whole language is that it is the integration of oral and written language, which is relevant, for example, to reading a text aloud and Readers Theatre (addressed later in the paper). As argued by Cambourne and Turbill (1987, p. 35):

> Although teachers often deal with talking, listening, reading and writing as separate components of language, this separation in effect is quite artificial. To facilitate the learning environment in the classroom teachers need to understand the strong relationships between the four language components.

The theoretical basis for the article is thus a combination of sociocultural theory (in relation to shared reading experiences) and Krashen's language acquisition theory (in relation to individual reading experiences).

## OUTLINE OF THE LITERATURE FOCUS IN THE ARTICLE

Initial reference is made to shared reading experiences involving reading aloud, followed by individual reading experiences involving individual silent reading, and finally approaches that incorporate both. Shared reading is approached initially by discussing the role and importance of the ritual of *storytime*, namely when parents read aloud to children in the pre-school years (Barton, 2007). Reading aloud as a shared reading experience is subsequently addressed in a school context through teachers reading aloud to pupils (Barrs, 2004). Moving from individual reading aloud to group reading aloud, the focus turns to Readers Theatre (Black & Stave, 2007), a dynamic group-centred approach to working with texts in school. The principles behind Readers Theatre (RT) are outlined through reference to key scholars within the field and reference is made to relevant research on its cognitive and affective benefits, both in L1 contexts and among EFL learners, in addition to challenges of implementing RT as a classroom method. With respect to RT in EFL contexts, reference is made to several of the limited studies that have been conducted.

Subsequently, individual reading experiences are introduced by discussing the concept of *extensive reading*, namely individuals reading large quantities of texts out of interest and for pleasure (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009). The works of Day and Bamford (1998) and Grabe (2009) are considered as key works within the field of second language (L2) reading. Research is reviewed on the benefits of individual extensive reading, in addition to the challenges of implementing extensive reading in the classroom, with reference to some of the seminal scholars in this field.

Finally, in the section entitled *Approaches that incorporate both shared and individual reading experiences*, attention turns to The Early Years Literacy Programme (EYLP) (Hill & Crevola, 1999) and Reading and Writing Workshops (Atwell, 1998), which both incorporate shared and individual reading practices as standard in their approaches and are therefore given special attention in the

paper. Literature has been chosen that outlines the principles underlying each approach and relevant research on these approaches is reviewed. Research among EFL learners within these approaches is limited, with reference to these few studies.

None of the shared and individual reading experiences addressed in the paper can be considered as mainstream school practices. The discussion therefore raises the issue of whether these experiences should receive a more prominent place in EFL pupils' literacy development in school.

## SHARED READING EXPERIENCES

### Reading aloud

For many children around the world, their first introduction to literature is through the ritual of *storytime*, when a parent or older sibling reads a book aloud to them, usually at bedtime (Barton, 2007). Storytime links oral and written language, thus representing an early encounter with literacy for children. The young child will gradually become more familiar with *story grammar*, that is how stories unfold, while at the same time developing language and vocabulary. Initially, the child is likely to be relatively passive and listens, but gradually interacts more over the text with the reader. The quality of interaction, for example the way the adult draws the child into the story by asking different types of questions and making the child relate the story to its own world of experience, is considered extremely important (Barton, 2007). Reading aloud is thus an example of how language develops in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). The child gradually takes more initiative and becomes more active until ultimately the role of the adult diminishes and the child becomes independent of the adult and is able to read on its own. In this way, the original shared reading ritual, one that usually lasts months or years, eventually leads to one where the child partakes in individual silent reading.

The act of reading literature aloud, however, and its significance for literacy development, is not only restricted to adults reading to young children in the home or in pre-schools. It can also play an important role in literacy development in school with pupils of different ages (Barrs, 2004). However, educators may need to be reminded of its potential value in school (Allen, 2000). As Wadsworth (2008, p. 1) puts it:

> We must constantly remind ourselves that read alouds are an irresistible invitation to welcome children into the exciting world of literacy. Read alouds are powerful because they serve so many instructional purposes—to motivate, encourage, excite, build background, develop comprehension, assist children in making connections, and serve as a model of what fluent reading sounds like.

However, the challenge for teachers is to make reading aloud in class as effective as possible (Drew & Sørheim, 2016). Firstly, it is important that teachers familiarise themselves in advance with the text they are to read aloud, especially by first reading it silently, but also by practising reading it aloud to themselves. In addition, according to Drew and Sørheim (2016, p. 86):

> Effective reading aloud involves varying the speed, volume and tone of voice: some passages are best read slowly and softly and others more rapidly and excitedly. Change in speed, as well as volume and tone, creates variation and makes the text more exciting to listen to. So does pausing in appropriate places […] The effect is increased, and a sense of anticipation created, if the reader maintains eye contact with the listeners and uses body language where appropriate.

Some teachers may find reading aloud challenging because of a lack of confidence in their reading aloud skills, especially non-native speakers of the language, an issue raised by Day and Bamford (1998, p. 131):

> A less than perfect command of the second language or a less than skilled ability to read aloud should not deter teachers […] Teachers – perhaps especially non-native-speaking teachers – who get into the habit of reading to their class act as role models for their students by sharing their love of reading.

Thus, the benefits of reading aloud to pupils should outweigh any self-consciousness or anxiety teachers may have about practising it.

 Reading a text aloud to a class provides the teacher with the opportunity to interact with the pupils during the process of reading, namely before, during and after the reading (Drew & Sørheim, 2016). The teacher may ask pre-reading questions, for example what the pupils anticipate will happen by looking at the front cover of a book, the blurb on the back, or the table of contents. The teacher may stop after certain chapters or passages and ask pupils to predict will happen next. For post-reading, pupils may reflect on what has been read, create alternative endings, or role-play scenes from the text.

When practised in schools, reading aloud has predominantly been carried out in primary school (Albright & Ariail, 2005). In an intervention study of one semester among EFL pupils aged 7 to 12 in Columbia (Cerón, 2014), read-aloud sessions were audio-recorded and pupils were interviewed about how they experienced the sessions. The study showed that the pupils developed their speaking skills, vocabulary, reading comprehension, reading strategies, story schemata, and critical thinking skills. In another study, Sheger and Renandya (2009) explored a reading aloud session in detail in a primary EFL classroom in Singapore. During the reading, the teacher asked predictive questions, which aroused the pupils' curiosity and interest. When the reading was finished, the teacher asked global questions, for example what values the pupils had learned. The teacher was able to monitor comprehension, make inter-textual connections, and link the text to the pupils' personal lives. It helped the pupils to appreciate the joy of reading, to comprehend more, and it promoted individual reading. The motivation to read independently as a consequence of being read aloud to by the teacher is also stressed by Krashen (2004). Reading greater amounts in itself promotes literacy development.

Older pupils can also benefit from being read aloud to as much as their younger peers. The teacher reading aloud was considered a highly influential practice in the teaching of literature and writing in a study reported by Barrs (2004), in which the teachers believed in "the value of continuing to read aloud to older children and regarded this as an important way in which they could bring texts alive for them and engage them with literature" (Barrs, 2004, p. 275). Atwell (1998, p. 144) notes how she abandoned her initial scepticism to reading aloud to older children:

> For a long time I thought of reading aloud as something teachers in the elementary grades did to entertain young children. But from my students' responses to texts I read aloud […] I learned this wasn't at all true. Everyone is enthralled by a good read-aloud. Hearing literature brings it to life and fills the classroom with an author's language.

Reading aloud to older learners exposes them to books, genres, authors, encourages them to read individually, helps develop their language and vocabulary, and increases their fluency. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkinson (1985, p. 23) go as far as to say that reading aloud is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading."

## Readers Theatre

Thus far reading aloud has been referred to as a shared activity in which one person reads aloud to another or others. Pupils in this context have essentially been listeners. However, reading aloud can also be practised when a group reads aloud a text. The best-known form of group reading aloud is Readers Theatre (RT), which has been practised for centuries (Coger & White, 1967). Black and Stave (2007, p. 3) characterise RT as "an interpretive reading activity in which readers bring characters, story, and even content area or textbook material to life through their voices, actions and words." In RT, pupils adopt an active role as readers of a text, at the same time maintaining their role as listeners when being read to.

In RT, a story, factual text, extract from a work of literature, or basically any kind of text, is divided into small segments which the readers in the group take it in turns to read aloud. An essential feature of RT is that the text is always visible. When practised by pupils in schools, the audience would usually be peers and the teacher(s).

There are different models of RT. Shepard (2004) makes the distinction between the traditional and developed models. In the traditional model, the readers (narrators) are generally static, for example in a semi-circle. In the developed model the narrators are static, while those who read the roles of characters are mobile (Drew & Pedersen, 2012).

Pupils in a class are typically divided into groups, each working with a different text. Each group would rehearse its text before performing it to the other groups (Drew & Pedersen, 2012). Groups of pupils in a primary classroom may be working with, for example, RT-adapted fairy tales, which they would perform to each other after rehearsals. Groups of pupils in a lower secondary classroom may be working on RT-adapted stories by Shepard (2005), such as Roald Dahl's *Mr Twit's Revenge*, Carol Farley's *Mr. Bim's Bamboo*, and Nancy Farmer's *Tapiwa's Uncle*. The pupils in these classrooms would experience a language-rich and content-rich learning environment through their encounter with multiple texts (Drew & Pedersen, 2012). Trousedale and Harris (1993, p. 206) argue that: "Through the group interpretation of literature, many students who have not been drawn into full participation in the literary community of the classroom are provided with the means of becoming part of it."

RT thus constitutes a shared reading activity in different senses. First, a group shares the experience of working with the same text. Second, groups share their texts with other groups. Pupils thus become both performers and listeners. This happens in a context where the group dynamic is a central feature. Pupils feel that they are each contributing their part to the group effort and that they are involved in a collective shared experience that helps them to develop interpersonal, social, and collaborative skills (Black & Stave, 2007). Through their collective efforts, "their confidence grows, they begin to see themselves as part of a successful project, and they gain a sense of pride and satisfaction" (Black & Stave, 2007, p. 14). Rinehart (1999) experienced that pupils enjoyed being involved together, listening to others, and performing themselves. Those who had avoided other reading tasks

did not avoid RT. In fact, several studies have found that RT appeals especially to struggling readers, who feel less anxious in the group context, and that these pupils are the ones who arguably benefit the most from it (Chan & Chan, 2009; Drew & Pedersen, 2010; Rinehart, 1999). In the study by Uthman (2002), children who were initially anxious became "so willing to help each other during rehearsals that they lost much of their anxiety about reading out aloud" (Uthman, 2002, p. 56). Drew and Pedersen (2010) found that a group of struggling lower secondary EFL learners who worked intensively with a RT adaptation of the fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin*, gradually became more and more at ease with their reading. One pupil who had initially been the most reluctant to read aloud ultimately became the most active and leading participant in the group.

Pupils in L1 contexts, especially at the primary level have benefitted both cognitively and affectively from RT participation. Studies have shown that pupils improve reading fluency (Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 1999; Tyler & Charard, 2000), accuracy (Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Samuels, 1997), and reading comprehension (Martinez et al., 1999). Pupils acquire more positive attitudes to reading aloud, and reading in general, and increase their confidence to read aloud (Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Uthman, 2002).

Similar results have been found in studies on RT in EFL contexts. For example, Myrset (2014) found that 6th grade EFL pupils in Norway improved their reading fluency, word recognition and pronunciation when working with RT scripts. By audio-recording both rehearsals and performances, Myrset was able to measure and quantify progress in terms of fluency and accuracy of reading. Adopting the same approach as Myrset, but with older EFL learners in Norway, Næss (2016) recorded similar gains in accuracy and fluency. In the studies by both Myrset and Næss, the participants worked with pre-written RT scripts, but also created their own scripts, thus making the link from reading to writing (Krashen, 1984).

Affective gains were recorded among lower secondary EFL pupils in studies by Drew and Pedersen (2010; 2012). Pupils increased their confidence and became more positive to reading aloud and reading in general. In a study by Drew and Pedersen (2012), pupils became so engaged in preparing their RT scripts that almost all of them were willing to stay behind after school for extra practice with the teacher prior to performance.

Although RT has numerous benefits, there are practical and logistical challenges (Drew, 2018). For example, it is important that teachers choose appropriate texts, both in terms of interest and level of difficulty. In some cases, teachers may have to adapt texts into RT form, which may be time-consuming. There are also physical challenges of finding rooms/spaces where different groups can practise texts without disturbing each other and revealing the content of their texts before performance. Because of these different locations, the teacher will physically be on the move from one group to another and will need to decide whether some groups will need more of his/her attention during rehearsals than others.

## INDIVIDUAL READING EXPERIENCES

This section concerns the role and importance of individual reading for the development of literacy. In this context, individual reading refers to pupils reading extensively large numbers of books and other longer texts which they themselves have chosen to read independently and silently with a focus on meaning (Day & Bamford, 1998).

Through extensive reading, scholars have argued, pupils develop their language, vocabulary, and writing skills (Barrs, 2004; Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Krashen, 2004), supported by research on the benefits of extensive reading programmes, both on written and oral language skills (for example, Elley & Mangubai, 1983; Elley, 1991; Grabe, 2009). When pupils are able to choose what to read on the basis of their interests, a further outcome, in addition to benefitting their oral language and literacy skills, is increased motivation to read, thus creating a positive cycle of reading leading to increased amounts of reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Krashen, 2004).

One of the strongest advocates of extensive reading for decades has been Krashen (1984; 1992; 2004): "Reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammatical competence, and the only way we become good spellers" (Krashen, 2004, p. 37). Scholars such as Krashen (1992; 2004) and Grabe (2009) refer to the overwhelming evidence of extensive reading on numerous aspects of literacy, including vocabulary, grammatical competence, reading comprehension, and writing style.

In spite of the evidence showing clear benefits of extensive reading, Grabe (2009) reports on relatively few schools and teachers practising it. In order for pupils to read literature extensively that interests them and at their level of reading proficiency, schools face the challenge of investing in large numbers of books to ensure their easy availability. Furthermore, teachers may be reluctant to assign time for extensive reading in classrooms when faced with a limited number of lessons at their disposal. They may also be reluctant because of the relatively passive role they assume when a class of pupils are all reading silently during a lesson. As Dean (2003, p. 33) puts it: "Silent reading is probably the least accountable activity that an English teacher can conduct."

Nevertheless, the degree to which a teacher is active or passive is no indication of what or how much pupils are learning. For Atwell (1998, p. 34), there was no doubt about prioritising silent reading in class:

> My students taught me that they loved to read. They showed me that in-school reading, like in-school writing, could actually do something for them; that the ability to read for pleasure and personal meaning, like writing ability, is not a gift or talent. It comes with the ability to choose, books to choose among, time to read, and a teacher who is a reader. Finally, I learned that selecting one's own books and reading them in school is not a luxury. It is the wellspring of student literacy and literary appreciation.

## APPROACHES THAT INCORPORATE BOTH SHARED AND INDIVIDUAL READING EXPERIENCES

### The Early Years Literacy Programme

One literacy-oriented programme that incorporates opportunities for shared and individual reading experiences is the Early Years Literacy Programme (Hill & Crevola, 1999), designed in Australia to promote literacy at the primary school level. Although created for learners in an L1 setting, the programme has successfully been adapted to L2 educational contexts (Drew, 2009; Charboneau, 2016). Reading large numbers of books, both in groups and individually, is a central feature of the programme. The Wings series of graded readers, comprising 26 ability levels with 10-15 books in each level, is the basis for the reading in groups.

Classrooms in the programme are organised in the form of learning centres, including a reading centre, a writing centre, and a teacher centre (Drew, 2009). Pupils are placed in homogeneous groups based on their reading level at any given time and rotate from one learning centre to another during a typical lesson, spending about 10-15 minutes at each. The teacher centre is where they experience shared reading in each lesson, sharing their reading with each other and the teacher. The pupils in each group read the same book from the Wings series at any given time before moving on to another book at the same level or progressing to books at the next level. At the teacher centre, the pupils take it in turns to read aloud parts of the book to the teacher, who monitors their reading fluency and accuracy, as well as checking comprehension. In this way, the teacher pays attention to each pupil's reading in each lesson.

The EYLP also incorporates time and opportunities for silent individual reading as a standard key practice (Drew, 2009; Charboneau, 2016). Pupils are given the opportunity to read self-chosen books at the reading centre for 10 to 15 minutes in each session. School libraries are expected to be well-stocked with books that pupils can borrow for individual reading (Drew, 2009). While the graded readers are read on the basis of the pupils' reading ability at any given stage of their development within the programme, and not because the pupils have chosen them, the reading learning centre provides them with the opportunity to choose books to read out of interest. The combination of the graded readers and multiple self-chosen books results in pupils in the programme reading a plethora of books.

Research on the EYLP in its country of origin, Australia, has shown that the programme is highly beneficial for pupils' literacy development (Hill & Crevola, 1999). Impressed by its results in Australia, a limited number of schools have adapted the approach in both L1 and EFL lessons in Norway. For example, in a case study of a 5th grade class using the EYLP in English lessons in a Norwegian school (Charboneau, 2016), the teacher commented that her pupils had become more accurate and fluent readers and that their reading comprehension and word recognition skills had improved. They had also become more confident readers. The teacher highlighted the fact that the pupils were especially enthusiastic and engaged at the teacher station, where each pupil had to read and participate and "the teacher was able to draw everyone into the conversation" (Charboneau, 2016, p. 344). In another study (Drew, 2009), the language skills of 57 3rd and 4th grade pupils in an EYLP school were compared with 58 peers in two control schools using Cambridge Young Learners Starters tests. The pupils were tested in different skills (listening, reading/writing and oral skills) on two occasions over a period of three semesters to monitor their progress. The pupils in the EYLP school made greater progress in all three tests than those in the control schools.

Finally, some studies have focussed specifically on gains in writing by pupils in the EYLP. In a longitudinal study of pupils' EFL writing from 4th to 6th grade, Drew (2010, p. 220) found that the pupils' writing was "in many respects mirrored in the written language of the books that functioned as their main source of written language input". In another study, Larsen (2016) compared the fluency and grammatical and lexical complexity in the writing of 43 7th grade EFL pupils in an EYLP school with 43 pupils in two control schools. All the pupils in the study were given the same timed writing task. The EYLP pupils scored higher than those in the control groups in all measures of fluency (for example, word count and T-unit length) and all measures of complexity (for example, ratio of subordinate clauses, higher degree of noun phrase modification, and more verb, noun and adjective

types). The superior writing results of the EYLP pupils were attributed to the greater amount of reading they had undertaken.

Although the number of schools implementing the EYLP in EFL contexts is on the increase, this number is relatively small (Charboneau, 2016). Implementing the EYLP requires considerable commitment on the part of schools and teachers and teachers who are well-versed in how the model works from a practical, organisational, and educational point of view. It also requires schools to invest in large numbers of classroom sets of graded readers and other books.

## Reading and Writing Workshops

Another literacy-oriented programme in which shared and individual reading experiences play an integral role, in this case among lower secondary school pupils, is Reading and Writing Workshops (Graves, 1991). A Reading and Writing Workshop is a structured and organised approach to literacy development that has primarily been employed in English L1 schools in the US (Atwell, 1998). Four basic principles of the workshop are pupils' self-choice of reading materials, sharing reading with others (especially peers and the teacher), self-choice of writing assignments, and sharing writing with others (Graves, 1991).

One of the leading proponents of Reading and Writing Workshops is Atwell (1998), who decided to break totally with traditional mainstream teaching practices, which she considered did not help individual pupils fulfil their potential. This break happened when Atwell encountered a junior high school male pupil who could barely read and write. After finding out that the boy's main interest was the sea, she acquired a number of books for him about the sea, including *Kon-Tiki* and *Survive the Savage Sea*. The boy initially struggled to read the books, but persisted: "All that fall and winter he took my breath away as I watched him break through to meaning and teach himself to read – as he moved his finger and lips, tracing each word, then finally abandoned pointing when it got in the way of his sheer pleasure in the stories" (Atwell, 1998, p. 7). The content of his writing was also about the sea. By the end of the school year the boy had made considerable progress with both his reading and writing, an experience that motivated Atwell to adopt the approach with all of her pupils.

Typical workshop sessions, as practised by Atwell, are organised in different units of varying lengths of time. Pupils are provided with time for independent reading and writing, but also the opportunity to share their reading and writing with others by informing their peers about what they are reading and writing, thus integrating written and oral language (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987). However, an integral part of each 90-minute workshop session also involves two shared reading aloud experiences involving the teacher and the whole class. The first, usually the initial activity and lasting about five minutes, is the teacher reading aloud a poem and discussing it with the class. The second, which usually takes place towards the end of a session and lasts about 10 minutes, is the teacher reading aloud from a book or short story. These shared whole-class reading aloud experiences both increase pupils' familiarisation and awareness of different forms of literature and inspire them to read individually (Atwell, 1998).

The Reading and Writing Workshops provide pupils with long sessions of silent individual reading as an integral part of their organisation. The classrooms themselves, in addition to the school libraries, contain shelves full of different titles (Atwell, 1998). An extremely important principle is that pupils choose what to read. In addition to a standard individual reading slot of approximately 20

minutes in each workshop session, pupils continue reading their books at home for 30 minutes each evening as homework. They write reading journals to the teacher about what they are reading and receive written comments from the teacher about their journal entries. They keep records of their reading and sometimes have individual conferences with the teacher about their reading. Moreover, the teacher holds regular mini-lessons in four broad categories:

1. Procedures, rules and routines for workshops

2. Issues of literary craft

3. Issues of written conventions

4. Strategies of good readers

In the *Issues of literary craft* and *Strategies of good readers* mini-lessons, the teacher may address topics such as genres, authors' styles and techniques, individual authors, literary works, schema theory and reading processes, and strategies for fluent reading (Atwell, 1998).

Atwell (1998) willingly shares her reading *territories* with her pupils, namely her favourite books, genres, and authors. She expects her pupils to define their reading territories and share them with others. A typical pupil in her class reads and records approximately 25-30 texts in different genres in a junior high school year. One pupil's list of 28 texts included Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Alice Hoffman's *Practical Magic*, Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World*, Joan Brady's *God on a Harley*, and Anne Tyler's *Searching for Caleb* (Atwell, 1998). Inspired by their reading and that of their peers and the teacher, pupils write texts in different genres throughout the year and keep records of the texts they have written.

The only known study where the main principles of Reading and Writing Workshops have been adapted to an EFL context is by Vatnaland (2016), spanning a whole school year in an 8th grade EFL class in Norway. The pupils had access to a wide range of books both in class and in the school library. They were able to choose what to read and also what to write. They shared their reading and writing with each other and the teacher. As with Atwell (1998), they received instruction on aspects of reading and writing through mini-lessons, for example on how to become more fluent readers and strategies they could use while reading. The study showed that the pupils' reading and writing improved considerably during the year, their attitudes towards reading became more positive, and their motivation to read increased. In their reading journals, they were able to reflect more and more on the content of their reading. The pupils especially appreciated the different way lessons were organised from what they were used to and that they were able to choose what to read and write.

As with the EYLP, those implementing Reading and Writing Workshops face practical and financial challenges. Teachers need to be committed to the model, as was Atwell (1998), to be familiar with how it works, and need to organise lessons and classrooms according to the model's principles. Schools also need to be willing to invest in large numbers of books for classroom and school libraries.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper has been to explore the role and importance of shared and individual reading experiences in EFL learners' literacy development. Shared reading experiences benefit EFL learners' literacy development in multiple ways, both cognitively and affectively. Texts come alive when they

are read aloud to learners, who develop their story grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills (Céron, 2014). Being read aloud to is a powerful motivator to read individually (Krashen, 2004). When participating in Readers Theatre, pupils are at times both listeners and readers. RT helps them to become more fluent and accurate readers (Myrset, 2014; Næss, 2016). When given the task of creating their own texts, RT helps pupils to develop their writing (Myrset, 2014). Moreover, RT increases pupils' self-confidence and motivation to read (Drew & Pedersen, 2010; 2012), which are important for successful language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). The benefits of reading aloud and RT arguably outweigh the challenges involved for teachers, such as familiarising themselves with a text to read aloud, or the physical and logistical challenges of practising RT in class.

Individual reading also benefits EFL learners in multiple ways, both cognitively and affectively. Through large amounts of extensive reading of literature in which they are interested, learners become more fluent readers, while also acquiring vocabulary, grammar, and formal aspects of the language through their reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004). What they gain through reading is reflected in the improved quality of their writing (Krashen, 1984). Their motivation to read increases through being able to choose what to read (Grabe, 2009). Their literacy is enhanced by reading more and more. As with shared reading experiences, the benefits of individual extensive reading seem to outweigh the challenges involved, for example the cost of investing in large numbers of books.

Although the shared and individual reading practices addressed in this paper have existed for hundreds of years, they seem just as relevant today. In fact, in the digital era where children and teenagers spend a great deal of time in front of computer screens reading digital texts, especially hypertext (Kern, 2015), these practices may be more important than ever. Of course, whole books can now be read digitally, so there need not be a conflict between reading and digital technology per se. However, the Internet is nowadays a major source of reading (Kern, 2015), and reading hypertext on the Internet is not the same as reading the types of literature discussed above. There therefore seems to be a case for providing EFL pupils with the opportunity to experience shared and individual experiences of literature. A balance needs to be found between, for example, the often excessive time spent on using textbooks in EFL lessons (Charboneau, 2012; Hellekjær, 2007), and time for the shared and individual reading experiences in focus here. These shared and individual reading experiences in EFL classrooms create increased target language input, which has been found lacking, for example, in the Swedish classrooms of Henry's (2014) study. Through shared and individual reading experiences, EFL learners will be exposed to a great deal of literature and be part of a literary tradition that has lasted for centuries, and which they will hopefully carry on.

The logical relationship between shared and individual reading is that shared reading inspires individual reading. This is what happens when children first encounter literature through *storytime*. Parents or other adults read aloud to children, but children eventually want to read on their own (Barton, 2007). This is what happened to Daniel Pennac's class of pupils, who were inspired to read individually after Pennac read a novel aloud to them in class (Pennac, 1994). The experience transformed them from being demotivated and disillusioned with their mother tongue French lessons to suddenly regaining their enthusiasm to read. This is what happened to pupils who have experienced RT in L1 and L2 classrooms (Cohen, 2011; Millin & Rinehart, 1999). Thus, providing shared reading

experiences is a way of instilling the love of literature in pupils and sowing the seeds of making them life-long readers.

With regard to practical teaching considerations, shared reading experiences outside of the EYLP and Reading and Writing Workshops can fit into teaching schedules at different times and for different periods of time that the teacher considers suitable. In this way they are highly flexible. A teacher can read aloud to a class, for example, as part of a lesson, for a whole lesson, or for several lessons. Teachers can read aloud to pupils of all ages in primary and lower secondary school, and to even older learners. Motives for reading aloud may be, for example, to introduce pupils to a new genre or author, or to provide them with an inspiring and motivating reading experience. RT is also flexible in that it can be used with different age groups, with pupils of different ability levels, and for different durations of time, from one to multiple lessons. It can be used so that it fits in smoothly with the teaching schedule and themes pupils may be focusing on at a given time. For example, in a study by Myrset (2014), pupils eagerly wrote and performed their own RT Christmas stories towards the end of the autumn semester. Alternatively, it may simply be a way of providing a totally new and inspiring reading experience.

If schools adopt the EYLP or Reading and Writing Workshop approaches, time for shared and individual reading, in addition to other literacy-promoting activities, is incorporated into the structure of the programme. However, these two approaches pervade the entire way teaching is structured and organised when used in L1 or L2 contexts. Teachers and schools who use these programmes thus need to be totally committed to them, as some schools are. Other schools may be wary of such a commitment. Nevertheless, even if schools do not use these approaches in their totality, allocating time for pupils to read individually in lessons is something teachers can nevertheless prioritise. If teachers allow pupils to read silently and individually in lessons, they are signalling to them that this is an important and valuable activity.

The fruits of shared and individual reading experiences manifest themselves in pupils' writing, as there is a close relationship between reading and writing (Krashen, 1984; 2004). Just as shared reading leads to individual reading, reading in general is a prerequisite for writing. The close link between reading and writing development is argued by scholars such as Barrs (2004) and Krashen (1992; 2004), who consider extensive reading as the major factor behind pupils' writing development. Studies of the effect of reading on writing in the EYLP support this claim (Drew, 2010; Larsen, 2016). Reading and Writing Workshops, as their very name suggests, alternate between reading and writing, the two interacting with each other in typical workshop sessions, with reading inspiring pupils to write (Atwell, 1998). Thus, individual and shared reading experiences are not only beneficial for reading development, but also for that of writing, and thus for pupils' literacy development.

It should be emphasised that the principles involved in the shared and individual reading experiences explored here are equally applicable to works of literature as they are to other kinds of texts. Furthermore, while the focus has been on L2 learners at the primary and lower secondary school level, these same principles and experiences apply to older L2 learners and to L1 pupils of different ages. Firstly, in terms of shared reading experiences, it is a powerful and inspiring experience for pupils to hear works of literature being read aloud in class. For me personally, the most inspiring experience of my school days was when our English teacher read aloud Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* over several lessons to his class of 15-year-olds. Hemingway's voice came alive in class through the teacher's oral reading of this classic novel and one could hear a pin drop in the

classroom. It was a similar experience for Daniel Pennac's pupils in their French L1 lessons (Pennac, 1994). Works of literature, such as *The Old Man and the Sea* or poems, can also be performed as RT. For example, *The Old Man and the Sea* could be divided into different parts among groups in a class. Each group focuses on practising and performing one part of the novel as RT, but collectively they read aloud the whole novel in class.

Secondly, in terms of individual reading experiences, teachers can ensure that classrooms and school libraries are stocked with works of literature, as was the case in Atwell's (1998) Reading and Writing Workshops. The inspiration of hearing a work of literature read aloud can motivate pupils to read individually more works by the same author, as happened in Daniel Pennac's class (Pennac, 1994). By increasing the amount of literature they read individually, pupils are likely to develop their literary appreciation skills, and their reading and writing proficiency (Krashen, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

The rationale for hereby focusing on the shared and individual reading experiences addressed in this paper is that, in spite of their age-old traditions, and in spite of research showing that they have clear benefits for pupils' literacy development, they are not mainstream practices in schools today, either in L1 or L2 teaching. Although the EYLP is an approach to literacy that accommodates shared and individual reading practices as standard, it is only practised by a limited number of schools in L1 literacy education, and even fewer in L2 literacy education (Charboneau, 2016). The same applies to Reading and Writing Workshops, which are only known to have been practised and researched in one EFL environment (Vatnaland, 2016). The teacher reading aloud, RT, and extensive reading are also not mainstream practices in school, despite the evidence of their benefits for literacy development (Drew & Pedersen, 2012; Barrs, 2004; Grabe, 2009).

The contribution of this paper has been to show that these shared and individual literature reading experiences, in spite of the challenges they involve, can benefit EFL learners' literacy development, both cognitively and affectively, by providing large amounts of classroom target language input. A language-rich environment can be created in the classroom through whole texts, whether it be texts read aloud to pupils, practised and performed as RT, or read silently and individually. This input can contribute to making English lessons more meaningful, stimulating and educational, complementing the large amounts of extramural English to which pupils in primary and lower secondary school are exposed (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Although these pupils can benefit separately from either shared or individual reading classroom experiences, it is the combination of the two, because of the logical relationship between the two (namely, shared reading inspires individual reading), which is arguably the most effective and productive. It is the understanding that EFL pupils would benefit most from the combination of the two in terms of their literacy development that brings a new perspective to EFL teaching. What pupils learn in school, as well as what they learn outside school, can contribute to equipping them with the language and literacy skills necessary to cope with the demands of living in societies where proficiency in English is an advantage, and often a necessity.

# REFERENCES

Albright, L. K. & Ariail, M. (2005). Tapping the potential of teacher read-alouds in middle schools. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *48*(7), 582-591.

Allen, J. (2000). *Yellow brick roads: Shared and guided paths to independent reading 4-12*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, I. A. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers.* Washington DC: National Institute of Education.

Atwell, N. (1998). *In the middle: New understandings about writing, reading and learning.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Barrs, M. (2004). The reader in the writer. In T. Grainger (ed.), *The RoutledgeFarmer reader in language and literacy* (pp. 267-276). London: Routledge Farmer.

Barton, D. (2007). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Black, A. & Stave, A. M. (2007). *A comprehensive guide to readers theatre: Enhancing fluency and comprehension in middle school and beyond.* Newark: International Reading Association.

Cambourne, B. & Turbill, J. (1987). *Coping with chaos.* Rozelle, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association.

Cerón, C.N. (2014). The effect of story read-alouds on children's foreign language development. *Gist Education and Learning Research Journal*, *8*, 83-98.

Chan, A. & Chan, S. (2009). Promoting assessment for learning through Readers' Theatre. *IATEFL Young Learner and Teenage Special Interest Group, 2*(09), 40-50.

Charboneau, R. A. (2012). Approaches and practices relating to the teaching of EFL reading at the Norwegian primary level. In A. Hasselgreen, I. Drew & B. Sørheim (eds.), *The young language learner: Research-based insights into teaching and learning* (pp. 51-69). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Charboneau, R. A. (2016). *Approaches to English as a foreign language (EFL) reading instruction in Norwegian primary schools.* PhD thesis. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.

Coger, L. I. & White, M. R. (1967). *A dramatic approach to literature: Readers theatre handbook.* Glenview, Ill: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Cohen, J. (2011). Building fluency through the repeated reading method. *English Teaching Forum*, *3*, 20-27.

Day, R. R. & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dean, G. (2003). *Teaching reading in secondary schools.* London: David Fulton Publishers.

Drew, I. (2009). Using the early years literacy programme in primary EFL Norwegian classrooms. In M. Nikolov (ed.), *Early learning of modern foreign languages: Processes and outcomes* (pp. 108-120). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Drew, I. (2010). A longitudinal study of young language learners' development in written English. *Norsk Lingvistisk Tidskrift*, Årgang 28, 193-226.

Drew, I. (2018). Reading in the second language classroom: Consideration of first language approaches in second language contexts. *Acta Didactica Norge, 12*(2), 1-19.

Drew, I. & Pedersen, R. R. (2010). Readers theatre: A different approach to English for struggling readers. *Acta Didactica Norge, 4*(1), 1-18.

Drew, I. & Pedersen, R. R. (2012). Readers theatre: A group reading approach to texts in mainstream classes. In A. Hasselgreen, I. Drew & B. Sørheim (eds.), *The young language learner: Research-based insights into teaching and learning* (pp. 71-84).Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Drew, I. & Sørheim, B. (2016). *English teaching strategies*, 3rd edition (1st edition 2004). Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget.

Elley, W. B. (1991). Acquiring literacy in a second language: The effect of book-based programs. *Language Learning, 41*(3), 375-411.

Elley, W. B. & Mangubai, F. (1983). The impact of reading on second language learning. *Reading Research Quarterly, X1X (1)*, 53-67.

Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Graves, D. (1991). *Build a literate classroom: The reading/writer's companion.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hellekjær, G. O.  (2005). *The acid test: Does upper secondary EFL instruction effectively prepare Norwegian students for the reading of English textbooks at colleges and universities.* PhD thesis. Oslo: University of Oslo.

Hellekjær, G. O. (2007). Reading: From a forgotten to a basic skill. *Språk og Språkundervisning, 2*(7), 26-29.

Henry, A. (2013). Digital games and ELT: Bridging the authenticity gap. In E. Ushioda (ed.), *International perspectives on motivation: Language learning and professional challenges* (pp. 133-155). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Henry, A. (2014). Swedish students' beliefs about learning English in and outside of school. In D. Lasagabaster, A. Doiz & J.M. Sierra (eds.), *Motivation and foreign language learning: From theory to practice* (pp. 93-166). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hill, P. W. & Crevola, C. A. (1999). Key features of a whole-school, design approach to literacy teaching in schools. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities, 4*(3), 5-11.

Holme, R. (2004). *Literacy: An introduction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Kern, R. (2015). *Language, literacy and technology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. D. (1984). *Writing: Research, theory and applications.* New York: Oxford.

Krashen, S. D. (1992). *Fundamentals of language education.* Chicago: SRA.

Krashen, S. D. (1999). *Three arguments against whole language and why they are wrong.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading.* Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann.

Larsen, L. (2016). *Fluency and complexity in the written English of Norwegian 7th graders: A comparative study of pupils in the early years literacy program (EYLP) with those in a textbook-based approach.* MA thesis. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.

Martinez, M., Roser, N., & Strecker, S. (1999). I never thought I could be a star: A readers theatre ticket to fluency. *The Reading Teacher*, *52*, 326-333.

Mercer, N. (2004). Development through dialogue. In T. Grainger (ed.), *The RoutledgeFarmer reader in language and literacy* (pp. 121-137). London: Routledge Farmer.

Millin, S. K. & Rinehart S. D. (1999). Some of the benefits of readers theatre participation for second grade Title 1 students. *Reading Research and Instruction, 39,* 71-88.

Myrset, A. (2014). *A case study of the benefits and challenges of readers theatre in a 6th grade Norwegian EFL class.* MA thesis. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.

Næss, M. S. (2016). *A case study of readers theatre with minority background adult learners of English in Norway.* MA thesis. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.

Pennac, D. (1994). *Reads like a novel.* London: Quartet.

Rinehart, S. D. (1999). "Don't think for a minute that I'm getting up there": Opportunities for readers' theatre in a tutorial for children with reading problems. *Reading Psychology, 20,* 71-89.

Samuels, S. J. (1997). The method of repeated readings. *The Reading Teacher, 50*, 376-381.

Sheger, C. & Renandya, W. A. (2009). Teacher read-alouds in an ESL context. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 6/4, 23-38.

Shepard, A. (2004). *Readers on stage.* Los Angeles: Shepard Publications.

Shepard, A. (2005). *Stories on stage.* Los Angeles: Shepard Publications.

Sundqvist, P. & Sylvén, L. K. (2016). *Extramural English in teaching and learning*. London: Macmillan Palgrave.

Tyler, B. & Charard, D. J. (2000). Using readers theatre to foster fluency in struggling readers: A twist on the repeated reading strategy. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, I 6*(2), 163-168.

Trousdale, A. M. & Harris, V. J. (1993). Missing links in literary response: Group interpretation of literature. *Children's Literature in Education*, *24*, 195-207.

Uthman, L. E. (2002). Readers theatre: An approach to reading with more than a touch of drama. *Teaching PreK-8, 32*(6), 56-57.

Vatnaland H. M. (2016). *Reading and writing workshops in the EFL Classroom: A longitudinal study of the workshop-based method in a Norwegian 8th grade EFL class.* MA thesis. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. London: Harvard University Press.

Wadsworth, R. B. (2008). Using read alouds in today's classrooms: Read alouds benefit children of all ages and in all subjects. *Leadership Compass*, *5*(3), 1-3. Downloaded 2020-03-10 from https://readtothem.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LC2008v5n3a4.

# Tema: Litteraturdidaktik