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**Boosting achievement through reading for pleasure – Exeter College**

The library shelves for less confident readers in the main learning resource centre at Exeter College exemplify the staff approach to encouraging learners to pick up a book to help their studies. They are colour coded for different subjects and have a good variety of fiction and non-fiction. The bookcase full of English language reads and Quick Reads was selected by ESOL learners for its accessible design and there are advice leaflets which have been translated into other languages by students.

They have been using the Reading Agency’s Reading Ahead programme since 2013. This invites participants to pick six reads of their choice (short texts such as poems and magazine articles as well as books) and record, rate and review them in a small print reading diary in order to get incentives along the way and a certificate on completion. Library staff work with ESOL students, those on vocational courses and now with some taking GCSE English. They also use the Reading Passport, a scheme from the South Western Regional Library Service and Literature Works, which encourages higher ability readers. In future years they may combine the two to provide a pathway for more confident readers.

Beth Bramble, formerly a youth worker, takes quite a specific approach to reading with her learners at Entry 3 in Functional Skills most of whom have some kind of additional need. After she has read aloud to them for a few minutes at the start of the class, they each settle down to 15 minutes’ silent reading of their own choice of text while she does the same. The impact is noticeable: noise levels drop, learners become calmer, and they are definitely more focused during the rest of the lesson.

One of her students, Dale, had never read a book before, *“Reading gets easier as you understand more. Don’t read something you don’t like – read what you want.”*

Beth really appreciates the support of the library in running Reading Ahead.  *“It was good to hear that they can read anything to take part. It made it seem less of a big deal and they’re not being set up to fail.”* However she doesn’t encourage digital reading, feeling that her students will get distracted if they are reading a book online and will interrupt themselves. Instead printed books become different and special.

Library staff have also helped Rachel Bourgoin, who teaches GCSE English and is aware that her students find the exam texts difficult to decode and dauntingly long: *“Reading Ahead has certainly been of benefit to a couple of my struggling GCSE students and has started them reading outside lessons. Initially, just entering the LRC was daunting and they wanted encouragement and help to find appropriate books.”*

ESOL tutor Mark Rawlins is equally enthusiastic about using reading for pleasure with his learners, most of whom are Level 2*. “I get them all to sign up to Reading Ahead – it will do them good! It definitely improves their vocabulary. I give them a notebook for listing new words which they come across as they read. If they are surrounded by texts they don’t understand it makes them frightened of the written word and more vulnerable. It’s also important for them to read so they see the difference between the spoken and written word.”*

Mark feels that graded readers work well as the students can see their progress and feedback about the books to the rest of the class. He has established a noticeboard outside his classroom for reviews which also features students being given their Reading Ahead certificates by broadcaster and writer Tony Hawks.

Meanwhile librarian Cathie Strover, who works with older ESOL learners, notices that they are more interested in practical texts related to their everyday lives such as TV listings and leaflets about phone tariffs. Inga, from Poland, a keen reader in her own language, started with graded readers but is now reading Harry Potter in English having previously read it in Polish. *“Reading Ahead motivated me to read an English book. It wasn’t easy at the beginning. Now I’ve got confidence to read full-sized books. I try to understand the plot without worrying about single words. I’ve still got a lot to do but as the beginning is the hardest, it’ll be easier with every book. Reading Ahead is a great opportunity to prove that you can! I recommend it to everyone!”*

Others are not so easily convinced. Baz, a Kurdish student, refused to pick up a book in English from September until February. When he did he had to admit that his tutor was right in that it helped his writing. Another ESOL student, Renate, found it a very special moment when she could read a book to her children in English for the first time.

**Top Tips**

* Get students involved in planning space and displays in the library so that they take ownership and responsibility.
* Use clear coloured labels to flag up subject areas rather than the Dewey catalogue system.
* Don’t assume that digital is best – books and a print reading diary can be a break from the rest of people’s lives spent looking at screens.
* Audio books are particularly useful for those not used to using Roman script – familiarises them with the content before they tackle the words on the page.
* Start a book blog and invite students to post their views on popular reads.
* Allow silent reading during class time so that everyone joins in and focuses their mind on a book.