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# A Study into the Feasibility and Effects of Reading Extended Authentic Discourse in the Beginning German Language Classroom

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Despite efforts to integrate all levels of foreign language instruction, reading remains on the periphery of beginning language study. Reading extended texts is outcast to an even greater degree. This article addresses this issue by presenting the design, results, and implications from a study involving beginning college-level language students who read a 142-page romance novel in their first semester of German. During the semester, the treatment group ( $N = 27$ ) followed the same standard first-semester syllabus as the comparison group ( $N = 32$ ), but replaced all standard reading assignments in the textbook with daily in-class readings of the romance novel. The effects of the treatment were assessed on the basis of the two groups' results on (a) three departmental exams and (b) a pretest and posttest consisting of written recall protocols of 4 texts and vocabulary-related questions. A statistical analysis of these two measures yielded 2 central findings. First, students were able to read a full-length authentic text in the first semester. Second, the treatment group performed as well as the comparison group on the three department tests and the posttest, which runs counter to arguments that time spent reading in class adversely affects beginning language learners' second language development. Curricular and pedagogical implications of these findings are discussed.

AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE *STANDARDS FOR Foreign Language Learning* (1996)<sup>1</sup> and recent calls for curricular reform (e.g., Arens & Swaffar, 2000; Berman, 1996; Bernhardt & Berman, 1999; Byrnes, 2000; Dupuy, 2000; Swaffar, 1999), increased attention is being directed at improving the articulation and coherence within K-16 foreign language (FL) curricula. Central to these important proposals is an increased role for reading at the lower levels of instruction, particularly the reading of culturally authentic texts, defined here as materials written to be read by native

speakers of the language rather than materials written only to teach language. Therein, however, lies a potential problem. While second language (L2) reading research has indicated there are various reader-based factors besides L2 proficiency that have a significant effect on reading comprehension (readers' formal schemata: Barnett, 1989; Carrell, 1984a, 1984b, 1985; Lee & Riley, 1990; Riley, 1993; readers' content schemata: Bacon & Finneman, 1990; Carrell, 1984c; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Hammadou, 1991; Hudson, 1982; Lee, 1986; Roller & Matambo, 1992; Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979; and readers' strategy usage: Anderson, 1991; Barnett, 1988a, 1988b; Kern, 1989; Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Raymond, 1993), research has

also supported the intuitive belief of practitioners that L2 competence is a necessary precondition for successful L2 reading (e.g., Clarke, 1980; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993; Gass, 1989; Laufer, 1997; Lee & Schallert, 1997; Taillefer, 1996). As a result, reading authentic texts has made only minor inroads in the beginning L2 classroom.

Understandably, the idea of reading longer authentic texts in first-semester L2 classes is considered even further beyond the realm of possibilities. A closer examination of L2 reading research, however, reveals that the infeasibility of reading longer authentic texts with beginning adult students is more presumed than proven. In fact, researchers' findings about L2 reading that were collected under specific conditions with students who typically have had at least 1 year of college-level L2 study have often been generalized and interpreted as curricular dictates. For example, in the L2 reading research cited above, the texts used for assessing reading ability were relatively short (i.e., 250–600 words). Although the convenience of using shorter passages for research purposes must be acknowledged, the findings from such research cannot necessarily be considered applicable to all forms of L2 reading, particularly extensive L2 reading, defined here as the daily, prolonged reading of book-length texts for an extended period of time.

The dominant paradigm of reading research—individual students reading one or more short texts and being asked to recall, summarize, or provide multiple choice or cloze answers—both reflects and influences standard L2 classroom reading practices. Yet to be investigated is what happens when the premises of this dominant paradigm are challenged, when beginning students read in groups with multiple in-class activities that emphasize skill transfer and when that reading involves book-length narratives or textbooks.

This is not to say, however, that no research has been conducted on extensive L2 reading. Studies in English as a Second Language (ESL) on extensive reading (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Constantino, 1994; Elley, 1991; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Robb & Susser, 1989; Tudor & Hafiz, 1989) and narrow reading (Krashen, 1989; Lee, 1996; Parry, 1993), defined as a series of readings that are arranged around a shared topic and overlap in language as well as content, have recognized the benefits of being exposed to the semantic and thematic redundancy available through extended reading about one topic.

In support of introducing longer texts into the L2 curriculum, Swaffar and Bacon (1993) argue

that text length encourages adult students to use macrostrategies and cognitive abilities that they already are familiar with using from reading in their first language (L1). For instance, instead of focusing entirely on individual lexical and syntactic items, students reading a longer text can derive meaning by making connections between segments, episodes, and events in the text. Longer texts may also allow students to develop a greater sense of context. As Martino and Block (1992) state, readers begin to know what to expect from the author in a longer text; in short, a longer text "provides its own background" (p. 16) for the reader.

By providing its own background, a longer text then may be able to supply students with the information necessary to override their limited L2 proficiency. Hudson (1982) and Hammadou (1991) both contend that appropriate and suitable background knowledge can offset deficiencies that students have in L2. Students reading a longer text seem to overcome their limited proficiency by drawing on the recurring vocabulary, characters, themes, and contexts inherent in longer texts. In his recapitulation of the reading research of the past 25 years, Grabe (1991) sums up the advantages of reading extensively by stating that it can "build vocabulary and structural awareness, develop automaticity, enhance background knowledge, improve comprehension skills, and promote confidence and motivation" (p. 396).

This study examines these plausible but untried benefits of reading longer texts at early stages in language learning by comparing the traditional classroom emphasis on language production with an approach that emphasizes classroom activities centered on extensive reading and reading comprehension. In light of the dominant thinking on the feasibility of early reading, the first research question to answer was simply whether students would be able to read a long, unedited text in the first semester and determine whether time spent reading would disadvantage them in preparation for the standardized, departmental language tests that students in all sections of first-semester German were to take. The text selected to be read by the treatment group was a 142-page German romance novel.

If extensive reading of German proved feasible in the first semester, the second research question to answer would concern what students gleaned from reading on their own and in groups and how their performance compared with students following a more traditional first-semester

approach. Overall, this study explored the ways an early classroom emphasis on extensive reading affected students' general reading comprehension and language proficiency. In its exploration of previously untouched areas of L2 reading research, this study was intended as a contribution to a more constructive discourse on the teaching of reading in FL classrooms.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants and Procedures*

Participants were true beginners enrolled in first-semester German at the University of Texas at Austin in the Spring of 1997.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of comparable information related to language learning and demographics, two intact first-semester classes served as the treatment group ( $N = 27$ ), and three different intact classes constituted the comparison group ( $N = 32$ ). For the first 4 weeks of the semester, both groups followed the same standard syllabus that accompanied the textbook. Outside of class, students spent time completing exercises in a workbook that introduced grammatical and lexical information. Class time focused on using this newly learned information in a series of communicative activities to activate the students' knowledge of specific grammar and vocabulary.

During this time, all 59 participants were introduced to the following grammatical topics: present tense of regular and irregular verbs, nominative case, negation, imperative, pronouns, plural forms of nouns, and question words. In addition, they were to learn about 350 vocabulary items necessary to perform the following functions: talk about themselves, other people, and the classroom; greet and take leave of people; talk about likes and dislikes; describe the weather; identify and describe clothing and people; ask and answer basic questions. Students also practiced their pronunciation daily through a series of short exercises that focused on a new vowel or consonant sound each day.

The 59 participants had exposure to various written texts during these initial 4 weeks. They read eight short dialogues or texts ranging in length from 50 to 266 words. Whereas the dialogues consisted entirely of vocabulary familiar to the students, the texts contained several new words and phrases comprising approximately 10% of the text. All of the reading passages were written by the textbook authors and were followed by content questions.

Fifteen different, authentic realia also appeared in the book during the first 4 weeks and served as supplemental information to reinforce the functional, topical, grammatical, or lexical goal of that unit. They ranged in length from a 5-word holiday greeting card to a 150-word advertisement for a summer vacation home on the North Sea coast. In general, students read them in class for gist, often in pairs or groups, and then completed the accompanying comprehension task.

### *Instrumentation*

At the end of the 4th week of instruction, all students completed a 50-minute departmental exam on the material covered to that point in the semester.<sup>3</sup> On the day after the departmental test, the students completed a pretest consisting of four short texts and an accompanying set of tasks based on the four texts. This first departmental exam and the pretest served to reveal whether the two groups had equivalent levels of proficiency at the time the treatment began.

During the final week of the semester, 10 weeks after the pretest had been administered, the students performed the same tasks—this time as a posttest. The four texts on the pretest and posttest represented four different genres: an advertisement, a newspaper editorial, an excerpt from a romance novel, and a culture note from a language textbook. The central characteristics of the four texts are summarized in Table 1.

The romance novel excerpt and the culture note served to reveal how the treatment group

TABLE 1  
Profile of Texts on Pretest and Posttest

Text	Genre	Length	Average Sentence Length	Miscellaneous
1	advertisement	94 words	8.5 words	Visual aid
2	newspaper editorial	158 words	11.3 words	Ironic tone
3	romance novel excerpt	198 words	9 words	81% of verbs in imperfect tense
4	culture note	162 words	16 words	Longer sentences

and the comparison group performed on the text types that were similar to their respective readings during the semester and text types that tended to appeal to audiences similar to those in the United States. The newspaper editorial is also a genre common to both countries, but this particular editorial reflected a noticeably German perspective. The advertisement, although a common genre, lacked several visual features characteristic of American ads and featured a product not usually advertised in entertainment publications in the United States.

In addition to the four texts, the pretest and posttest contained two different tasks that students were to perform for each of the four texts: writing a recall of the text in English and completing two vocabulary-related exercises based on the text. After reading the text and writing a recall protocol, the students saw each text two more times: once for each set of vocabulary-related questions. These questions fell into two sections. The first section, the Definition Test, required the students to define in English five underlined words or phrases in each text. The second section, the Functional Test, required them to explain in English the semantic or morphosyntactic significance of various words and phrases. This second section involved identifying the antecedent of a particular pronoun, indicating whether a specific adjective had a negative, neutral, or positive connotation, or characterizing a character's feelings toward a particular person or action.

During the study, both groups completed two more 50-minute, standardized departmental language exams that focused on the most recently learned material. The romance novel read by the treatment group was not included on these exams. The study ended with the posttest during the last week of the semester.

### *The Experimental Treatment*

In the class following the pretest and continuing until the last week of the 14-week semester, all students in all classes used the same syllabus. However, the treatment group modified its use of the standard syllabus by replacing all readings in the class textbook with the German romance novel that the students read in class during the remaining 10 weeks of the semester. The key pedagogical difference between the two groups was that the treatment group spent half of each class hour reading a novel, whereas the comparison group spent the entire hour practicing the grammar and vocabulary covered by the two de-

partmental examinations. Table 2 provides an overview of the research design.

Students in the treatment group were told that they would be reading the novel in place of textbook readings. They were not told that they represented an experimental section, that they were the only ones who were reading the novel, or that they differed in any way from the other first-semester classes. The fact that all students in the first semester continued to follow the same syllabus and that they all took the same tests seemed to reassure the students in the treatment group that reading the novel did not represent anything unusual.

The experimental treatment rested on two premises. First, most of the extensive reading would occur in class or in classroom pair and group work under the supervision of the instructor. Second, the reading would be guided by a series of tasks designed to draw on students' existing cognitive skills for the purpose of (a) recognizing major events and the textual language used to convey these events, (b) reproducing textual language both orally and in writing, and (c) ultimately analyzing the events and textual language for cultural implications (Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991).<sup>4</sup>

This application of extensive reading differed from the standard approach to extensive reading as outlined in Day and Bamford (1998) in five distinct ways. First, there was no sustained silent reading during class time. In fact, because most of the reading was pair or group work, the 20 minutes of reading each day in class was perhaps the noisiest period of each lesson. Second, to maintain a workload consistent with the comparison group, 90% of the reading took place in class. Students spent time outside of class learning the material in the textbook. Third, students were not able to select which text to read, nor did they have the freedom to stop reading if the text failed to interest them. Every effort was made, however, to select a text that provided plenty of entertainment and intrigue to maintain students' interest over the course of the semester. Fourth, since the text read during the semester was an unedited, authentic romance novel, it did not conform to Day and Bamford's (1998) argument that all texts in an extensive reading program be easy or the equivalent of "*i* minus 1" (p. 91). On the contrary, the novel presented a challenge to the students who had been exposed to German for only 4 weeks when they started reading it. Finally, whereas Day and Bamford stated that in an extensive reading approach there should be "few or no follow-up exercises after reading" (p. 8), the

TABLE 2  
Overview of Research Design

The First 4 Weeks (Five Sections of First-Semester German)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•standard first-semester syllabus</li> <li>•20-minute quizzes on textbook chapters 1 and 2</li> <li>•first departmental 50-minute exam on chapters 1–3 at end of 4th week</li> <li>•precondition attitude survey and pretest on the day after the first exam</li> </ul>	
The Next 10 Weeks	
<p><i>The Treatment Group</i> (Two Sections of First-Semester German, <math>n = 27</math>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•30 minutes of non-reading communicative language practice each day based on assigned textbook materials</li> <li>•daily communicative reading and discussion of the 140-page novel for 20 minutes (1000–1500 words read daily)</li> <li>•daily group work, communicative exercises, four-skills practice</li> <li>•20-minute quizzes on textbook chapters 4, 6, and 7</li> <li>•second departmental exam on chapters 4–5</li> <li>•5-minute mini-oral and 10-minute oral exam</li> <li>•Three class visits by independent observer</li> </ul>	<p><i>The Comparison Group</i> (Three Sections of First-Semester German, <math>n = 32</math>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•35–45 minutes of non-reading communicative language practice each day based on assigned textbook materials</li> <li>•daily communicative interaction with written texts for 5–15 minutes (100–400 words read daily)</li> <li>•daily group work, communicative exercises, four-skills practice</li> <li>•20-minute quizzes on textbook chapters 4, 6, and 7</li> <li>•second departmental exam on chapters 4–5</li> <li>•5-minute mini-oral and 10-minute oral exam</li> <li>•Three class visits by independent observer</li> </ul>
The Final Week (Five Sections of First-Semester German)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•post-condition attitude survey and posttest</li> <li>•third departmental exam on chapters 6–8</li> </ul>	

novel in this study frequently provided the basis for classroom discussions, role plays, writing exercises, and grammatical exemplification. In other words, a conscious attempt was made to use the novel as one of the key components for language learning.

#### *The Novel*

The text that the students in the treatment group read is a popular novel entitled *Mit dem Sturm kam die Liebe* (With the Storm Came Love) by Marianne Andrau (1981). The novel is part of the monthly Baccara series, a staple at most German newsstands and generally directed at an adult female readership. Students read the book in its original German format without modification. As is the case of many of the novels of this kind in Germany, it was originally written in English and translated into German for wider distribution. Despite its non-German origin, the novel is still considered authentic because its intended audience was native German speakers.

The choice of a popular novel for this study was intentional. Because this novel was originally written for a North American audience, it contains a culturally familiar context and formulaic, predictable content that is especially accessible to Ameri-

can university students who are familiar with soap operas, romance films, and TV movies-of-the-week. As Swaffar (1991) notes, a text's familiarity "eases the cognitive load because the second or foreign language learner can anticipate ideas rather than rely exclusively on language to convey ideas" (p. 255).

The choice of a relatively long narrative was equally important. As mentioned earlier, L2 learners appear to benefit from being exposed to the semantic and contextual redundancy available through extended reading about one topic. Totalling 142 pages in length and containing roughly 40,000 words, the novel provided students the opportunity to become familiar with the characters, their behavior, the locations, and the language used to characterize these recurring images. Thus, although such a text would be considered difficult by more traditional readability formulae that rely on word count and sentence length, its cultural familiarity and narrow focus were major assets for the readers.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

This study followed the standard approach to classroom-based research by comparing one group's performance to another's, but it also ex-

amined each group's performance independently of the other to assess how students responded to their respective pedagogical treatment. In other words, between-group and within-group comparisons at the pretest and posttest served to ascertain the effectiveness of the instruction as experienced by each group.

Since both the first departmental exam and the pretest took place before the treatment began, data for the two groups on these two measures were subjected to a *t* test analysis to establish equivalent levels of proficiency and attitudes toward reading prior to the treatment.

The three 50-minute departmental exams were graded in groups of 2 to 4 by the instructors teaching the course. The course coordinator oversaw the grading and was available to solve any problems concerning the validity of an answer. The data from the departmental exams were then submitted to an analysis of variance (ANOVA) for group affiliation (comparison or treatment) with repeated measures on the dependent variables the departmental exams.

Evaluating the pretest and posttest required scoring two different sections separately: the written recall protocols and the vocabulary-related exercises.

Scoring the written recall protocols entailed counting the number of pausal units in each recall protocol. As defined by Bernhardt (1991), a pausal unit is "one that has a pause on each end of it during normally paced oral reading" (p. 208). She adds that "pausal unit endings are generally found at the end of a syntactically related unit such as 'the old man / was happy / above all / about the information / which he obtained / recently'" (p. 209). The interrater reliability across all four texts for establishing pausal units was .95.

The same two raters scored the written recalls from both the pretest and posttest and reported an interrater reliability of .97. In line with the

example set by Lee and Riley (1990), distortions and embellishments of the original text content were not counted because, on the one hand, the information was recalled incorrectly and, on the other hand, the information was not in the text itself. Paraphrases were allowed because the protocols were written in the participants' native language. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

The recall scores were submitted to an ANOVA for group affiliation (comparison or treatment) with repeated measures on the dependent variables total pretest and posttest recall scores. This analysis examined the interaction between group affiliation and the means on the recalls for the pretest and posttest.

Each response to the vocabulary-related exercises was scored as either right or wrong. One point was awarded for each correct response. Two non-native speakers with near-native fluency graded the responses. Interrater reliability was .92. These vocabulary scores were then submitted to an ANOVA for group affiliation (comparison or treatment) with repeated measures on the dependent variables total pretest and posttest vocabulary scores.

## RESULTS

The results are reported in the following order: pretreatment measures (first 50-minute departmental exam and pretest), 50-minute departmental exams administered during and following treatment, posttest recall scores, and posttest vocabulary scores.

### *Establishing Equivalent Proficiency Levels and Attitudes before Treatment*

As the last column of Table 3 indicates, *t* test analyses for the two groups' scores on the first departmental exam and the pretest indicated no

TABLE 3  
Descriptive Statistics and *p* Values for the First Departmental Exam and the Pretest Recall and Vocabulary Test Scores

Measurement	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
Pretest Recall	Comparison	32	23.63	13.45	.11
	Treatment	27	18.67	9.50	
Pretest Vocab	Comparison	22	7.86	4.91	.57
	Treatment	19	7.05	4.13	
First Dept. Exam	Comparison	32	84.16	9.21	.48
	Treatment	27	85.96	10.11	

Note. Two-tailed; *p* < .05.

TABLE 4  
Descriptive Statistics for Second and Third Departmental Exams

Measurement	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
2nd Dept. Exam	Comparison	32	81.19	7.21
	Treatment	27	82.74	8.98
3rd Dept. Exam	Comparison	32	77.28	11.90
	Treatment	27	80.29	11.56

significant difference between the two groups' reading ability (measured by the pretest recalls), vocabulary knowledge (measured by the pretest vocabulary exercises), and language proficiency (measured by the department exam), which indicated equivalent levels of ability at the time the instructional variation was induced.<sup>5</sup>

*Departmental Exam Scores during and after Treatment*

Descriptive statistics for the departmental exams administered during and after the treatment appear in Table 4. The equivalence noted above for the first exam of the semester persisted on the two subsequent tests. On the second exam, taken 9 weeks into the semester and 5 weeks into the experimental treatment, the treatment group had a mean score of 82.74 compared with the comparison group's mean of 81.19. The same pattern surfaced for the third departmental exam, administered during the last week of the semester after completion of the treatment.

The ANOVA for group affiliation (comparison or treatment) with repeated measures for the dependent variables revealed no significant interaction between group affiliation and test score (Table 5).

Having read extensively in class following a guided procedural treatment, the first-semester adult L2 students in the treatment group did not

demonstrate a measurable and statistically significant difference in language proficiency (as measured by the scores on the departmental written exams) when compared to the comparison group that followed a communicative approach that involved reading shorter, edited texts.

*Reading Comprehension after One Semester of Instruction*

As noted above, for the pretest and posttest, students wrote a recall protocol immediately after reading each of the four passages. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics of the number of pausal units recalled by the two groups for each of the four passages on the pretest and posttest. Of particular interest was whether there was a significant change within and between groups from the pretest to posttest.

Results for the ANOVA for group affiliation (comparison or treatment) with repeated measures for the dependent variables total pretest and posttest recall scores appear in Table 7. They revealed a significant within-subject effect ( $p < .05$ ) for gains made by both groups on recalls from the pretest to posttest. However, there was no significant within-subject effect for the interaction between the group affiliation and the change in recall scores from the pretest to the posttest ( $F = 0.90$ ,  $p = .335$ ). In addition, there was no significant between-subject effect for

TABLE 5  
Summary of Repeated Measures ANOVA on Departmental Exam Scores for the Group Affiliation Independent Variable

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Subjects					
Group	1	198.38	198.38	0.85	.361
Residual	57	13,323.83	233.75		
Within Subjects					
Dept. Exams	2	1,151.77	575.88	18.54	.000
Group × Dept. Exam	2	17.87	8.94	0.29	.751
Residual	114	3,541.51	31.07		

Note.  $n = 59$ ,  $p < .05$ ; sphericity assumption has been met.

TABLE 6  
Descriptive Statistics and  $p$  Values for Recalls on Pretest and Posttest

Text	Group	Test	$N$	Mean	$SD$	$p$
1 (ad)	Comparison	Pretest	31	7.29	4.67	.02
		Posttest	32	10.16	4.79	
	Treatment	Pretest	27	5.89	3.36	.03
		Posttest	27	8.22	4.08	
2 (editorial)	Comparison	Pretest	32	4.41	3.14	.000
		Posttest	32	8.18	4.73	
	Treatment	Pretest	26	3.89	2.50	.003
		Posttest	27	6.48	3.37	
3 (romance novel)	Comparison	Pretest	29	6.00	5.60	.009
		Posttest	30	10.03	5.86	
	Treatment	Pretest	24	4.38	2.98	.000
		Posttest	25	11.20	5.50	
4 (culture note)	Comparison	Pretest	26	8.27	5.78	.008
		Posttest	31	13.65	8.46	
	Treatment	Pretest	22	6.32	4.20	.000
		Posttest	27	13.96	7.32	
Total	Comparison	Pretest	32	23.63	13.45	.000
		Posttest	32	40.97	18.20	
	Treatment	Pretest	32	18.67	9.50	.000
		Posttest	27	39.04	15.44	

Note. Two-tailed,  $p < .05$ .

group affiliation in respect to the overall recall score ( $F = 0.97$ ,  $p = .328$ ).

To investigate in more detail the significant within-subject effect for gains made by both groups on recalls from the pretest to posttest, a  $t$  test was used to compare each group's mean recall score from the pretest with its mean recall score from the posttest. The results appear in the last column of Table 6 and indicate that both groups made substantial gains in their recall of all texts from the pretest to posttest. For the comparison group, the most statistically significant difference between the mean recall score from the pretest and the mean recall score from the

posttest occurred in the group's recall of the second passage, the editorial. The least significant difference was evident in the group's recall of the first passage, the advertisement. For the treatment group, the most statistically significant difference between the mean recall score from the pretest and the mean recall score from the posttest occurred on their recall of the third passage, the romance novel excerpt. The least significant difference occurred on their recall of the first passage, the advertisement. Overall, the comparison group recalled nearly double the number of pausal units from their pretest score (pretest total mean = 23.63; posttest total mean = 40.97). Simi-

TABLE 7  
Summary of Repeated Measures ANOVA on Pretest Recall and Posttest Recall Scores for the Group Affiliation Independent Variable

Source	$df$	$SS$	$MS$	$F$	$p$
Between Subjects					
Group	1	347.60	347.60	0.97	.328
Residual	57	20,387.67	357.68		
Within Subjects					
PrePost	1	10,414.53	10,414.53	146.58	.000
Group $\times$ PrePost	1	67.07	67.07	0.94	.335
Residual	57	4,049.76	71.05		

Note.  $n = 59$ ,  $p < .05$ .

larly, the treatment group recalled more than twice the number of pausal units on the posttest than they did on the pretest (pretest total mean = 18.67; posttest total mean = 39.04). In other words, the equivalent reading ability of both groups at the outset of the study was maintained and improved at an equivalent rate by the end of the semester.

#### *Vocabulary Knowledge after One Semester of Instruction*

To evaluate possible changes in students' vocabulary knowledge, their answers to the vocabu-

lary-related questions from the pretest and posttest were analyzed. As described earlier, on the pretest and posttest students responded to two sets of five questions for each text. The first set of questions, referred to as the Definition Test, required students to define in English five underlined words or phrases in each text. The second set of questions, referred to as the Functional Test, required them to explain in English the semantic or morphosyntactic significance of various words and phrases. Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics for the two groups' answers to the Definition and Functional Tests for each of the four passages on the pretest and posttest.

TABLE 8  
Descriptive Statistics and *p* Values for Vocabulary-Related Questions, Pretest, and Posttest

Text	Question Type	Group	Test	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
1	Definition	Comparison	Pretest	20	1.15	1.14	.09
			Posttest	26	1.81	1.81	
		Treatment	Pretest	17	1.35	1.11	.33
			Posttest	26	1.73	1.28	
	Functional	Comparison	Pretest	19	2.58	1.17	.53
			Posttest	24	2.83	1.40	
		Treatment	Pretest	19	2.74	1.09	.06
			Posttest	24	3.38	1.09	
2	Definition	Comparison	Pretest	16	.94	.57	.22
			Posttest	18	1.22	.72	
		Treatment	Pretest	14	.57	.75	.47
			Posttest	23	.74	.62	
	Functional	Comparison	Pretest	15	3.40	1.50	.34
			Posttest	18	2.89	1.49	
		Treatment	Pretest	13	2.46	1.76	.30
			Posttest	22	3.04	1.46	
3	Definition	Comparison	Pretest	14	.07	.27	.002
			Posttest	17	.82	.81	
		Treatment	Pretest	9	.11	.33	.03
			Posttest	18	.67	.69	
	Functional	Comparison	Pretest	11	.91	1.04	.03
			Posttest	16	1.75	.85	
		Treatment	Pretest	6	1.33	1.03	.22
			Posttest	17	2.00	1.12	
4	Definition	Comparison	Pretest	11	.36	.50	.56
			Posttest	15	.53	.83	
		Treatment	Pretest	4	.50	.58	.91
			Posttest	15	.47	.52	
	Functional	Comparison	Pretest	12	1.67	1.30	.36
			Posttest	15	2.07	.96	
		Treatment	Pretest	6	1.33	1.03	.26
			Posttest	17	1.88	.99	
Total	Comparison	Pretest	22	7.86	4.91	.16	
		Posttest	26	10.38	6.82		
	Treatment	Pretest	19	7.05	4.13	.006	
		Posttest	26	11.35	5.34		

Note. Two-tailed,  $p < .05$ .

Noticeable from these results is the increased number of students who completed the posttest vocabulary questions and the consistent gain for both groups on the posttest.

The results of the ANOVA for group affiliation (comparison or treatment) with repeated measures for the dependent variables total pretest and posttest vocabulary scores appear in Table 9 and reveal a significant within-subject effect for the change in scores for both groups from the pretest to the posttest. No significant effect was found for the interaction between group affiliation and the pretest and posttest vocabulary scores. Students who did not complete a portion of the vocabulary section of either the pretest or the posttest were dropped from the analysis, which reduced the number of participants for this analysis to 38.

To investigate in more detail the significant within-subject effect for gains made by both groups from the pretest to posttest, a *t* test analysis was used to compare each group's mean vocabulary scores from the pretest with their mean vocabulary scores from the posttest. The results appear in the last column of Table 8 and indicate that both groups made significant gains in their vocabulary score from the pretest to the posttest in only three cases. Both groups showed a significant gain on the Definition Test for the romance novel excerpt. The comparison group also significantly improved on the Functional Test for the romance novel excerpt.

Although the treatment group showed only one significant gain on an individual test (Definition or Functional), its total score for all eight tests increased significantly from the pretest to the posttest ( $p = .006$ ). This finding reflects the fact that the treatment group improved its score on the posttest from their pretest score on all but one of the tests. The comparison group also improved from the pretest on all but one of the set

of questions. The overall increase was not statistically significant, however ( $p = .16$ ).

As mentioned earlier, because the vocabulary-related questions appeared on both the pretest and posttest after the four recalls, some students ran out of time and were not able to complete all the exercises on the pretest. That changed significantly on the posttest, however. Whereas only 4 students in the treatment group finished all of the pretest, 15 completed the posttest, an increase of 275%. In the comparison group, 11 completed the pretest, and 15 finished the posttest, an increase of 36%. Thus, although the scores from the two groups did not differ significantly, the treatment group showed a significant increase in its ability to process German.

## DISCUSSION

### *Extensive Reading in Beginning L2 Instruction*

The findings from this study raise questions regarding the amount of language proficiency needed to read successfully in a L2. By following a guided procedural treatment that consisted of extensive in-class and group-work reading, first-semester German students in the treatment group were able to read an authentic popular novel beginning in the 4th week of instruction and to perform at least as well on departmental exams and a posttest of reading recall and vocabulary knowledge as students who followed the standard syllabus for the entire semester. In other words, the students' limited linguistic competence did not short-circuit their ability to read authentic texts in class with the support of their classmates and instructor.

Several important components of the treatment appeared to contribute to these students' success. First, the guided procedural model for reading the novel provided students with a sys-

TABLE 9  
Summary of Repeated Measures ANOVA on Total Pretest Vocabulary and Posttest Vocabulary Scores for the Group Affiliation Independent Variable

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Subjects					
Group	1	4.43	4.43	0.14	.714
Residual	36	1,171.85	32.55		
Within Subjects					
PrePost	1	369.61	369.61	19.79	.000
Group × PrePost	1	38.03	38.03	2.04	.162
Residual	36	672.25	18.67		

Note.  $n = 38$ ,  $p < .05$ .

tematic approach to reading that represented a logical progression in cognitive difficulty that moved from identification to summarization, synthesis, and eventual analysis. Students became familiar with this approach and felt comfortable adhering to it because it provided them with a framework for achieving comprehension without prescribing a particular understanding or interpretation.

Second, in-class group reading allowed the students to pool their knowledge and work with their classmates toward comprehension. Not only did the group-work reading permit students, as Doughty (1998) suggests, "to use the second language to express and understand messages as well as to transfer information" (p. 136), it also allowed them to share their prior knowledge, their reading strategies, and their language ability to construct meaning from the text.

Third, because of its length and cultural familiarity, the text itself provided students with two key allies in overcoming the initial anxiety and difficulty of reading a longer authentic text. Although the length of the novel may have initially appeared daunting to the students, its recurring situations, characters, behavior, and words seemed to aid readers' comprehension. In addition, through the in-class reading process, the students began to take advantage of the novel's being a culturally familiar genre and became more aware of the need to recognize stereotypical behaviors and their consequences.

Fourth, in adapting the procedural approach to reading the novel, students developed effective habits that allowed them to comprehend the text despite their limited L2 competence. The combination of the treatment group instructors' continual emphasis on moving through the text to find the necessary key information and the accompanying handouts that directed students to focus on the major events and their logical consequences effectively removed close, intensive reading from class. In addition, the fact that students were to read approximately 1,000 words a day in class appeared to limit their developing word-for-word reading habits. Thus, as a supplement to the current emphasis on strategy training in L2 reading instruction that focuses on teaching students effective approaches *while* reading, activities for *after* reading that do not require or assume word-for-word comprehension also seem to have the potential to foster effective L2 reading habits. Such an approach for developing effective reading habits could also potentially address the difficulty cited by researchers (O'Malley & Chamot,

1990; Raymond, 1993) of teaching students new reading strategies.

Further evidence of the change in the treatment group's reading habits was the number of students who finished the posttest as compared with the number who completed the pretest. As indicated above, the number of students in the treatment group who finished the posttest increased 275% over the number who finished the pretest.

At this early stage of the research into extensive reading in beginning instruction, a central finding from the experimental treatment is the fact that first-semester students were able to read an authentic novel in class successfully. Despite the conviction among researchers in support of a language threshold that L2 learners must cross before they can read successfully, it seems necessary to reexamine the design and pedagogy used in the research that has until now precluded extensive, authentic reading from being implemented at the lower level of instruction.

#### *Reading and L2 Learning*

Of equal interest to the finding that the students were able to read the novel was the potential for this reading to serve as the basis for developing students' skills in all areas of language learning. The results indicate that the treatment group attained similar levels of reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and language proficiency to the comparison group. A discussion of the interaction between the experimental treatment and each of these skill areas follows.

That the treatment group's most significant gain occurred in the recall of the romance novel excerpt suggests that the 10-week exposure to the romance novel genre may have influenced reading comprehension. Equally important is the treatment group's significant gain in recall of the culture note, a text type that presumably would have favored the comparison group and its familiarity with passages from the textbook. However, the treatment group's recall of more of the culture note suggests an ability to transfer reading skills across genres and content areas.

Unfortunately, there were not any surveys of either group's familiarity with or prior knowledge of the topics presented in each text. As the extensive research on background knowledge's effect on reading comprehension indicates (e.g., Carrell, 1984c; Hammadou, 1991; Hudson, 1982; Lee, 1986; Roller & Matambo, 1992), the results from such surveys would have been helpful in

determining which students were predisposed toward comprehending which texts.

For the vocabulary-related exercises, although not statistically significant, the comparison group outscored the treatment group on all four Definition Tests on the posttest, whereas the treatment group performed better on three of the four posttest Functional Tests. Such dichotomous results suggest that the more discrete-point Definition Test was better suited to the reading habits of the comparison group, whereas the treatment group responded better to the Functional Test designed to determine whether students could link or conceptualize information in each text. The treatment group's vocabulary acquisition during the semester was enhanced not so much by defining individual words in context as it was by their exposure to the novel's semantic redundancy and the students' own interaction with the lexicon during their group work and discussions. Such outcomes indicate that the task itself has a potential effect on language learning and reinforce Byrnes's (2000) call for more research that examines the interaction between FL curricula and performance.

On the departmental written exams, the two groups showed strikingly similar results. Most importantly, the 20 minutes spent each day reading the novel did not disadvantage the treatment group in their performance on the standardized exams. This difference in time spent on the textbook material was a major concern at the start of the treatment because students from the treatment group needed to be prepared not only for the departmental exams during the current semester, but also for the demands of subsequent courses where they would adhere to the standard syllabus for the entire semester. Spending 20 minutes every day over a 10-week period amounted to roughly 16 classroom hours that were not spent overtly reviewing material that would later appear on departmental exams. That the treatment group performed just as well on material for which the comparison group had an advantage suggests that some implicit learning and skill transfer must have taken place within the treatment group.

An encouraging and intriguing finding of this study is that students appeared to be well served by either treatment. Each group made significant gains during the semester, and neither appeared to be at a disadvantage at any point during the semester. The following section addresses the implications of such findings for the L2 curriculum, at least in German.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE L2 CURRICULUM

Given these findings, four important implications for the L2 German curriculum are apparent. First, by integrating extensive reading more centrally into beginning instruction and by following a procedural in-class approach to reading, there appears to be the possibility that L2 students can begin to develop the reading skills that could serve them more effectively as they make the transition from lower-level to upper-level language study.

A second implication is that an emphasis on in-class extensive reading in the first semester can possibly foster the development of more than just reading skills. If beginning students who follow a curriculum that devotes 20 minutes to extensive reading each class day can achieve grammatical and communicative competence similar to students who follow a more traditional elementary German curriculum, then perhaps reading's role in the lower-division curriculum needs to be reconsidered.

Third, if students can learn German by reading an extended authentic text in the first semester, there now is the additional possibility that content-based courses and interdisciplinary curricula with a strong reading-based focus can be implemented sooner in the language learning process than previously thought. Typically, content-based courses are not offered until the third year of language study, which may prevent the majority of our students who stop studying the language after 2 years from having the opportunity to use their language skills to learn about different content areas.<sup>6</sup>

However, if content-oriented instruction or any extensive reading is to be genuinely effective at the lower level, it must be clearly coordinated with the readings that take place in subsequent semesters. In other words, there needs to be a coherent L2 curriculum in which each semester's readings build on the readings from previous semesters by recycling themes, vocabulary, characters, or genres familiar to students. For example, students of German who read a culturally familiar romance novel in the first semester could follow that in the second semester with a more culturally specific contemporary popular novel about love and relationships (e.g., Hera Lind's *Ein Mann für jede Tonart* [A Man for Every Key]). In the third semester, students could examine an East German perspective on relationships by reading *Die Neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (The New Sorrows of Young W.) by Ulrich Plenzdorf, a novel that would then prepare students for reading

Goethe's *Werther* in the 4th semester. Each of the texts could also be supplemented by movies dealing with relationships such as Doris Dörrie's *Männer* (Men) or Tom Tykwer's *Winterschläfer* (Winter Sleepers). In such a curriculum, the semantic redundancy of each text would be supplemented by thematic redundancies between texts. Following the notion of narrow reading, this approach eases students' comprehension, but at the same time it requires them to situate each text contextually in order to uncover its cultural implications.

Fourth, the fact that the experimental treatment was implemented so easily into the standard first-semester curriculum suggests that increasing the role of reading in beginning language instruction does not necessarily have to involve major curricular changes or restructuring. In other words, instituting an extensive reading component in first-year German classes does not mean that the standard curriculum and pedagogy have to be diminished or compromised. Students in the treatment group, for example, read the novel in class, yet still were prepared for the departmental exams and the standard course the following semester.

The ease of implementation also extends to daily lesson planning.<sup>7</sup> Because of the systematic and student-centered nature of the procedural model for reading, the instructors were spared having to spend their time outside of class developing supplementary materials such as glosses, vocabulary lists, or comprehension questions.

Thus, extensive reading appears to be not only a feasible option for lower-level instruction, but also a manageable one. By allowing for current curricula to remain in place while also better preparing students to make the transition to upper-level study, extensive reading presents curricular planners with a common thread that can tie together all levels of language instruction in a coherent fashion.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study represents only the beginning of research needed to investigate extensive reading in beginning instruction and its potential for serving as a key component in language learning from the outset of instruction. The experience from conducting this study and the results themselves point to several issues that merit further investigation. First, additional studies that involve different extended texts should be undertaken. The novel for this study was chosen for its cultural familiarity, but the possibility of introducing a

more culturally specific text or allowing students to select the text also needs to be investigated. Also worth examining is the role that technology and the wealth of authentic materials on the World Wide Web can play in an extensive reading program.

Second, the influence that students' interest in and familiarity with the text topic has on their extensive reading needs to be examined. This issue will play a crucial role in text selection for the beginning level.

Third, future studies should carefully consider the impact that assessment instruments can have on research findings. In this study, the finding that the comparison group's reading ability improved just as much as the treatment group's was based on the two groups' reading and recall of shorter texts. An interesting comparative study would be to include extended texts as part of the pretest and posttest. It is possible that whatever advantages the treatment group gained from reading an extended text did not show up statistically because the type of measures used favored certain types of language use that were not stressed in the experimental treatment.

Fourth, although the instructors attributed much of the success of the classroom procedure to the group readings, there needs to be a more thorough examination of what transpires when beginning students read together. The research on group work has focused mostly on group oral interaction rather than group reading interaction.

Fifth, further research is needed into the extent to which skill transfer takes place in a comprehension-oriented, reading-based approach to language learning. This study noted the treatment group's ability to perform as well as the comparison group on written exams; yet still needed is an assessment of the speaking abilities of both groups.

Sixth, since the reading treatment in this study occupied only one-quarter of the entire semester's class time, additional studies could be conducted that compare the effects of varying amounts of in-class reading, such as having two levels of treatment groups, one that reads for 15 minutes each day and the other that reads for 30 minutes.

Seventh, a longitudinal study should be undertaken that investigates the effects of extensive reading over 2, 3, or 4 semesters, as well as over the student's entire college career. This type of study would begin to determine whether the two groups continue to score equally on all the measures, or if an extended treatment has an effect

that was not evident after only 1 semester. Helpful in the analysis of such a study would be exit surveys of all participants after each semester and extensive student profiles.

Finally, more research into reading's role as a motivating factor in language learning is necessary. If student responses are positive after 1 semester, yet attrition rates continue to rise after the 4th semester, then it appears that more research into what happens to cause the drop in interest and whether reading could play a role in remedying the situation may be needed. To assess this adequately, the research should be conducted interinstitutionally and involve data from a wide cross-section of universities and colleges.

Such research can supply useful information for strengthening the L2 curriculum. Ultimately, the L2 curriculum will provide a richer, more rewarding experience if students are allowed to follow a coherent and systematic approach to language learning that allows for smooth transition from level to level and that develops their ability to use language to learn.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* are part of an overall standards project for U.S. education, attempting to set up an overall framework for setting learning goals across 50 states without specifying exact curricula. The original project was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities (Grant No. R211U30004). The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1996) were among the first standards completed and published. They are available for \$20 a copy at: National Standards Report, P.O. Box 1897, Lawrence, KS 66044; (913) 843-1211; FAX order (913) 843-1274; credit card orders, (800) 627-0629 (Arens & Swaffar, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> All students in first-semester German were considered true beginners based either on their not having had any prior instruction of German or on the fact that their score on the department's placement exam did not qualify them for a higher-level course. First-semester German at the University of Texas at Austin meets for 50 minutes each day, five times each week. The textbook used is *Deutsch zusammen* (Donahue & Watzinger, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> To view the materials used in this study, including departmental exams, pretest, posttest, lesson plans, sample recall protocols, sample chapters from the romance novel, and pausal unit analysis, visit <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/hhm2/extreadingstudy.html>.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the methodology used in class to guide the students through the novel, see Maxim (2000).

<sup>5</sup> The smaller sample size for the pretest vocabulary scores is a result of some participants' inability to finish the pretest, an understandable result considering the students had had only 4 weeks of instruction at the time of the pretest. To evaluate its appropriateness for first-semester students, the pretest had been piloted the previous semester with students who had just completed 1 semester of German.

<sup>6</sup> Sternfeld (1997) and Leaver (1997) both offer examples of content-based instruction that has been successfully implemented at the first-year level.

<sup>7</sup> To view the lesson plans used in the experimental treatment, visit <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/hhm2/extreadingstudy.html>.

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