

Message from the editor

Just as the thirty-two pages of this edition were fitting together nicely, I realised I had forgotten one of the articles, caught in limbo between copy-editing and proofreading. We don't have to make *ERJ* thirty-two pages long, but the two-sided nature of paper means there must be an even number of pages, and if the number is not divisible by four, one of the leaves may drop out.

The missing article needed some swift proofreading, but before I could render the pages to send to one of our crack team of apostrophe hunters and fans of em and en dashes, I needed to copy and paste the link on our website for the notice on the call for papers for *JER*, our new *Journal of Extensive Reading*. We will carry on providing practical information and ideas for teachers in *ERJ*, while in *JER* you can publish research into ER, peer-reviewed, free and online (see p. 25).

While I was at the ersig.org website I saw that we didn't have a link to KEERA, hosts of next September's ER World Congress in Seoul (p. 30), so I decided to send a note to our wonderful website manager to suggest this. As I went to send the email, I found my half-written idea for a series in *ERJ*: a Revisionist History of ER. I wonder who could write this?

Just then, the post came in with the latest newsletter from IATEFL's Literature, Media and Cultural Studies SIG, containing a book review by Philip Prowse of *Bringing Extensive Reading into the Classroom*. I wish we had a book review! Perhaps somebody can write one for the next edition—the deadline is February (p. 21).

The number of items you can hold in working memory is only seven plus or minus two, so by this time, I'd forgotten what I started out to do. Oh yes, that was it: writing a message from the editor!

Mark Brierley erj@jalt.org

ERJ Staff

Editor

Mark Brierley
Shinshu University

Copy Editor

Eleanor Kane
University of Shimane

Design

Bjorn Fuisting
Ritsumeikan University

Proofreaders

Andrew Archer
Thomas Bieri
Doreen Ewert
Chau Meng Huat
Peter Hourdequin
Richard Lavin
Sakae Onoda
Daniel Stewart
Joseph Tomei

Published by the JALT ER SIG
www.ersig.org

September, 2012 ISSN 2187-0853

The 5th Annual ER Seminar

Myles Grogan

Momoyama University

Extensive reading events tend to be a little different from other language teaching events. I have several reasons for liking these events, and the 5th Annual ER Seminar, held at Sugiyama Jogakuen in Nagoya, fulfilled expectations on all counts.



The facility was easy to find and well-laid out. The "Greenshirts", as the volunteers were known, were ready to help people to the venue and always helpful at the event. Funds raised from the catering for the event were passed on to a charity. One of the volunteers addressed the participants prior to the main events, making a real connection between the students and the conference participants. Volunteers and organizers deserve congratulations for creating a friendly atmosphere.

The seminar was big enough to have the feel of a major event, and yet small enough that you could meet, get to know, and talk with regular attendees. The pre-seminar workshop led by Dr. Krashen was well attended, and many participants were able to catch up with each other. Dr. Krashen's workshop was a joy to watch, his seminar was well-referenced, allowing follow up for further investigation or challenge. Krashen's work covers a huge range, and he covered it well while at the same time proving engaging and, simply put, fun. The post-workshop



event, likewise, was well attended, with good food, and lots of discussion about the day's topics.

A further theme I enjoy at ER events is that there are always plenty of events available in Japanese. We are, after all, language teachers in a Japanese environment. Those of us who are not Japanese speakers may be called upon to explain ER in Japanese to administrators, students, or even friends, and Japanese language presentations help to do this (in my case at least!). A particularly enlightening plenary from Junko Yamanaka was both practical and informative. Very much a teacher who leads from the front, she talked about her ER kit (a water-proof bag, a bookmark, and a graded reader) and how she used



her commute to read—along with figures to show how much she read in a semester.

In most conferences, I try to allot myself "recovery sessions" in which I can relax and organize what I have seen that day. With such a focused event, connected with a large part of my teaching load, this proved impossible. George Truscott's session on goal-setting and accountability raised some interesting questions based on his experience in economics, looking at reading targets in class. Patrick Judge produced informative case studies based around the shy readers he has had experience with, well grounded and referenced, with a series of factors to account for success in language learning. One issue he raised also appeared in the session run by Beniko Mason. Mason's work had been mentioned in the



plenary, and was packed to the gunwales. Like Judge, she also mentioned that in some of her research, it appears as though giving book summaries or mini-reports in Japanese was successful—perhaps more so than the same task in an L2. In light of the recent questions raised about translation in the classroom and the role of L1 in the classroom, the role of L1 may well need some serious reconsideration.

For me, personally, however, the most significant moment came upon realizing one of the things that makes ER events so unique. In his presentation, Krashen suggested that, to some extent, he was preaching to the choir. Most people listening already have some experience and faith in ER. In many events at JALT, while the goal is to teach English, approaches may vary (and reasonably so). While this is still true to an extent within the ER SIG, there is perhaps more common ground among participants. Most of us believe that reading a lot is an important part of the language acquisition process, and that reading in general is important. We may disagree on the role of testing, or whether reading should be done in or out of class, but everyone agrees that input and reading are important.

Although I almost didn't attend, the seminar left me optimistic. Besides everything else, Krashen tells us that looking at longevity, three important factors are reading, bilingualism, and coffee. I am not just helping my students learn a language. It seems I might be helping them live longer! Now if I can get the school to provide funding for coffee as well as the library . . .



Meeting Dr. Krashen

Darren Elliot

Nanzan University

I'm not sure if there is anyone who has had a greater impact on applied linguistics than Stephen Krashen. There are people who wander in and out of fashion; there are academics who have made a pretty big footprint in a certain area of the field; but if you have ever written a paper on Second Language Acquisition, you will have cited Krashen.

I've been interviewing researchers, writers and other leading lights in English language education for the last three years or so (you can see the videos at my website www.livesofteachers.com), and when I saw Dr. Krashen was coming to town I was very keen to talk to him. His trip to Japan took in several cities but his main engagement was at the ER SIG's 5th Extensive Reading Seminar, held at Sugiyama Jogakuen University in Nagoya.

Dr. Krashen has increasingly seen extensive reading, or free voluntary reading, as a great source of comprehensible input. He carries a foreign language novel with him at all times and reads whenever he has a moment, placing the most emphasis on reading material which is compelling enough to make the reader forget he or she is reading in a foreign language. It's a message which fits well with that of the SIG and the seminar.

My preparation for this interview was broadly similar to any other—I tried to read as much of the interviewee's work, and as many critiques of his work, as possible. I wrote down questions as they occurred to me whilst reading, and invited questions from friends and colleagues. Here we hit a snag. Stephen Krashen has had a long, prolific, and divisive academic career and it appears that his theories are not universally respected. Before we go any further, we should outline exactly what those theories are.

Starting in the 1970s, Krashen put together what became known as "The Five Hypotheses", five theories about the way we learn languages which had an immense impact on the nascent field of applied linguistics at the time.

1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis which draws a distinction between language gained through usage (as with children learning their first language) and the process of studying language rules.
2. The Natural Order Hypothesis which claims that one

cannot acquire a structure unless a fixed set of other structures have already been acquired.

3. The Monitor Hypothesis, which addresses our ability to self-correct our output based on what we have learned.

4. The Input Hypothesis, which posits that comprehensible input (language slightly above our level referred to as "+1") is all a learner needs to acquire language.

5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, which describes how negative emotional states like anxiety or discomfort prevent acquisition from taking place.

The combination of common-sensical simplicity and neat metaphor meant that these ideas were taken up enthusiastically by many language teachers. There have, of course, been criticisms. Opponents claim that Krashen's research is not sufficiently rigorous. His terms are insufficiently defined, or undefinable.

I was curious to know whether Dr. Krashen had known in the 70s how important his ideas would be, even decades later. His answer was enlightening.

"The moment [the idea] hit there was a felt sense that I knew it was right," he said. He told his colleague Larry Hyman, "I think I've found the answer, this is it, this is like finding the structure of DNA."

Given this strength of feeling, it's unsurprising that when I asked Dr. Krashen whether he felt his hypotheses still stood up, he was unshakable. Although he is, and always has been, absolutely clear that these are hypotheses, he firmly believes that nothing has disproved them yet.

As much research as we do, teachers do need to take a certain leap of faith in deciding what will help their learners learn. Krashen mentioned in our interview the "strong felt sense" which prevents some people from accepting his ideas, and which he has to acknowledge in himself in continuing research. Certainly, the five hypotheses have enabled many teachers to conceptualize language acquisition in helpful and understandable ways. Whether some of those concepts are clearly defined or accurately researched may be moot, although the fact that Krashen himself believes his work to stand up to scientific scrutiny suggests his work should be assessed that way. Personally, I am not sure that we can fully capture what it means to learn a language, as the combinations of variables are almost infinite.

The reason that Krashen has attracted such opprobrium from certain quarters, though, is his willingness to stick his head above the parapets on politicized topics such as bilingual education and

testing. He is opposed to a reliance on phonics in early reading teaching, something I pressed him on when we met. So long as a parent reads aloud to a child "your kids have no choice but to become highly literate [. . .] it's inevitable". According to Krashen, phonics, beyond the basics of consonant sounds and the alphabet, has little effect on reading comprehension skills. To governments and publishing houses highly invested in phonics-based reading programs, this is rather unpalatable. As a teacher and a parent, I will admit some confusion, but I do respect Dr. Krashen for suggesting that there may be other ways to learn.

Links

If you want to learn more about Stephen Krashen's work, you can start by watching the interview <http://www.livesofteachers.com/2012/07/10/an-interview-with-dr-stephen-krashen/>

Frankfurt International School summarizes Krashen's work very neatly <http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/krashen.htm>

As does the website of renowned linguist Vivian Cook <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/Krashen.htm>

Scott Thornbury asks us if Krashen is still relevant. The blog post itself is succinct, and the comments, including those from Krashen himself, enlightening. <http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/2009/12/27/k-is-for-krashen/>

This open letter from a well-known British children's author highlights why government reading policies relying on phonics may not be the best way forward. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jun/04/michael-rosen-phonics-screen-test>

This highly critical article of Krashen's involvement in bilingual education is not particularly credible, but does demonstrate how vitriolic political discourse can be. <http://www.angelfire.com/az/english4thechildren/krashen.html>

You can read a number of articles about each of his areas of interest on Krashen's website. <http://www.sdkrashen.com>

I would like to thank the ER SIG for organizing the seminar, Sugiyama Jogakuen for hosting it, and of course Stephen Krashen for his time and his thoughtful answers to all my questions.