

INTRODUCTION

The 2007 volume of the *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal* brings changes in both the journal's publication format and the editorial staff. First, this is the journal's premier online issue. While some of us are attached to our paper copies of the journal, going online promises some exciting new options for us. We hope that the online journal will be more accessible to the membership and will also bring a greater audience to the excellent articles. Going to an online format will also save a little more paper, which will not be bad for the environment. Second, as editors representing MinneTESOL, Mike Anderson and Bonnie Swierzbin have taken the place of Kristi Liu and Nima Salehi, whom we thank for their years of service and for facilitating a smooth editorial transition. We also thank Nima, Becky Uran Markman and Aydin Mohseni for their work in making arrangements for online publication and for putting together the format for the website based on board member and editor input. Finally, in an additional editorial change, Michelle Fuerch joins Marguerite Parks as a co-editor representing WITESOL, replacing Don Hones, whom we recognize for his many years of excellent work on this journal.

The first section of this journal includes articles that discuss ESL teaching and learning issues at a variety of levels, from high-stakes testing and challenges at the district level to working with low-literacy adults and individuals' choices of learning strategies.

We begin with the article "Educating English Language Learners in a Rural District: A Case in Point" by Tina Scott Edstam, Constance L. Walker, and Karla Stone. This article provides a close-up, direct look at the process of developing and implementing a school action plan to address the needs of ELLs in a rural school district. Their forthright description of the challenges and strengths of the ESL staff in this district led one reviewer to say, "There is so much truth here."

In our second article, "Overcoming Limitations: How a Filipino Speaker of English uses Compensation Strategies," Jennifer Lloyd portrays the impact of social context on the language learning strategies of individual learners.

Next is an article by Julie Trupke-Bastidas and Andrea Poulos, "Improving Literacy of L1-Non-Literate and L1-Literate Adult English as a Second Language Learners," that describes classroom-based research aimed at improving English literacy of adult East African women, a population that has sometimes been overlooked in research.

Our fourth article, "Making Decisions about ESL Curriculum," by Patricia Hoffman and Anne Dahlman returns to issues at the district level. The authors describe the process of ESL curriculum evaluation and design in a particular Minnesota school district and offer guidelines for the fundamental process of choosing an ESL curriculum. This article will be of special interest to ESL educators non-urban districts with growing ESL populations as their programs change to address the needs of these learners.

The section finishes with the article "...And the Beat Goes On: Further Evidence to Support the Need for Accommodations and Universal Design in High Stakes Testing of English Language Learners" from Andrea Erichsrud and Christopher Johnstone. The results of this qualitative research study show how irrelevant information or culturally-bound concepts, such as soup cans and box tops, used in testing can potentially distract and confuse ELLs.

The second section of the journal includes reviews of works in print. Katie DeKam reviews two engaging new books, *The Lion's Share* and *Dhegdheer*, from the Somali Bilingual Book Project sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Commission. Michael Coggins examines *All New Very Easy True Stories: A Picture-based First Reader*, a textbook for students with low literacy levels. The last two reviews focus on textbooks for advanced students. Tor Lindbloom reviews *Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources* and Cameron Jaynes reviews the second edition of *All Clear Listening and Speaking 3*.

The 2008 volume will be a special topic issue focusing on research and best practice for the instruction of ESL learners who have low levels of literacy. We encourage our readers' contributions to the next volume and we especially invite submissions from our colleagues in Wisconsin, who were sadly underrepresented in this year's submissions. We also welcome feedback on the new format of the journal.

We thank all of those involved in the process of creating this volume of the journal, particularly the authors and the Editorial Advisory Board. We also thank Hamline University, and the University of Minnesota for their support of the editorial process.

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Educating English Language Learners in a Rural District: A Case in Point

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the challenges faced by rural school districts in general, and one in particular, in providing 'best practices' for their English language learners. It begins with numeric data reflecting the large increase of immigrant families in rural communities in the past decade. A review of the literature offers insights into the realities and strengths of rural districts from an ESL perspective. The case in point is a six-member rural elementary school team who chose to participate in a two-year professional development project and created a school action plan to address the needs of their English language learners. The process they underwent and the small but significant successes they have had serve as an example for other rural districts interested in making site-based changes.

Introduction

As we continued driving, all visual remnants of the Twin Cities slowly diminished from view. Within a couple of hours, we had entered a town where the pace seemed mellow, the landscape bucolic, and the downtown reminiscent of a National Geographic piece on the grace and charm of small-town life in America. Founded originally by German, Irish, and Scandinavian farming families over more than a century ago, the town today finds itself once again a magnet for newcomers bringing similar hopes and dreams for a better life for their families. This image became even more complete for us as we entered the elementary school building awash in the daily chatter of the town's children, reflecting its current ethnic and cultural make-up, 79% Caucasian and 21% Hispanic, most recently arrived from Mexico and parts of south Texas. Where the home languages had once been German, Norwegian, and Swedish, it was now Spanish. Where lutefisk and dumplings had once framed the cultural landscape, it was now "apple pie and enchiladas."¹

Why would six staff members at a rural elementary school, hours away from the Twin Cities, be willing to make an intense two-year commitment of enormous time, energy, and effort to participate in a professional development program at the University of Minnesota? The answer can ostensibly be explained by numbers: demographics, statistics, and standardized scores. But a richer and more complex response moves beyond the numbers and allows us to understand the realities, the challenges, and the strengths of a rural district seeking to improve the way it serves its language minority students.

With 44% of America's English language learners (ELLs) residing in rural communities (Berube, 2002), it is not surprising that many of Minnesota's rural school districts would reflect this new reality. From 1999–2005, there was a 29.57% increase in the national enrollment growth of ELLs in rural districts (communities of less than 25,000) as compared to 4.45% in non-rural districts (ELL Student Enrollment, 2006). Though traditionally based in large urban centers, ELLs and their families have begun settling in rural communities unprepared for these changing demographics. The Hispanic population itself increased from 1.5 to 3.2 million residents in small-town America over the last twenty years (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004). According to Geller (2001), the 2000 Census data for one southern region in Minnesota showed an increase of 6,469 new residents, with 77% self-identified as Hispanic/Latino; 7% as white, and the remaining 16% Black/Somali. The Minnesota Rural Education Association, representing 150 school districts within the state, now includes many schools serving students for whom English is a second language. For those rural schools whose ELLs have finally become not only visible but a 'critical mass,' due in large part to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability measures, the need for these students to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is no longer the personal hope and expectation of a handful of ESL teachers in the district, but the concern and responsibility of an entire school staff.

It was for this reason that a rural elementary school staff of six, with their principal's support, from a town we will refer to as 'Hansen' found the invitation to participate in sustained professional development of interest. A grant through the University of Minnesota's TEAM UP (Teaching English Language Learners Action Model to Unite Professionals) project offered them the opportunity to participate in a two-year teacher professional development program to address issues of curriculum, instruction, and assessment of second language learners. With funding to cover release days for substitutes, materials and resources, stipends, graduate course credit, and even travel expenses, this rural elementary school team could now tackle the unique challenges it faced with 21% of its K-5 students designated as English language learners. Composed of two classroom teachers, one ESL teacher, one reading specialist, one speech-language clinician, and one paraprofessional, the team's members reflected a wide range of expertise and many years of teaching experience. Their journey towards sounder policies and procedures to address 'best practices' for their new learners will be described in this 'case in point' against the backdrop of the realities and strengths of rural districts in general, and those of Hansen in particular.

Realities of a rural school district

Hansen, like most rural communities, reflects the realities of a rural school district. It is geographically isolated from a large metropolitan area by a distance of several hours or more. This fact alone impacts its teaching staff, particularly its English as a second language (ESL) teachers, who are professionally isolated from their peers, lacking

collegial support, and with no local access to mentorship by experienced ESL teachers to draw upon. In contrast to their urban ESL teacher counterparts, “[ESL] educators in the nation’s rural areas often have to rely largely on their own wits to build ESL programs” (Zehr, 2001, p. 1).

Professional isolation in rural areas creates problems in the recruitment and retention of qualified (licensed) and experienced teachers, particularly in specific areas of expertise (Collins, 1999; Reeves, 2003). There is the propensity to utilize tutors and educational assistants rather than qualified teachers to instruct English language learners (The Education Alliance, n.d.). Meador (2005, p. 152) noted in her study on rural ELLs that rural ESL teachers “voiced their frustration with classroom teachers who made little attempt to establish relationships with Spanish-speaking students, instead relying on one or two classroom aides and one bilingual ESL teacher spread among all the classrooms to provide instruction and adult support.” This situation is of special concern in districts with struggling second language learners who would benefit from direct instruction provided by experienced and professionally prepared ESL teachers, one group that can be difficult to attract to rural districts.

The NCLB mandates for finding highly qualified teachers have exacerbated this problem, disadvantaging rural systems even further in their attempt to comply with state and federal guidelines (Jimerson, 2005a). Critics of NCLB include issues of rural schools as one of many that arise when all schools are lumped together into a “one size fits all” mandate. Going as far as labeling this NCLB policy as ‘placism,’ Jimerson (2005b, p. 211) states that this bias against students in rural schools “discriminates against people based on where they live.” She argues that “small rural schools have excelled using successful strategies such as multi-age classrooms, interdisciplinary teaching, and performance-based assessments” (p. 218), strategies which don’t align well with the high-stakes testing of NCLB.

Professional and geographic isolation are also manifested in the area of staff development. With no major universities nearby, the ability for teachers to have access to ongoing and comprehensive staff development to address the needs of their second language learners becomes more problematic. Often the sheer geographic size of many rural districts, with relatively low numbers of students, hampers comprehensive, district-initiated staff development efforts. Creative ways to offer ongoing training for these mainstream teachers becomes of paramount importance, requiring principals with vision and leadership skills who understand the importance of all staff prepared for these students (Wrigley, 2000). Generally, rural administrators tend to be inexperienced in addressing federal (Title III) requirements for serving students learning English as a second language. Even those most sincere in their efforts often do not place ELL needs very high on their school agendas (The Education Alliance, n. d.). Their district’s approaches tend to be reactive rather than proactive in planning for their English language learners. Notification of the district’s failure to meet federal guidelines for adequate yearly progress (AYP) or state guidelines for annual measurable achievement

objectives (AMAO) for their ELL population often serves as the ultimate catalyst for some rural administrators to take initial action in addressing these students' achievement gap.

Limited funding is not a unique concern to most school districts in these days of tightened budgets but rural districts claim that it is more sharply felt by them since they cannot "derive the benefits of economies of scale" (Reeves, 2003). Thus, funding disparities as well as declining enrollment in many rural districts account for rising expenses disproportionate to revenue available. This easily results in scarce resources for mainstream and ESL teachers whose students do not have the proficiency, either linguistically or academically, to make use of the same English grade-level textbooks and other materials available to mainstream classmates. Effective and engaging reading materials, for example, that would be simpler in language and also age and content-appropriate for beginning language learners, are the types of resources that would be cut from a budget, with the argument that they benefit too few students.

The term 'low incidence schools' is one most commonly used in the ESL field to describe settings which have a small number of ELLs represented in the district and typically an itinerant ESL teacher who travels from school to school within a district to provide students with educational support. Rural low incidence schools often fall short of funding and access to grants without that 'critical mass' of ELLs needed to generate dollars to hire ESL staff and provide adequate programming (Abdelrahim & Di Cerbo, 2006). Nevertheless, districts such as these even with only "two immigrant students with a language barrier are under the same federal legal obligation to provide those students with a program to learn English as those districts that receive an influx of students" (Zehr, 2001, p. 2). At the other end of the spectrum are a few rural school districts which can be considered 'high incidence,' with ELL populations representing 25% or more of the student population (Auerbach, 2006). Within these districts in Minnesota, it is not unusual to find a meat or poultry processing plant that has attracted immigrants and refugees with enticements of steady paychecks through year-round employment, resulting in stable populations that become active members of the rural community.

A large influx of newcomers appearing within a relatively short period of time in a traditional small homogeneous town can often send its residents reeling, with culture shock felt by both sides. The arrival of these newcomers can be met with great hostility, apprehension, and resistance, especially when a community has had few 'outsiders' in many decades, if not longer (Schram, 1993). What would be considered a daily reality in urban settings across the country is transformed into a daunting and unwelcome challenge in Midwestern rural communities where diversity has historically been considered the presence of both Lutheran and Catholic churches. The lack of cultural awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of newcomers is not a new phenomenon in the United States. But in rural communities, where a stop at the local market, gas station, or bank often results in encounters with fellow residents, the hostile feelings generated on Main Street can be too easily played out in school classrooms.

Rural English language learners can suffer from marginalization in the school environment. Meador's research on the marginalized status of Mexican immigrant girls in the rural Southwest described how closely these students' identities were connected to their "participation in school social and sporting events" (2005, p. 153). Their Anglo teachers saw their lack of involvement in sports and other activities as a major reason for their lack of social as well as academic acceptance. Interestingly, Diaz' (2005) research on school attachment of rural Latino youth in Minnesota underscores the importance of a school staff's willingness and ability not only to engage these students in academic work but also to draw them into after-school extracurricular activities so that strong social bonds with their mainstream peers can be forged. His findings indicate that "students' level of school attachment is increased by the frequency of attendance at community events and by the number of extracurricular activities in which students engaged" (p. 300). A rural town that welcomes its newcomers at local events is providing its language minority youth with much needed entry into the heart of the community.

Cultural isolation in a rural community is another reality faced by the first wave of these students and their families, with few stores and services offering the types of foods and traditional supplies normally used. With less access to bilingual support and cross-cultural liaisons in a rural setting, just learning what is available to them becomes a greater challenge (Zehr, 2001). And even though public schooling is available to all immigrant and refugee children, the 'cultural script' underlying the American school experience is not. As much as rural school districts are challenged on many fronts to provide a positive and effective learning environment for their English language learners, the families of these learners are also challenged to access, understand, and participate in an educational system that is usually quite foreign to them.

Strengths of Rural Districts

Yet a case can and should be made for the strengths of rural districts for its advocates point to myriad factors that could work in favor of its newcomers, making its school setting an advantageous place for ELLs to be. Bailey (2000) from the Center of Rural Affairs cites statistics showing how much safer small schools are, noting much lower levels of violent crime and discipline problems. He also points to twenty-three research studies reflecting much higher extracurricular participation rates among small schools where "in nearly every measure, rural students [. . .] equal or exceed the participation rates of all students" (p.3). This increase in student involvement typically results in increased parental involvement and resulting community interaction, with ELL families proud to watch their children on stage, on the sports field, or wherever else activities take them. Attending a game or a concert at school is often far less intimidating and uncomfortable for ELL families than meeting with a child's teacher in a one-on-one parent conference.

Many of our rural teachers have offered anecdotal examples of their job satisfaction working in a rural setting, reiterating what researchers have found in their studies (Gibbs, 2000; Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005). One of our Hansen team members said the following:

I love working in a small rural community with children and grandchildren of some of my family, friends and neighbors. We have a stake in what happens in our school because this is where we live and work and educate our children too. I believe one can "bloom where you are planted." Knowing a good amount of the staff for me is an advantage. We celebrate each other's life events and support and hold each other up during the bad times. I think we are a professional group, respecting the privacy issues of our students, but we know the communities and people that make up our district well enough to pick up on something that is happening in a family or something that does not feel right.

A teacher from Iowa noted how "staff members are better connected to their communities and parents, and therefore, better able to help immigrant students to become part of the community" (Zehr, 2001, p.3). This greater familiarity and geographic proximity offers teachers many more opportunities to informally interact with ESL families through daily routines at the post office, shops, churches, and other local venues. Rural teachers can also more readily tap into local community resources such as volunteer groups, fraternal organizations, libraries, and key businesses where their personal connections are invaluable.

Teachers in rural school settings have opportunities to impact decision-making and take on leadership positions that might be unattainable in large urban districts. What could be described as staffing limitations on one hand, could be seen as an opening for talented and capable teachers who want to advocate for their ELLs. Teachers willing to do the groundwork will find a fertile field. A rural Vermont ESL teacher, for example, began a cross-district consortium to apply for funding unavailable to small rural districts which resulted in monthly meetings for collegial support, cooperation, and shared knowledge (Auerbach, 2006). A southwestern Minnesota network of rural and semi-rural ESL teachers began meeting in a central location to provide themselves with a similar opportunity to connect with their peers (Edstam, 2002). Rural teachers may well have the unique ability to effect change in their schools within a system with fewer layers of bureaucracy and much more face-to-face communication between the school board, administrators, and staff. Indeed, Gibbs' (2000, p. 3) found that "rural teachers have a greater degree of autonomy and more direct influence over school policy than do urban teachers." A rural team of highly professional staff members can make a huge impact on the policies and practices of their school and district.

Whether in urban, suburban, or rural schools, it is clear that the principal plays a key role regarding the education of ELLs. Having written extensively about the challenges of educating ELLs in rural areas, Wrigley (2000) says the following:

The district can provide structure and guidance, but it is the school principal who ensures that the programs are properly implemented and maintained. It is the principal who sets the tone of acceptance, who encourages his or her staff to warmly welcome the language minority students and their families. I cannot stress enough the importance of the principal's attitude in areas such as valuing what students bring both culturally and linguistically, and initiating efforts to communicate with the families on a meaningful level. In my experience, the schools that are most effectively addressing the many needs of their ELLs are those schools that have a principal who views the new population as an enriching rather than problematic addition to the school environment. (p. 3)

A principal capable of showing this level of leadership would represent a unique 'strength' in a rural district.

The Hansen Case

Hansen is a rural school district of approximately 1400 students, with a language minority population of 14%, all of whom are Spanish speakers from Mexico or parts of south Texas. The highest percentage of ELLs is 21% (107 students) at the K-5 elementary school. When the school staff began to work with the TEAM UP project in the summer of 2005, the school had one full-time licensed ESL teacher, one bilingual (Spanish) ESL teacher seeking licensure, one full-time ESL paraprofessional, one half-time paraprofessional, and one half-time family service worker. ELLs were identified by the state's Home Language Questionnaire and an informal language/reading assessment and were placed in an ELL language level based on a district constructed informal oral language survey given by the ESL teachers. Hansen's program service model was completely pull-out in small segments of time, with as little as 15 minutes designated at some points to be followed by 30 minutes later in the day. With ELLs equally distributed per class per grade, both ESL teachers pulled ELLs from every classroom at every grade level. The ESL teachers determined reading levels at each grade and divided the ELLs into small groups accordingly and focused on reading instruction. With class schedules set around school specialist schedules (i.e., music, art, computers), ELLs were usually pulled from classes during the content (i.e., math, science, social studies) instruction time.

Challenges Faced by Hansen

One of the biggest challenges identified by the team was the planning and scheduling of staff development focused on 'best practices' for ELLs. The district's staff development committee had its own list of topics, so the TEAM UP group needed to do some negotiating to put the ESL focus higher on the committee's agenda. They also had to

deal with staff resistance to any 'outside of contract' time for this development, so finding pre or post class time meant shortening the school day on one end or the other to accommodate the staff time needed. Lacking funding for outside speakers, the district looked to the TEAM UP members themselves to design and present the staff development materials or find guest speakers with nominal or no fees to do so.

Getting teacher 'buy in' to even consider change is an issue at every school but particularly at Hansen where, with high numbers of veteran teachers, many are seemingly unwilling to change their instructional paradigm. Challenging experienced teacher practice is no easy task. Resistance to such change takes many forms, and the Hansen team too often heard "Show me the research!" when they suggested that change might be warranted. Unless staff can be convinced of the effectiveness of new strategies and techniques for teaching ELLs, they are resistant to making changes from their 'tried and true' methods of teaching. Though their ELL population has increased exponentially in the last decade, many of these mainstream teachers, in a stereotypic but common perspective, still look to the ESL teachers to 'fix the problem' by removing the ELLs from the classroom 'until they speak English fluently.'

Administrative support has been inconsistent, with a recent superintendent of brief tenure whose concern for ELLs was insincere at best and an elementary principal with good intentions but torn by staff factions and union threats. The principal's main reason for participation in this grant was his concern over the rapid demographic increase of his ELL population. What was appealing about the grant was that one of its key components was the creation and implementation of a school action plan to address the needs of its English language learners specifically developed and carried out by each elementary school team. The principal recognized the potential value of this type of professional effort put forth by a team of six dedicated staff members. The team seized an opportunity to collaborate in ways that might effect changes that were so clearly needed.

Hansen was also dealing with some other realities of rural school districts. Its ESL teachers were understaffed, with only one of the two at the elementary school qualified and licensed, though very much a novice; the other was on a variance and working on her license but unfamiliar with the elementary setting. There had been a bilingual ESL teacher who left the school after a short time there, so high turnover was also a problem. Filling the teaching gap, paraprofessionals were used a great deal for one-on-one tutoring of ELLs, who, in many instances, had more direct instruction from these aides than from their classroom teachers.

With scheduling done to accommodate specialists' schedules, ELLs missed a great deal of content instruction. By pulling students from several classes at each grade level, ESL teachers were unable to connect with the large number of classroom teachers, making meaningful communication about student work and any type of collaborative efforts between teachers almost impossible. Newcomers with minimal English were not getting

enough instruction at the level they needed. Overall, academic achievement for English language learners was suffering.

Many aspects of an ESL program that should have been solidly in place were loosely dealt with. Registration procedures and intake forms for entering ELLs needed attention. Appropriate questions requesting relevant information needed to be developed as the old ones were often irrelevant if not intrusive; much needed background information and academic records from the last school also needed to be included. The assessment of ELL language skills for entering ELLs had to be standardized and understood not only by ESL teachers but also by mainstream teachers. Access to a bilingual Spanish speaker to meet with families, especially during an initial registration was often limited, creating a stressful experience for all involved. Attention to ELL parental involvement, always a challenge, had not been addressed in any concerted way. And lack of translated written material and a school answering machine message only in English made communication with and notification of parents very difficult.

Hansen was also suffering financially, with declining enrollment causing major cuts in teaching staff and in dollars available for all the other needs of a school district. Some non-teaching staff positions that were cut had their responsibilities redistributed, making workloads heavier. The only bonus was more available classroom space, a rarity in most schools, which allowed the ESL teachers to have a very large and comfortable room for their pull-out classes and paraprofessional tutoring. Even common planning time by grade level, once a mainstay, was eliminated due to a reduced budget that had teaching schedules reassigned.

Hansen's School Action Plan

One of the long-term goals for each team in the TEAM UP project was the creation of a school action plan to address each site's most pressing needs where service to ELLs is concerned. Over a two-year period, the Hansen team identified the following four major goals:

1. To increase collaborative efforts between mainstream and ESL teachers
2. To develop and improve procedures for ESL programming
3. To increase parent involvement of ELL students
4. To provide staff development that addressed ESL issues

Each of these goals had specific objectives that helped the team approach them in small incremental steps, which, taken together, would move them towards achieving their aims.

How successful have they been with each goal? Here are the results thus far.

1. To Increase Collaborative Efforts between Mainstream and ESL Teachers

Efforts to increase collaboration have been made through the process of clustering. The team considers one of their greatest successes to be the clustering of ELLs in grades 1-5 in either one or two classrooms at each grade level rather than being distributed equally across the grade. The ESL teachers have assigned themselves to specific grades, thereby further reducing the number of teachers with whom they need to connect. As one team member stated, "this has increased collaboration and professional conversation between our ESL teachers and our classroom teachers." ESL and mainstream teachers are able to discuss ways to increase ELL student achievement in a more timely and meaningful way.

In kindergarten, the ELLs are being clustered 60 minutes every morning for one of their academic blocks. During that time, an ESL teacher, an ESL paraprofessional, and a special education teacher join the kindergarten teacher in a collaborative teaching effort to work at the levels needed by these students, either at workstations or in small group settings.

With clustering in effect, the two ESL paraprofessionals have fewer classrooms to cover, allowing them to work with ELL students who can remain in their rooms and participate more actively in their classes.

2. To Develop and Improve Procedures for ELL programming

Addressing the ESL program, the team worked extensively on revising their ELL registration procedures, developing new forms and channeling the paperwork in a more streamlined manner. A revised placement form was an important part of this overhaul. It included the ELLs' oral language level, their reading level, and the services being received (i.e., ESL; special education; Title I). A policy was created to share these forms with classroom teachers as another means of increasing communication with them about their newly entering ELLs.

In an effort to more smoothly schedule ESL services, the staff were informed in their August workshop as to times allocated for ELLs to receive instruction from ESL teachers. When classroom teachers began in the fall, they knew that the ESL teachers would be

addressing language through content and focusing on the content areas. That information helped them plan their own instruction for their ELLs.

With the district having failed to make the state's AMAO, the team took on the enormous task of writing a plan to improve ELL achievement on a K-12 basis with Minnesota Department of Education sponsored assistance. This included a presentation to the school board which was preceded by many months of work reviewing ELL test data such as the MN SOLOM and the TEAE test with the help of the district testing coordinator.

Recognizing the poor academic showing of their ELLs, the ESL teacher and team leader joined forces to write a grant that was funded for a migrant summer school program in the district. It was highly successful as shown by a comparison of pre and post testing results with significant gains in both reading and math for the ELLs who attended.

3. To Increase Parent Involvement Of ELL Students

Although ELL parents were not purposely ignored prior to TEAM UP, the team decided that a more focused effort needed to be made to increase ELL parent involvement. An ELL family night was specifically scheduled in the fall and was a major success, with far more staff participation and a high rate of parent attendance. A team member noted that during the event a feeling of "wellbeing was introduced," with great enthusiasm shown by the ELL families. With interpreters on the scene, the parent-teacher conference in the fall had an 81% attendance rate, a high point for that event.

Another change which, as one team member said, "might seem small but has made a huge difference" was the relocation of the family service worker to the elementary school office from another far corner of the school to be more readily available to translate or interpret for ELL parents when needed.

4. To Provide Staff Development that Addressed ESL Issues

Addressing staff development began on an incremental basis. The first year, a monthly quick five-minute 'information blast' with a suggested technique or cultural fact was shared at each faculty meeting, where TEAM UP was always on the agenda. Team members called this a "mini in-service that keeps us at the forefront of people's minds so they know that we're still out there and that we're the resource people to help them with issues they might have." The second year, a TEAM UP staff binder for each staff member was created and filled with ESL related articles on instruction, assessment, parent involvement, culture, etc., for teachers to access information. Team members continue to add to these binders throughout the year.

The team adds ESL oriented information to their school bulletin, seeing it as "simple and easy thing to do but it's a way to share staff development in an out-of-the -box way of thinking about it." They also created a bulletin board in their staff lounge to increase communication among all the staff committees within the school. "Even in a small district, there is a lot of turnover on committees and people don't even know who they can go to for information about different things."

The interim superintendent has been vocally supportive of the team's request for further staff development on ESL issues and has given them his full cooperation. This, in itself, was met with great team satisfaction as contrasted with reactions from the prior administration.

Hansen - Moving Forward

The Hansen team is already planning ahead for the 2007-2008 school year, beyond their TEAM UP involvement. The team has an ongoing list of tasks to tackle in addressing the four goals outlined for itself. It needs to evaluate its collaborative model now that clustered classrooms have been put into place and determine how well these classrooms are providing opportunities for their ESL teachers to work with classroom teachers, either as team teachers or as co-planners of parts of the curriculum. Other than the kindergarten cluster teachers, only a few classroom teachers have stepped forward to participate in collaborative efforts, pointing to time as the main factor preventing them from doing so. The team has been brainstorming creative ways to address this by identifying possible times during the week when cluster teachers at each grade level could meet with their ESL teacher.

Team members will be making another school board presentation in the next few months so they can speak directly to the board about the ways in which the district can best address the needs of their ELL population. This presentation serves to make the team's work more public, while at the same time underscoring the importance of attending to the instructional needs of this student population. They are anxious to continue their work with staff development and are developing a seven session plan to be carried out over a two-year period that addresses the following issues: ELL strategies; collaboration and team teaching; flexible reading groupings; language and content objectives; differentiated instruction; and test data evaluation.

There is a strong need to continue working on ELL parent involvement and an interest in looking at alternative parent-teacher conference formatting that would allow interested Hispanic parents to come during set blocks of time, in an "open house" fashion, rather than only at appointed times. In that way, families can attend together, supporting each other in the process of connecting with the school community. The team leader wants to investigate greater ELL parent involvement activities with other local school districts that

would encourage different types of resource centers or cooperatives to meet monthly and share ideas. She would like to have a Title III networking group replicate the same type of benefits she has seen derived from a Title I networking group across several rural school districts. The team is hopeful that the yearly 'Arts Night' can have a multicultural component to it for the first time, attracting ELL families. And more cooperation will be sought from the local Chamber of Commerce, local churches, and local businesses to provide resources and/or funding for school related events and activities that would further involve ELLs and their families.

A revised district ESL program guidebook is being planned to include all of the ESL forms, procedures, and service model and will be made available to all staff as well as parents. A review of instruction time allotted for ESL levels 1 - 4 will also be under discussion to determine how and when ESL teachers work with ELLs at varying levels of English proficiency.

Conclusion

Bernard Berube (2000; 2002), the ground-breaking author on ESL instruction in rural schools, identified three **R's** to frame his discussion: 1) **recognition** of the existence of English language learners; 2) **responsibility** on the part of all school staff to meet ELL learning needs; and 3) **respect** for each language learner as shown by respect for the ESL profession when programs are held to the highest standards. As he (2002) notes:

The three R's of LEP [limited English proficient] students and for the (ESL) profession appear particularly elusive [*italics added*] in the nation's rural communities, where LEP enrollments are low, where the professional staff are commonly unprepared for the changing realities of having LEP children in their midst, and where LEP newcomer children struggle to fit in to a setting where their language, their skin color, and their culture may be viewed as inferior at worst or exotic at best. (p. 1)

These three R's are not 'elusive' on the Hansen team but in fact are positively reflected in the attitude and work of its team members. These individuals are well aware of the realities of their own rural school district and can enumerate its challenges better than their critics. But they are also very proud of its strengths and have tried to build on those in developing their school action plan. They understand very well the necessity of process, that the very act of sharing their professional expertise and tackling seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the complex world of schools is an integral part of the work they do. They have become believers in incremental change and have seen the value of taking small steps leading towards a major goal. Team members have come to know each other better as friends and as colleagues, in ways that cannot help but have a positive influence on student learning and school success. Since their initial TEAM UP meetings during the summer of 2005, Hansen's ELL population has continued to

increase, though overall district enrollment has dropped dramatically. As numbers continue to tell one story, the Hansen team is intent upon telling theirs.

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Endnotes

1 The term 'apple pie and enchiladas' is taken from the title of a book by A. V. Millard & J. Chapa, called *Apple Pie and Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest* published in 2004 by University of Texas Press. The authors note how much more easily ethnic food is accepted into these communities than are the newcomers themselves.

**OVERCOMING LIMITATIONS:
HOW A FILIPINO SPEAKER OF ENGLISH USES COMPENSATION STRATEGIES**

Jennifer Lloyd

ABSTRACT

While the topic of language learning strategies has become very popular in the last few decades, there have been few studies addressing how social context impacts the use of language learning strategies. This article examines how both the stage of learning and the setting in which the learning is taking place affect a specific individual's use of compensation strategies for speaking English. More specifically, this article focuses on professional vs. casual settings. The participant is an adult Filipino speaker of English who has seventeen years' experience using English in her profession in a variety of settings abroad. She is currently working as a nurse in Minnesota. Based on interviews, questionnaires, and observations, this study concludes that even though the participant feels more proficient speaking English at her workplace than in nonprofessional settings, she utilizes compensation strategies in both settings. The findings indicate that compensation strategies can aid in language learning regardless of the learner's proficiency level and setting in which the learning is taking place.

RESEARCH

Researchers have long recognized the advantages of using strategies for language learning. Many have examined whether or not the use of certain strategies make some language learners more successful than those who do not employ those strategies (Naimen, Fohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1996) Other researchers have examined how strategies contribute to individual differences in language learners (Ellis, 2004). Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as "Specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8). Which strategies a learner employs depends upon a number of factors: learner age, stage of learning, gender, the target language, learner cognitions, learning style, cultural background, personality, previous experience of language learning, and the setting in which learning is taking place (Ellis, 2004).

Parks and Raymond (2004) are among the few who have researched how the setting factor influences a language learner's use of strategy. In *Strategy use by nonnative-English-speaking students in an MBA program: Not business as usual!* Parks and Raymond (2004) examine "how social context may constrain or facilitate the use of strategies or the development of new strategies" (p. 374). They suggest that international students often have a hard time taking initiative to employ the strategies

that are typically associated with a good language learner. The subjects of the study were Chinese students who, after completing English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, registered in a Master's in Business Administration program in a Canadian University. The results, which were based off of interviews, observation, and collection of various documents, showed that the move by the students from the EAP to the MBA program (sheltered core courses) resulted in changes in their strategy use in regard to reading, writing, and team work: "Their use (or nonuse) of strategies was variously constrained or facilitated by the way they were positioned within a specific social context" (Parks & Raymond, 2002, p. 384).

The subject of this study, whom I will call Marie, is from the Philippines and speaks English as her third language—following Visayan and Tagalog. Marie pursued a nursing career in order to seek adventure and a higher salary abroad. After nursing in the Philippines for three years, Marie worked in Saudi Arabia for fifteen years and in Kuwait for one year. She is currently working in a nursing home in Minnesota, where she has resided for just over a year.

Marie is not alone in leaving the Philippines in order to pursue a nursing career abroad. According to Choy (2002), due to nursing shortages, health-care organizations from Minnesota and Wisconsin are recruiting more and more Filipino nurses. Ong and Azores (1994) predict that the U.S. will continue to alleviate their nursing labor demands with Filipino nurses searching to escape the uncertain economic conditions of the Philippines (as cited in Choy, 2002).

Many nurses who are non-native speakers of English and desire to work abroad take courses that teach the specific English necessary to work in the nursing profession. This type of English teaching is called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Orr (2002) defines ESP as a "Tailor-made language package to specific communities of learners with highly specialized language needs" (p.2). Increased specialization in language learning emerged in the 1960s in response to the growing demands of international technology and commerce and a linguistic shift of focus from prescriptive grammar to meaningful communication in specific settings. ESP also developed in response to the advances in educational psychology that placed an emphasis on the learners' needs and interests. A half of a century later, some now consider ESP to be the most important area in English language teaching (Hutchinson & Waters, 2000). Although Marie has never had explicit ESP training, the main context in which she has been using and learning English over the last seventeen years has been within the nursing profession.

In light of the above research on language learning strategies and the participant's prolonged experience of using English in a certain setting, this research examines the following questions: Which language learning strategies does a specific individual utilize? How is her choice of strategy affected by her stage of learning and setting in which she is learning?

METHODOLOGY

A variety of methods exist to assess language learning strategies and skills; however, because each method offers advantages and disadvantages, Cohen and Scott (1996) recommend using a combination of methods that best target the desired information of a given study. Johnstone (2000) also recommends this diversity or “triangularization” of methods. For the purposes of this study, interviews, written questionnaires, and observation were the tools used to collect information about the subject’s competency in English and language learning strategies.

Over a time period of two months, I met with Marie in her home, a setting in which she would be comfortable, to conduct the interviews and questionnaires. After obtaining Marie’s permission, all of the interviews were digitally recorded. The initial interview was semi-structured. It included predetermined questions and a background questionnaire (see appendix); however, Marie was given much room to elaborate, and I could clarify as needed. In subsequent meetings, the interviews consisted of a few follow-up questions, and then I allowed Marie to lead the conversation and to tell me about whatever it was that interested her. For a majority of the time she talked about her experience in Saudi Arabia and showed me photo albums. Due to the fact that Marie loves to talk, I was able to record large amounts of natural data without having to use many prompts.

In order to determine Marie’s stage of learning, she completed a chart developed by Naimen, Fohlich, Stern, & Todesco, (1996) to self-assess her proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing English. Naimen et al. (1996) had developed this chart for their participants in an adult interview study documented in their book, *The Good Language Learner*, to self-assess their proficiency in the language they were learning. Proficiency is categorized as *Elementary*, *Working Knowledge*, or *Advanced (native-like) Knowledge* based on agreement with a list of statements. For example, to assess proficiency in speaking, the statements used to categorize include “I can make essential sound discrimination; understand simple statements & questions on topics very familiar to me (meals, purchases, etc.)” –*Elementary*, “I can understand most casual conversations on familiar topics, related to my family, work, daily events, etc.” –*Working Knowledge*, and “I am able to follow conversations of native speakers (at normal speed)” –*Advanced Knowledge* (Naiman et al., 1996). Based on this chart, I was able to determine Marie’s stage of learning English in different contexts—both professional and nonprofessional.

In order to determine which language learning strategies Marie employs, she completed Rebecca Oxford’s (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning*. This inventory was designed to help learners become more aware of how they learn a language and to help teachers effectively teach each student by teaching to their strategies. The

questionnaire is divided into six parts, which address the following language learning strategies: remembering more effectively, using your mental processes, compensating for missing knowledge, organizing and evaluating your learning, managing your emotions, and learning with others. In each section, the language learner is provided with examples of specific learner actions and asked to rate himself or herself on a scale of 1 to 5 ranging from *Never or Almost Never True of Me* to *Always or Almost Always True of Me*.

Observation was my third method of collecting data. While interviews and questionnaires can prove valuable in collecting information about language learning strategies, according to Cohen and Scott (1996), much of the data collected from these instruments is comprised of the learner's generalized self assessment, which may or may not be completely accurate. There is much debate about the level of consciousness a learner has about his or her strategy use. However, Oxford (1990), believes that learners are often very aware of the strategies they use. Other researchers agree that the language learner's own reflections and observations about his or her learning provide more information than would an outsider's observations of this internal process (Hutchinson & Waters, 2000).

While both opinions of the learner's awareness of his or her strategy use are valid, good research always attempts to collect data using a variety of methods. Cohen and Scott (1996) recommend using observation in order to obtain data from an objective perspective rather than relying solely on the learner's self assessment. Therefore, in order to complete Johnstone's (2000) triangularization method, I included observation in my data-gathering methods. I observed Marie in both her workplace, a nursing home, and a local café—a more casual, nonprofessional setting, and took notes regarding her language learning strategy use. I would have liked to have digitally recorded Marie speaking English in her workplace; however, in the best interest of the residents, I chose not to.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study, as outlined below, indicate that Marie uses compensation strategies both in professional settings, where she feels more proficient in English, and in casual settings, where Marie feels less proficient in English.

Strategy Choice

The results of Marie's *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (Oxford, 1990) are as follows:

Strategies

Score

Remembering More Effectively	3.6
Using all Your Mental Processes	3.7
Compensating for Missing Knowledge	3.3
Organizing and Evaluating Your Learning	4.3
Managing Your Emotions	3.3
Learning with Others	4
Overall Average	3.7

After obtaining these results, I originally had planned on analyzing the strategy that Marie indicated as using the most, which was *Organizing and Evaluating Your Learning*. However, as I began to analyze the recorded data from the interviews, Marie's prevalent use of compensation strategies caught my attention. Upon examination of the specific questions regarding compensation strategies, the following results show that Marie usually does use compensation strategies when speaking (see #2 and #4), which became my focus.

Score	
<u>4</u>	1. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
<u>4</u>	2. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
<u>3</u>	3. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
<u>3</u>	4. I read English without looking up every new word.
<u>2</u>	5. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
<u>4</u>	6. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

4 = Usually true of me 3 = Somewhat true of me 2 = Usually not true of me

According to Oxford (1990), compensation strategies help learners to overcome knowledge limitations and to stay in conversations long enough to get sustained practice. Compensation strategies are perhaps among the most important of language learning strategies for beginner or intermediate learners; however, they are also useful for more expert learners. While Oxford (1990) acknowledges that some experts classify compensation strategies such as using synonyms as merely being communication strategies that are not useful for learning, she defends her position that compensation strategies do aid in learning language. Because of the difference in classifications, the

distinction between compensation strategies and communication styles is a matter that merits further research.

Analyzing Data

After transcribing the recorded data, I located and tagged Marie's use of the following selected compensation strategies for speaking English from Oxford's (1990)

Language Learning Strategies:

1. Getting Help: Asking for help by hesitating or explicitly asking for the missing expression.
2. Using Mime or Gesture: Using physical motion in place of an expression during a conversation to indicate the meaning.
3. Adjusting or Approximating the Message: Altering the message by omitting some items of information or making the ideas simpler or less precise.
4. Using Circumlocution or Synonyms: Using a roundabout expression involving several words to explain a single concept or using a synonym to convey the intended meaning.
5. Avoiding Communication Partially or Totally: Avoiding communication when difficulties are anticipated or encountered in order to save the learner emotionally.

The following are examples of Marie's use of each strategy:

Getting Help

In both of these examples, Marie directly asked me to provide the missing information or to verify her use of a word.

1. "We did the exam for speaking, the exam for writing, the exam for...what is that...?"
2. "Kuwait was just a very small country...you call that country?"

Using Mime or Gesture

In the first example, Marie gestured to indicate the "rope" that is used to symbolize the uniting of man and woman in Filipino weddings, and she also asked for help. In the second example, the first gesture was for "bottle," and the second gesture "choke."

1. "They will put this...uh (gesture), what do you call that?"
2. "They cannot hold the feeding. (gesture) They just leave it there and then, ah you will just see the baby...(gesture)..."

Adjusting or Approximating the Message

In the first example, Marie used the word "place" in place of the more complicated expression "housing development." In the second example, Marie used "like this" multiple times in order to simplify the message.

1. "So my friend bought a house in this place."
2. "I get a lot of (laugh) penalty. I have to pay like this, like this. Why? Because they caught me talking in like this."

Using Circumlocution or Synonyms

In these examples, Marie uses roundabout expressions to communicate "interviewer," "research," and "a test-taking strategies class."

1. "And the one who will do the interview is also from here."
2. "It seems when I see my boys studying it's almost the same but more of the, on their side, more on the research, they have to make some researches."
3. "All I did was just to attend, oh, what is this? Some, uh, it's like, you know, they give us tips or hints how to go straight and how to go, how to answer all those questions..."

Avoiding Communication Partially or Totally

In both of these examples, Marie trails off and does not complete her thought.

1. "But they have a good, it's a good place to work for me as long as you..."
2. "It's a good hospital, and it's really crowded you know (laugh) because once it's a good hospital..."

As is evident in my last example, the strategy of avoiding communication was the one that was most open for interpretation. Did Marie leave her sentences unfinished due to encountering or anticipating difficulties, or did she simply not finish because her point could be inferred by what she had already stated? Oxford (2006) does give examples of this strategy in her book; however, no explanation is offered as to how the learner's knowledge limitations were assessed.

Observations

In my observations of Marie in professional and casual settings, the most noticeable compensation strategies she used were *Adjusting or Approximating the Message* and *Avoiding Communication Partially or Totally*. Marie often replaced more specific words with "this" or "that" when conversing. Also, she frequently trailed off and did not complete her thoughts as in the following example of partial avoidance:

"All I did is prepare the meds so when the residents is already here, it's easy to..."

Marie seemed to avoid communication more often when in a group of people. One on one, Marie was very talkative and did not usually shy away from topics. However, Marie did not participate very much in her coworkers' conversations unless she was directly asked a question—even then she answered with a very short response that did not encourage more conversation on that topic (such as professional basketball or online chatting). At the café, Marie participated more in the conversations that were familiar or interesting to her. This is an example of how avoiding communication can save the learner emotionally and enable her to contribute more at a later time.

Stage of Learning

When assessing her English proficiency according to Naimen et. al.'s (1996) chart, Marie indicated advanced or native-like knowledge in all areas in the skills of reading and writing. However, in the skills of understanding and speaking, while overall she would consider herself to be advanced in these skills, she indicated having difficulties in certain areas. Marie specified difficulties in understanding movies, jokes, and different language styles and dialects. She did not indicate any struggles with understanding lectures or professional discussions. When asked about her speaking proficiency, Marie did not feel she has native-like knowledge when it comes to being able to participate in any conversation or discussion with high degree of fluency or approximating native accent.

Marie expressed that she feels most comfortable using English at work—although she acknowledged that every nursing context presents her new challenges in English. In Saudi Arabia, she said her main language challenge was learning to communicate with her coworkers, most of whom were nonnative speakers of English from many different countries. In Minnesota, one of her challenges is learning to speak like Minnesotans. Marie said that whenever she responds to being thanked by saying "You're welcome," her sons always correct her; she should be saying "You bet!" Based on the questionnaire and interviews with Marie, it seems that Marie is at an advanced proficiency level of English when using English for professional purposes and is less proficient when using English in more casual settings.

Based on these results, I did not expect that Marie would use many compensation strategies at work. However, as noted above, Marie used compensation strategies when speaking English at work and in casual settings. I believe this is due to the fact that most of my observations of Marie at work were of her casual conversations with coworkers and residents. Thus, while nursing requires a specific knowledge of English for the profession, a large part of nursing is also interacting with people on a more casual, personal level.

DISCUSSION

The conclusions of this study lend support to the idea that compensation strategies can aid in language learning regardless of the learner's proficiency level and the setting in which the learning is taking place. Even though Marie has seventeen years of experience speaking English in her nursing career and believes herself to be very proficient when using English in her workplace, she continues to use compensation strategies to overcome knowledge gaps. Despite Marie's experience of using English in a variety of settings—the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—Minnesota is a new setting that presents new language obstacles.

In *RN*, a professional nursing journal, the article "Say it in English!" discusses the importance of nurses speaking English around their patients. The editor writes, "So please, don't add to a patient's sense of worry, fear, or isolation by speaking another language in front of her—or even outside of her room. Say it in English" (Ostrowski, 2006, p. 9). The ability to speak English in the nursing field is essential to the profession. However, as a growing number of nonnative English speakers explore nursing careers in the Midwest, concerns are raised regarding their English proficiency. Many foreign nurses are very well educated in their field and have had rigorous training in ESP, but one must keep in mind that the change in setting inevitably brings with it new challenges in English, as is evident in the present study. Therefore, the pedagogy of compensation strategies and other language learning strategies in the field of ESP is a matter that merits further research.

Background Questionnaire

What languages were spoken in your childhood home?

What do you regard as your native language?

What languages were spoken in your neighborhood?

When did you begin studying English and under what circumstances?

How long have you lived in the United States?

In what environments do you speak English?

How do you rate your overall proficiency in English compared with the proficiency of native speakers of the language? a) Excellent b) Good c) Fair d) Poor

How important is it for you to become proficient in English?

 a) Very important b) Important c) Not so important

What are the main reasons you want to learn English?

Do you enjoy language learning?

Do you feel you are still learning? (what kinds of things?)

Please list all of the languages you have studied and under what circumstances:

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Improving Literacy of L1-Non-Literate and L1-Literate Adult English as A Second Language Learners

Julie Trupke-Bastidas
Andrea Poulos

Abstract

This research focuses on effective practices for teaching reading to both adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners acquiring literacy for the first time in English and learners who are already literate in their first language. This study examines if learners' phonemic awareness and decoding are improved when using a whole-part-whole instructional method that combines a focus on higher and lower-level skills. Participants include nine females from East Africa: five non-literate (L1-non-literate) and four literate (L1-literate) in their first language. Participants were given pre and posttests of phonemic awareness and decoding and then whole-part-whole reading instruction for 10 weeks. This intervention impacted L1-non-literate participants the most. Those learners who scored the lowest on pretests showed the most gains on the posttest.

INTRODUCTION

Faced with the task of designing instruction for a class with learners not literate in any language and learners with literacy in another language, practitioners may ask: How can I meet the needs of both learners? This study examines if learners' phonemic awareness and decoding skills—several of the component skills essential for reading, and potentially skills helpful to learners of varying literacy levels—are improved when using a whole-part-whole instructional method. This method combines higher-level and lower-level skills by teaching whole words in a context, then examining particular words to practice a letter-sound or phonemic awareness skill, and then reading the whole words again later in a sentence or story context.

Literature Review

To understand the basis for using a whole-part-whole instructional method, we first examine second language (L2) research on the components of reading. Researchers have long held that reading is an interactive process involving different components (Adams, 1990). Grabe (1991, p. 383) states that “reading involves both an array of lower-level rapid, automatic identification skills and an array of higher-level comprehension/interpretation skills.” Research has shown that readers have limited cognitive capacities available for use while reading, and having an efficient lower-level system allows readers to focus their limited capacity on comprehending text (Perfetti & Lesgold, 1977; Stanovich, 1991). Thus, developing automatic word recognition skills is important for L2 readers to be able to comprehend text (Bernhardt, 1991; Eskey & Grabe, 1988; Geva & Ryan, 1993; McLaughlin, 1990; McLeod & McLaughlin, 1986; Segalowitz, Poulson, & Komoda, 1991).

Word recognition consists of three component processes: orthographic, phonologic, and semantic. *Orthographic* is being able to visually analyze the composition of words including letter processing and memory (Greenberg, Ehri, & Perin, 1997). *Phonologic* involves recognizing the phonemes (individual sounds) in a word (Greenberg et al., 1997). *Semantic* is recognizing the meaning. The interaction between orthographic and phonologic processes is often described as *decoding*, which is one component examined in this study.

L2 studies demonstrate the importance of word recognition skills in reading (Baker,

Toregeson, & Wagner, 1992; McLeod & McLaughlin, 1986). L2 studies also highlight that learners' first language (L1) may influence the speed and difficulty of acquisition of word recognition skills in the L2 since there may be some transfer and interference from the L1 (Brown & Haynes, 1985; Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003; Haynes & Carr, 1990; Morray, 1982; Ryan & Meara, 1991). Also, L2 studies point out that those with lower decoding have lower reading levels (Favreau & Segalowitz, 1982). Learners can build decoding skills through practice but these skills might not transfer automatically from the L1 to L2 (Gaziel, Obler, & Albert, 1978; Walters & Zatorre, 1978). Thus, based on the L2 studies on lower-level skills, one can conclude that orthography and phonology are key areas that may need improvement for most beginning ESL readers literate in their native language (L1-literate), especially beginners, while also needing a focus on higher-level skills.

The majority of L2 studies conducted thus far have been on highly educated learners who are highly literate in the L1 (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). Research has shown there is an advantage for overall acquisition of English for those learners who have some level of literacy in their native language (Bigelow, Delmas, Hansen, & Tarone, 2006). However, this study involves some participants who have not acquired literacy in any language and never previously received formal education. Therefore, these learners are acquiring literacy for the first time in ESL classes. The next section defines literacy and presents the additional skills learners who are becoming literate will need to acquire to improve their reading in English.

Literacy has been defined as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Perfetti & Marron, 1995, p. 1). For non-literate learners in the L1 (L1-non-literate), acquiring literacy in English means learning the *alphabetic principle* (Perfetti & Marron, 1995), that reading builds on speech and that phonemes (sounds) are represented by different letters. Learners just developing the alphabetic principle are starting to activate their orthographic and phonological processing. Thus, learners need to develop phonological awareness, or “the ability to attend to the phonological or sound structure of language as distinct from its meaning” (Center for Dyslexia, 2004, p. 1). Many L1 studies have shown a strong relationship between phonological awareness and learning to read (Grabe, 1991).

One kind of phonological awareness particularly important for emerging readers is phonemic awareness, which refers to the “ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words” (McShane, 2005, p. 2). “Phonemic awareness is usually learned through reading and writing an alphabetic language” (Perfetti & Marron, 1995, p. 33). Phonemic awareness is important for acquiring literacy and is improved through becoming more literate (Perfetti & Marron, 1995). Studies on L1-non-literate adults have shown that they have little or no phonemic awareness skills and do not perform well on phonemic awareness tasks that involve the manipulation of phonemes in their native language (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Kruidenier, 2002).

In particular, Young-Scholten and Strom (2006) studied 17 adult immigrants and refugees' English proficiency and reading ability. They found levels of English instruction and native language schooling were linked to English reading level. Those less proficient in reading English exhibited less phonemic awareness in English than those more proficient in reading. These less proficient adults showed similar results with children since they had more syllable

and onset/rime awareness than phonemic awareness (Strom & Young-Scholten, 2004, p1). This study and others have shown that adults can learn to segment speech in the L1; thus, there is no critical period for acquiring this (Morais, Content, Bertelson, Cary, & Kolinsky, 1988), and instruction may improve adults' phonemic awareness (Kruidenier, 2002).

The Reading Research Working Group (RRWG) was formed to review the research on reading and provide suggestions for improving literacy. They recommend an explicit focus on phonemic awareness instruction for native speakers. Specific suggestions include: (1) focus on one or two types of phonemic awareness tasks at a time; (2) focus on segmenting and blending, which may be most useful to learners; and (3) use letters as well as sounds for instruction (Kruidenier, 2002, p. 50).

In addition to focusing on phonemic awareness, L1-non-literate learners need to develop decoding skills; that is, knowledge of the letter-sound relationship (i.e., the relationship between orthography and phonology). To decode, learners must be able to: 1) recognize letters, 2) identify and produce the sounds represented by the letters, 3) blend the individual sounds in sequence, and finally 4) recognize the word. As discussed earlier, this instruction may also be beneficial for beginning L1-literate ESL learners. Instruction to build learners' knowledge of the letter-sound relationship is commonly referred to as phonics.

Based on their review of the literature, the RRWG recommends instruction in phonics for native speakers. They state, "explicit, systematic phonics instruction is most effective for beginning readers" (Kruidenier, 2000, p. 49). However, when applying these recommendations to ESL learners acquiring literacy in English, there are important differences to consider. First, Burt, Peyton, and Van Duzer (2005, p. 4) state that, "Alphabets [phonics and phonemic awareness] instruction with native English speakers generally assumes high oral language skills and vocabulary." L1 readers often know 5,000 to 7,000 words before beginning formal instruction in reading (Grabe, 1991; Singer, 1981). Second, beginning native English readers' oral skills are usually much higher than beginning ESL readers so "instructional strategies that rely on oral comprehension of vocabulary and use of nonsense words to teach sound-symbol correspondence are not likely to be successful with English language learners" (Burt et al., 2005, p. 1).

While there are few studies on what specific phonics instruction works with L1-non-literate ESL learners, there is research on what general instruction works best with them such as having materials relevant to their daily lives (Condelli, 2002, p. 1). Hood (1990, p. 59) states, "For beginning learners of English who are illiterate in L1, the process needs to begin with development of context-embedded, cognitively undemanding language; that is, language which is about very familiar things and is closely tied to actions and events. Such language can begin to be developed in both spoken and written modes." Thus, nonsense words or words about unfamiliar things are unlikely to be useful or effective words to focus on with learners.

Some researchers and practitioners recommend teachers incorporate phonics by combining enabling skills (visual and auditory discrimination of letters, sounds, and words; blending letters to sound out words; teaching sight vocabulary) with language experience and whole language approaches (Bell & Burnaby 1984; Holt & Gaer 1993; Vinogradov, 2001; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Perfetti and Marron (1995, p. 22) state, "Instruction in decoding not only can

be embedded in meaningful tasks and materials, it can also be done in a whole language classroom.” This is consistent with the research that identifies reading as a combination of higher-level and lower-level skills. Thus, a combined approach may be useful for L1-literate and L1-non-literate learners. This method of combining enabling skills (lower-level) with whole language activities (higher-level skills) is referred to in this study as *whole-part-whole* reading instruction (adapted from Moustafa (n.d.) and Strickland (1998)).

There is a lack of data showing if these methods do help beginning ESL learners improve their lower-level skills. This study seeks to contribute to research on using phonemic awareness and phonics instruction with L1-literate and L1-non-literate learners. Along with several others not included in this article, this study seeks to investigate the following questions:

1. *How does the whole-part-whole reading instruction intervention over ten weeks impact phonemic awareness, word list decoding, and story text decoding for learners with and without L1 literacy?*
2. *In which phonemic awareness skills (initial sound, same sound, rhyme, blending, segmenting) and letter-sounds do the learners show the most gains following ten weeks of whole-part-whole instruction?*
3. *What qualitative differences exist between learners who improve most and least overall after using this instruction for ten weeks?*

Participants

This research was conducted in a beginning literacy ABE/ESL class in a metro area learning center. The class met for three hours, four times a week in the evening. Participants in the study included nine females (see Table 1) ranging from 23 to 52 years old. All participants were from East Africa. The participants had a wide range of previous educational experience and literacy skills.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information and Educational Background

Participant	Country	Languages	L1-Literacy	Yrs. Prev. Ed.	Age
Sahra	Somalia	Somali	No	0	23
Vicki	Somalia	Somali	No	1 (Somalia) 5 (US)	26
Rani	Ethiopia (Oromo)	Somali, Oromo, Amharic	No	0	31
Neli	Ethiopia	Amharic	No	0	43
Ava	Somalia	Somali	No	0	51
Greta	Somalia	Somali	Yes	2 (Somalia) 2mo. (US)	42
Susan	Somalia	Somali	Yes	8 (Somalia)	52
Kelli	Somalia	Somali	Yes	8 (Somalia)	44
Ana	Somalia	Somali	Yes	9 (Somalia)	37

Methods

Data Collection

The data collection was conducted in three phases: pretesting, ten weeks of instruction, and posttesting. The pretest interview included demographic information and questions about the participant's attitude toward reading, frequency of reading outside of class, and materials read outside of class. The posttest interview included the same questions and also inquired about participant's opinion of the reading instruction over the ten weeks.

Participants were given three tests both as pretests and later, as posttests. The first instrument was a phonemic awareness test that included five separate components adapted from *The Adult Reading Toolkit – Edition 4* (LDA, 2005). These components included identifying initial sound, same sound, and rhyming words as well as blending and segmenting. The second instrument was a decoding word list test from *Sylvia Greene's Informal Assessment Level 1* (2006), which provided diagnostic information about a learner's word analysis ability that indicated the letter combinations mastered. The third instrument was a *BADER Reading and Language Inventory* (Bader, 2005) story passage at the participant's reading level. The level of reading passage was determined by having participants read a graded word lists. The list the participant was able to read without reading more than four words incorrectly determined the level of the passage they read for the test. All testing was conducted individually with each participant. Present at each session was an interpreter who spoke the participants' native languages and English. The interview questions and phonemic awareness test were responded to orally. All responses were tape-recorded and analyzed following the administration of the test.

Other data collected throughout the ten weeks included observations of classroom activities, copies of student work, and informal student feedback. The researcher also kept a journal with notes about the lessons, in particular, what went well and what might need to be improved. Additionally, attendance of the participants was recorded.

Instruction

The researcher examined the participants' pretests including what phonemic awareness skills and letter-sound combinations the majority needed to work on. Based on these findings, the researcher incorporated whole-part-whole reading instruction in the class for ten weeks. This reading instruction integrated whole language methods that focus on building higher-level skills with phonemic awareness and phonics instruction that focus on building lower-level skills. The lower-level skills were practiced using words learners focused on in the week's lessons, already knew from previous lessons, or had in their vocabularies. Components of whole-part-whole reading instruction include:

- A focus on parts of words after learners have learned the words or at least can recognize them.
- After the focus on the parts of words, the whole words are practiced again or examined in a sentence or story context.
- Words for study are those from the thematic unit or from a story that has been read to them or that they have read in unison or on their own (adapted from Strickland, 1998; Moustafa, n.d.).

Each week's lessons revolved around a life skills theme such as shopping, health, and employment. Within these themes, the researcher chose several words that contained the sound or phonemic awareness skill to practice along with one rime for the "part" portion of

the whole-part-whole instruction. The specific phonics and phonemic awareness or “part” practice included the following components:

- *Letter-Sound Activity*: For about 30 to 45 minutes each week, the researcher focused on a particular sound in a word and used that as a transition into showing other examples of words learners may know that also have the same sound. The letter-sound focus included short vowels, long vowels, digraphs (*ch, sh, th, ph*), or consonant blends (*pl, cl*, etc.). Activities to practice included a word dictation followed by sentence writing.
- *Phonemic Awareness*: Some weeks for about 10-20 minutes the researcher used words in the thematic context of the week’s activities or a reading to focus on phonemic awareness activities such as identifying phonemes, rhymes, and blending.
- *Onset/Rimes (Word families)*: Onsets are the consonants in a syllable prior to the first vowel and rimes are the first vowel and everything after it in a syllable. For example, in the word *play*, *pl* is the onset and *ay* is the rime. Each week, the researcher reviewed and/or presented new rimes that appeared within a story that had been read to, with, and by learners. For example with the rime *ay*, the instructor would also have learners practice *pay, say, day, may*, etc. The onset/rimes were presented and practiced using various activities.

The complete whole-part-whole instruction included two components: about 1.5-2 hours per week of direct reading instruction (whole) using whole language methods and about 1.5-2 hours per week of phonics and phonemic awareness activities (part). Over the ten weeks, this whole-part-whole reading instruction consisted of a total of 30-40 hours. However, not all participants attended all class sessions so the amount of instruction each participant ended up receiving varied.

The participants’ scores on all three assessments for both the pre and posttests were calculated. The word list decoding and story text tasks consisted of word reading, so the number of words read correctly was counted. Since the number of words in the story text varied based on the level of text, the percentage of words read correctly was calculated to enable a comparison of participants’ scores. The researcher used judgment in accepting correct responses that were slightly varied due to an accent. Data were examined to identify who was most and least improved. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed for any themes.

Results

Research Question One

First we examine the results for the first research question: *How does the whole-part-whole reading instruction intervention over ten weeks impact phonemic awareness, word list decoding, and story text decoding for learners with and without L1 literacy?*

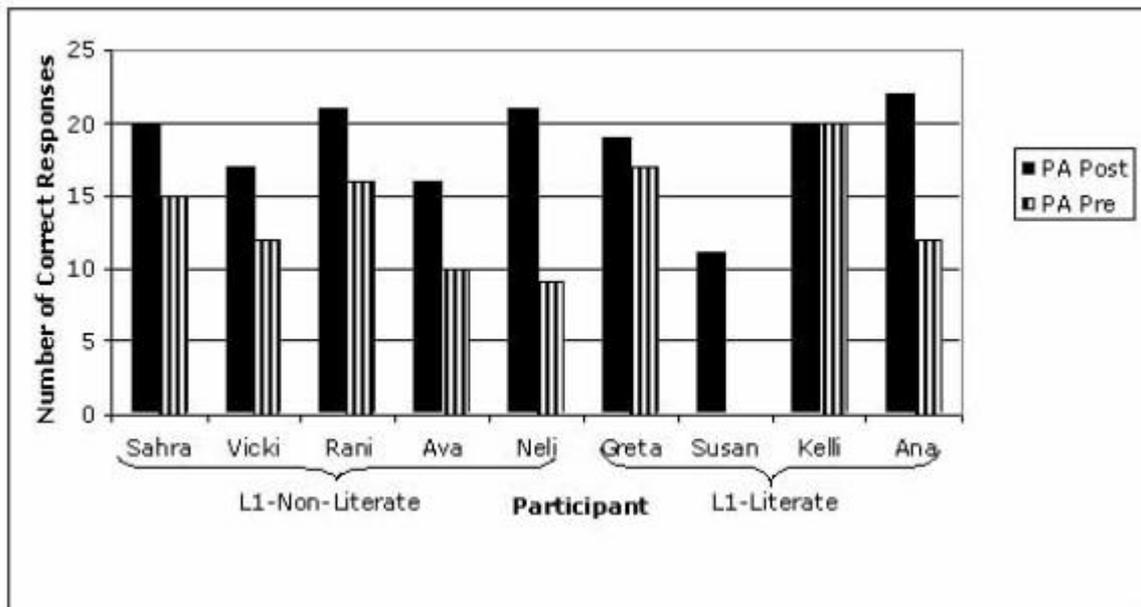
Phonemic Awareness

Eight of the total of nine participants increased their phonemic awareness on the posttest, and one participant (Kelli) scored the same number of correct answers. In particular, those who showed the most improvement included one of the L1-non-literate learners (Neli), and two L1-literate learners (Susan and Ana). Those who showed medium gains in phonemic awareness included the remaining four L1-non-literate participants (Sahra, Vicki, Rani, Ava). Those who showed the lowest gains in phonemic awareness were two L1-literate learners

(Greta and Kelli).

The total number of correct responses was 25 and the average increase in the number of correct responses for all participants on phonemic awareness was 6.22 responses. On the phonemic awareness test, L1-non-literate learners (Sahra-Neli in Figure 1) showed consistent gains, whereas the L1-literate learners varied more in their gains (Greta-Ana in Figure 1). However, since there were small numbers of learners, these results can only suggest there is a difference between the two types of learners and are not definitive.

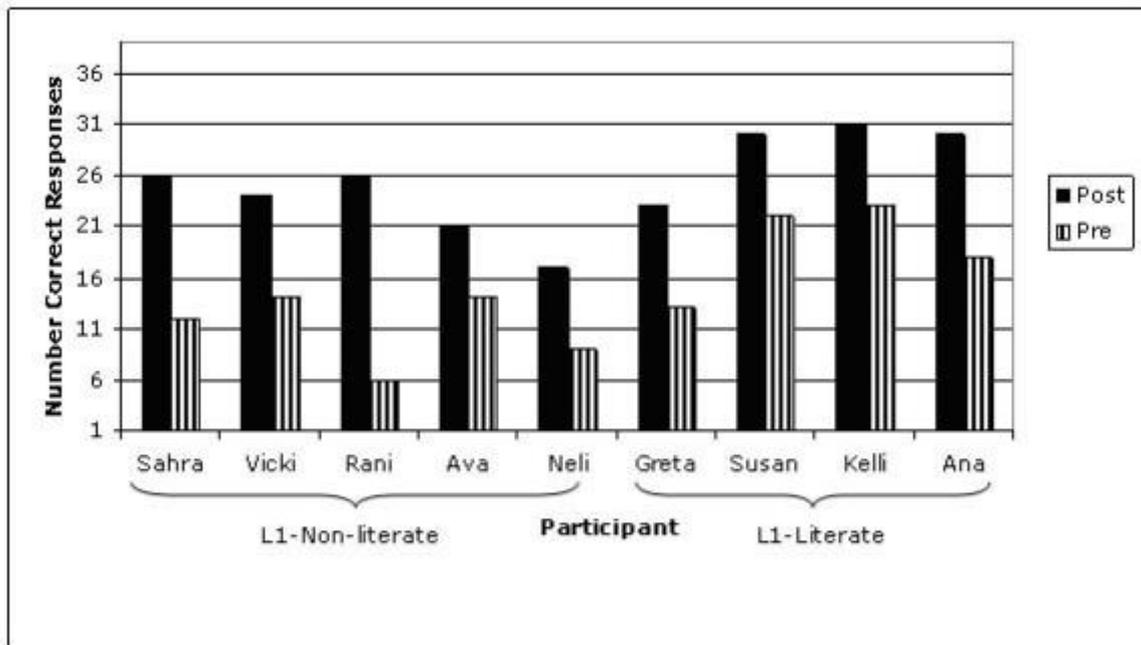
Figure 1. Number of Correct Responses on Pre and Post Phonemic Awareness by Participant



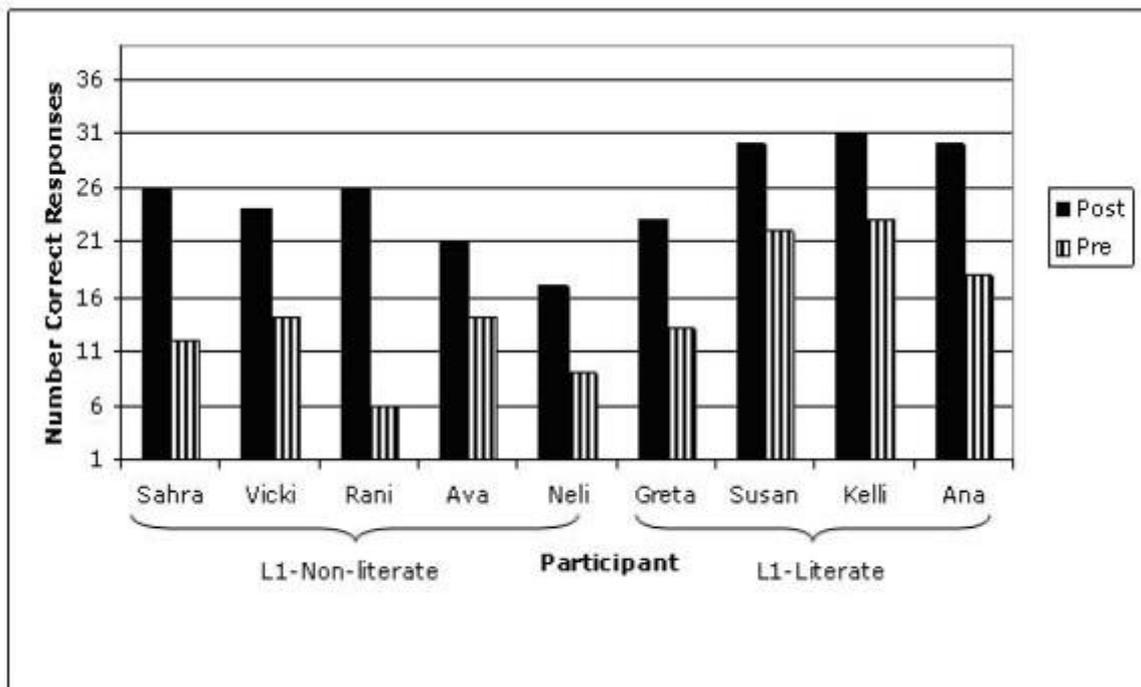
Word List Decoding

All participants demonstrated improvement on the posttest on Sylvia Greene's *Informal Assessment of Word List Decoding*. Those who showed the most improvement were two L1-non-literate learners (Rani and Sahra) and one L1-literate learner (Ana). The number of correct responses possible was 38. The mean increase in the number of words read correctly for all participants was 10.77; all participants increased by 7 words or more.

Figure 2. Number of Correct Responses on Pre and Post Word List Decoding by Participant



Story Text



Overall Gains

To determine which participants improved the most on all three tests combined, an overall ranking was calculated to compare the participants. The overall ranking was calculated by summing the rank of each participant on each test (determined in comparison with the other participants) and then ranking each participant's sum total in comparison with the other participants. For example, Rani had the seventh highest improvement on the phonemic awareness test (rank of 7), the highest improvement on the word list decoding test (rank of 1), and the highest improvement on the story text decoding (rank of 1). Therefore, her total rank

(i.e., the sum of her ranking on all three tests) is 9. Nine is the lowest ranking of all participants (Neli and Sahra are next with 10) and therefore, she is assigned an overall rank of 1 (i.e., most improved on all three tests in comparison to other participants). Those who had the lowest combined ranking (i.e., most improved) were Rani, Neli, and Sahra (all L1-non-literate participants). Those with the rankings showing lowest gains on all three tests consisted of Ava (L1-non-literate) and Kelli and Greta (L1-literate participants).

Research Questions Two and Three

Research Question #2: *In which phonemic awareness skills (initial sound, same sound, rhyme, blending, segmenting) and letter-sounds do the learners show the most gains following ten weeks of whole-part-whole instruction?* The three learners with the most gains in phonemic awareness (Neli, Susan, and Ana) showed the majority of these gains in initial letter sound, same sound, and blending sounds. Identifying rhyming words seemed to be mastered by two of those learners (Neli and Ana) prior to the pretest. On word list decoding, the learners that improved the most (Rani, Sahra, and Ana), overall showed these gains in decoding clusters and short vowels. These learners scored at high levels of proficiency in consonants (80% correct responses or higher). This is consistent with the results of all participants. Additionally, the lack of improvement by Rani and Ana in long vowels was also consistent with the other participants.

Research Question #3: *What qualitative differences exist between learners who improve most and least overall after using this instruction for ten weeks?* Those learners who showed the most overall gains were the following: Sahra, Rani, and Neli. These three learners all had strong oral skills, a willingness to communicate with others, and L1-non-literacy. Those learners who showed the least improvement overall were: Ava, Greta, and Kelli. All three of these learners did not have as strong oral skills and seemed more reluctant to speak in class. Additionally, Greta and Kelli shared literacy in their L1, and high pretest scores on all three tests. These two appeared to grasp the concept of sounds and benefit from this instruction in their writing. However, Ava did not have literacy in the L1, but in contrast to the other L1-non-literate learners, was frequently absent or complained of illness and headaches during the class. She often left during time spent on phonics to pray or complained of headaches and tiredness. She also worked another job outside of class and was one of the oldest students. While she had some letter-sound knowledge of consonants, she often struggled with vowel sounds. She responded better to the instruction when it focused on reading stories.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

As outlined above, the action research achieved some interesting outcomes:

- The whole-part-whole reading intervention overall impacted L1-non-literate participants more than L1-literate participants. Those learners with the lowest pretest scores on the phonemic awareness and story text appeared to have the most improvement on the posttest.
- In the area of phonemic awareness, the learners who improved the most showed the most gains in identifying: a) initial sound of a word that was spoken to them, b) same letter sound, and c) a word by blending individual sounds (e.g., that /h/ + /ow/ + /s/ is “house”).
- In the area of decoding word lists, the learners who improved the most showed the most gains in decoding: a) clusters and b) short vowels. These learners showed the least gains in decoding long vowels.

· The qualitative characteristics of most improved learners overall were strong oral skills, a willingness to communicate with others, and L1-non-literacy. Those with the least overall improvement had lower oral skills and seemed more reluctant to speak in class. (In addition, two of these learners were already L1-literate and the tests used didn't show their gains well, and the third was often tired, sick, or absent.)

Interpretation

Based on the results of how the intervention affected the L1-non-literate and L1-literate participants, it seems that whole-part-whole reading instruction is useful, in particular, for the L1-non-literate learners. This intervention appears to benefit L1-non-literate learners in acquiring phonemic awareness, decoding words, and reading stories. With a few exceptions, this study also shows that the L1-non-literate participants mostly had lower performance on the pretests than the L1-literate participants. This is consistent with the literature that demonstrates a lower performance on decoding of adult learners who are not literate in any language. The case can thus be made for the effectiveness of incorporating this type of content-based phonics/phonemic awareness activities into a beginning level ABE/ESL class.

The results also demonstrate that L1-literate learners did not benefit as much from this intervention in improving these skills. This may imply that for the L1-literate learners, the instruction was not helpful in increasing phonemic awareness and decoding. However, there are a few other plausible explanations for the lower gains. First, many of the L1-literate learners scored high on the three pretests. Therefore, they may not have been able to show their progress because they approached the limit of scores on the pretest, and they did not have as much room to improve on these assessments. On the word list decoding pretest where Greta and Kelli had lower scores (with 33% and 59% correct answers respectively), they showed more improvement than on the other tests, with gains of 20 and 27% respectively. Hence, when these learners had more room to show improvement on the test, they did so.

Second, L1-literate learners may not have benefited as much from this instruction for improvement on these three tests as the L1-non-literate participants because in comparison, their decoding was strong in most areas. While these learners still lacked some skills in decoding vowels, digraphs, and clusters—key differences from Somali and English—their skills were still stronger than most L1-non-literate learners. This is consistent with literature that shows learners may need some instruction in letter-sound knowledge, especially where there are differences in the L2 from the L1, but L1-literate learners may need less intervention or instruction than L1-non-literate learners.

While the results on these particular assessments show L1-literate learners may not have benefited as much as L1-non-literates for reading, interestingly it is possible they may have benefited from this instruction in their writing, spelling, and comprehension skills. These areas were not assessed in this study; however, the researcher emphasized activities to help improve the spelling for these learners since they didn't have as much difficulty decoding many of the words. Also, during the whole language portion of the reading instruction, an emphasis was on comprehension. An improvement in spelling and writing was observed by the practitioner on weekly dictation activities. Also, these learners appeared to understand texts read in class by successfully completing comprehension activities. Thus, perhaps the "part" instruction was still helpful for the L1-literate learners in their writing rather than in their reading, and the "whole" instruction was helpful in building reading and vocabulary comprehension. All of these findings are good news for the teacher with limited lesson

planning and class time who wants to be certain that every minute in class counts as much as possible for as many as possible!

There are two more questions to address from the results from this research. Why did three of the L1-non-literate participants have the same or stronger phonemic awareness skills than two of the L1-literate participants? This is probably because these three L1-non-literate students in particular had been attending this class for many months prior to the beginning of the study and therefore, received instruction in phonemic awareness previously, while the two L1-literate participants with the same or lower scores had just begun attending this class a few weeks prior to the beginning of the study.

As stated, most of the learner gains in phonemic awareness recognition were in the areas of: first letter sound, same letter sound, and blending sounds. This is gratifying since these components were the majority of the emphasis in the instruction. In addition, there may have been “washback” from the pretest and instruction in class which may have helped learners understand better how to answer the questions on the oral test. This is also gratifying, since we as teachers are so often trying to help our learners prepare for a variety of tests both within our programs and to help them reach other life-goals.

The difficulty that learners had with the last component (counting the number of phonemes) was also not surprising given the difficulty of the task and the inherent confusion over what to count—the syllables, number of letters, or phonemes—even after receiving explicit directions. Many learners were observed counting the letters or syllables before answering the question. Also, since this task seems to require a great deal of metalinguistic understanding to arrive at the correct answer, it is understandable why this would be a challenging component. Based on these results, it seems questionable whether there should be much emphasis on this area of instruction because of its difficulty. It is only speculation, but perhaps this is one area of phonemic awareness that is only truly developed after one has acquired high levels of literacy in a language.

Again, in word list decoding, the letter-sound components most focused on in instruction were the areas where learners show the most improvement: clusters and short vowels. On the other hand, the finding that long vowels recognition did not improve and in fact decreased, may have actually resulted from the strong focus on short vowels and only a brief focus on long vowels, which may have caused confusion for learners, and they over-generalized the short vowel sounds to words with the long vowel sound. This is perhaps a caution to be certain to teach each needed point with plenty of redundancy built in, as was done with the first three components.

Another finding with pedagogical implications is the fact that individual consonants, regardless of being in initial or final position in a word, were mastered by most learners. At the start of the research, most learners had some phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge, which was likely in the consonants of the words. Learners’ consistent strength in identifying consonants on the pretest seems to imply that learners acquire these letter-sound correspondences with relative ease and may not require explicit instruction in each consonant sound. Perhaps once learners have some phonemic awareness, some of the consonant sounds are just acquired while learning to read words by sight. With time so limited, teachers may not want to spend much time if any on this area. This finding also highlights the importance

for teachers of some type of pre-assessment of the learners before spending too much time on a learning area in class.

The particular characteristics of those who improved the most were L1-non-literacy, strong oral skills, and a willingness to communicate. The first factor of L1-non-literacy was expected because these learners mostly had lower performance on the pretests and therefore, had more opportunity to show improvement. The other two factors appear to be related and while there was no assessment in these areas for this study, these characteristics seem to also be what distinguished these learners over the other L1-non-literate participants and some of the L1-literate participants. Perhaps having stronger oral skills affected their responsiveness to the whole-part-whole instruction because they already knew the meaning of many words and were then able to apply the letter-sound instruction to words they already had in their oral vocabulary.

Importantly, it seems that focusing on the sounds and words in context was quite helpful because learners were familiar with many of the words, and could use that oral knowledge to then examine the letters and recognize the words in written form more readily. In addition, since these were words that appeared many times throughout the thematic unit, the learners would encounter them many times and this may have increased their motivation or desire to learn strategies to help them identify them quickly. Also, learners seemed to enjoy reading the stories each unit. Many stated they would read them at home or were observed reading them before class or during the break. Having high-interest relevant readings that included the words that were focused on in the phonics practice seems to have helped build even more motivation to read.

The L1-non-literate learner who was one of the least improved learners was Ana. Unlike the most improved L1-non-literate learners Sahra, Neli, and Rani, she appeared confused many times with instruction and often complained of headaches and tiredness. This may mean that ultimately instruction in the component skills may not be helpful for some learners, may not be helpful for some learners at certain stages of reading or second language acquisition, or some learners may just acquire skills at a slower pace and may need even more repetition and review. These results also highlight the importance of having a variety of instructional methods as part of an ABE/ESL class to meet various learning styles and abilities.

Based on this research project, there are some final recommendations to make. First, a balance of lower-level skills and higher-level reading practice seems to be important. Throughout the study, the researcher was challenged in balancing the focus on phonics skills and text reading. Learners seemed to lose their attention or get bored when a lot of time was spent on specific letter-sound skills in one class or one week of instruction. Additionally, incorporating the review of sounds (e.g., asking learners how to write a word and prompting them by making the sound of the letter), when working on other activities, especially with writing, seemed to be useful in helping learners apply the skills they learned. Also, as the findings show, some learners (particularly L1-literate learners) in a low-level class may have stronger decoding skills than others. The focus for this portion of the instruction for these learners could include spelling and writing so that they are also challenged and make learning gains. Also, it might be useful to provide these learners with more advanced decoding instruction (separate from the other learners) that is focused on the phonetic components

where these learners in particular have gaps (i.e., long vowels). One learner explained this clearly by stating, “If I can write it, then I can read it.”

Conclusion

This study shows that for most participants using a whole-part-whole instructional method in which whole words are presented in a context then examined to practice phonemic awareness or letter sound skills was effective. This instruction seemed to improve their phonemic awareness, decoding of individual words, and decoding words within a story text. In particular, those learners with the most improvement were L1-non-literate learners. It appears that combining a focus on top down whole language activities with bottom up skills helped these learners improve their phonemic awareness and decoding in English. Research has shown that having stronger bottom-up skills can help free learner’s attention to comprehending text—the main purpose for reading. Thus, these learners built skills that can help them with comprehending text. Further studies are needed that take into account the oral skills of learners along with the decoding and phonemic awareness. Research should also be duplicated with different demographic groups and more L1-non-literate and L1-literate learners, as well as with several kinds of control groups. More studies such as these could help guide researchers and practitioners to finding what instructional techniques are most useful for particular ESL learners acquiring literacy in English. While more research needs to be conducted to test this content-based instructional method of teaching reading, this study provides some exciting insights as to how to assist L1-non-literate learners acquiring literacy in English for the first time while also providing beneficial instruction for L1-literate learners.

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Participants' names have been changed to respect their privacy.

MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT ESL CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the authors' work with one school district in Minnesota helping to evaluate and revise their ESL program. In particular, the authors describe the steps that the district ESL teachers took in evaluating and selecting an ESL curriculum. These steps included consulting existing literature on curriculum and textbook selection, coming to a consensus as a district about priorities in regard to the ESL curriculum, looking at curricular choices made by other districts in Minnesota and creating a comprehensive curriculum review evaluation rubric to assist in making the right decision for the district. In addition to describing the process of the curriculum evaluation and redesign in the district, they present evaluation tools (checklists and rubrics) that they created for the purpose of designing curriculum. Further, they propose guidelines for the process of making decisions about ESL curriculum, which can be modified to fit other districts' ELL characteristics, teacher preferences, identified standards, and mainstream curricula.

INTRODUCTION

Programs for English language learners (ELLs) are increasingly becoming more systematic in their approach to instruction. In the past, the English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum was frequently patched together or developed from other curricula no longer being used by other teachers. In addition, commercially prepared curricula were often unsatisfactory or limited in their scope and practicality in the ESL classroom. Fortunately, this situation has been changing.

Because no textbook will address all the needs of every ELL, there will always be a need for teacher created materials and knowledge of how to differentiate mainstream curricula for ELLs. Yet many districts do desire to adopt a published curriculum, particularly for newcomers in larger programs. As textbook publishers have responded to the demand for quality materials, more commercially available textbooks specific to ELLs have been developed as well as more specialized ESL curricula that are integrated with mainstream textbooks. As the choices increase, so does the necessity of developing a systematic means for evaluating the various textbooks available, particularly as the purchase of a published curriculum may be one of the most expensive propositions a district will undertake. For those districts so inclined, this article will provide a means for evaluating potential textbooks and curriculum materials.

Despite the increased number of choices in regard to ESL textbooks, it is important to keep in mind that each district will have some unique needs and thus a one-size-fits-all-model is not appropriate. Several approaches to textbook selection have been proposed,

but unless the key stakeholders are involved and understand the unique needs of their district, an inappropriate choice may be the result. This occurred in one district the authors worked with and resulted in none of the ESL teachers using the texts that had been purchased at considerable cost to the district. Personalizing the choice to fit a particular district cannot be emphasized enough (Ansary & Babaii, 2006; Byrd, 2001).

The authors have been assisting several school districts with program evaluations and curriculum adoptions. This article proposes some guidelines for the process of making decisions about ESL textbooks, which can and need to be modified to fit individual districts' ELL characteristics, teacher preferences, identified standards, and mainstream curricula. The intent is to provide practical guidelines and ideas to consider when choosing or reviewing ESL curricula. In addition, a description of work with one school district that actually conducted a district-wide ESL program evaluation is included. As part of this review process, the program evaluators worked together with district team members, to evaluate the existing ESL curriculum and to make recommendations for a new one. The steps that were taken to evaluate and select an ESL curriculum are described. These steps included consulting existing literature on curriculum and textbook selection, coming to a consensus as a district about priorities in regard to the ESL curriculum, exploring curricular choices made by other districts in Minnesota and creating a comprehensive curriculum review evaluation rubric to assist in making the right decision for the district. Before proceeding to the description of this work with the district, some basic principles that need to be taken into consideration when making decisions about adopting an ESL curriculum will be outlined.

FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ESL CURRICULUM

Questions to consider when designing curriculum

Any review of ESL curricula should begin by identifying the essential characteristics of the district (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001). These include the ESL program philosophy and goals as well as those factors mentioned earlier, such as the learner characteristics, standards, teaching preferences and mainstream curricula. Whether or not there is diversity of home languages spoken or one predominant language group is also important to consider as some textbooks may include a home language component. Similarly, whether or not a district adopts a curriculum that incorporates this component depends on the belief system among district educators as to the desirability and practicality of bilingual programs.

Another crucial element in the curriculum selection process is defining, in explicit terms and with sufficient detail for clarity and mutual understanding, what the goals of ESL instruction in the school or district are. These goals should always be described in relationship to the mainstream or content-area curricula as the broader main goal of the

ESL curriculum should be to prepare ELLs for success in the mainstream academic content and curriculum (e.g., Collier, 1989; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Gibbons, 2002; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989). This is often a challenging task for ESL teachers, particularly in smaller districts, where the connections between ESL and content-area classrooms are often not as well-established. An elementary ESL teacher, who teaches ESL in a pull-out instructional setting where these connections have yet not been created, describes the difficulties of connecting the ESL curriculum to the mainstream curriculum like this:

It can be exhausting, as an ESL teacher, to create your own curriculum constantly. Some differentiated instruction manuals that come with the regular curriculum, can be helpful. But teaching with an ESL curriculum that is not tied into the mainstream curriculum is difficult. Students are not engaged (at least in my pull-out setting) because they don't receive a separate grade for their work; and they cannot practice and reinforce their learning if the content is different from the mainstream content.

Another related challenge is evident in the experiences of several ESL teachers who have shared with us their struggles to balance between, what they call "teaching language" as opposed to serving as "tutors" with homework help. These teachers are ESL teachers from small ESL programs where the students represent multiple content-area classrooms and grade levels. In these settings, the students come to the ESL classroom (for which they often do not receive academic credit) expecting to get help with their homework assignments from the content area classrooms. These assignments vary significantly from student to student as do the academic support needs of the students. It is this kind of reactive or remedial, fully customized, assistance that takes much of these teachers' time. Little time is left for the more proactive, foundation building language learning activities. The real challenge lies in the fact that this kind of reactive mode of instruction addresses the more visible and immediate gaps in the students' skills and knowledge, but it does not proactively and systematically support students' long-term second language acquisition skills outlined in the ESL language standards (national and state-level) that function as a prerequisite for students ultimately succeeding in mainstream, content-area classrooms. Thus, it is essential that the ESL teachers define their roles as providing both the more foundational language skills as well as the more reactive assistance that responds to students' more immediate needs stemming from the content area classroom.

Additionally, some districts may have small numbers of ELLs while other districts may have students at all proficiency and age levels. Larger programs with multiple teachers would likely benefit from the common expectations developed through a district- and/or school-wide review process (Garinger, 2002; Kessler, 1997).

Before ordering review copies of ESL curriculum materials, the ESL teachers, with other stakeholders (the more that can be included in this process, the more likely the curriculum adoption will be successful), should discuss the underlying philosophical views about the ESL curriculum, its goals and its connections to what we know of best practice in educating ELLs. Table 1 lists some of these questions that should be explored at the very beginning of the review process. Experienced evaluators say that districts that not only have discussed these points, but which also have documented and enforced implementation of these principles, have tended to be more successful in selecting and implementing a curriculum that is utilitarian and is compatible with the mainstream curriculum.

Table 1. Starting Point: Checklist for Making Decisions about an ESL Curriculum

Questions to consider during ESL curriculum review:

- What is the goal of ESL instruction in the school/district?
- What are the crucial characteristics of this program? What are the beliefs and expectations of the various stakeholders in regard to ESL instruction?
- What is the role of ESL instruction in relationship to mainstream curriculum and instruction?
- What is the ESL program philosophy?
- What are state requirements regarding the education of ELLs?
- What are the skills and knowledge described in the state/national ESL standards?
- What do we know about what is best for ELLs?

The role of textbooks

A textbook can serve different purposes for teachers. It can function as a core resource, as a source of supplemental material, as an inspiration for classroom activities, or even as the curriculum itself (Garinger, 2002). We emphasize that a textbook or a textbook series should never be the total answer to the district scope and sequence for ELLs because of the diverse nature of ELLs and the programs that serve them as well as the diversity among schools and among mainstream curricula. However, a textbook can provide a framework or structure on which to personalize and differentiate for each district's, school's and classroom's needs. It can also serve to standardize the expectations of what will be taught at each grade level and at each level of proficiency. Where feasible, ESL textbook content should be aligned as much as possible with the mainstream curriculum content and themes, especially if the ESL textbook contains

academic content themes. Table 2 lists the multiple ways that textbooks are commonly used in ESL classrooms.

Table 2. Roles of Textbooks

ESL textbooks may...

- Help sequence material/information to cover
- Contain ideas for activities
- Provide information about learning processes
- Complement curriculum (e.g., grammar, vocabulary)
- Serve as a reference
- Include assessments
- Offer homework assignments
- Serve as an introduction to a unit or theme
- Assist in standardizing instruction (getting to a certain level by the end of the year)
- Provide stories, visuals, and overhead transparencies
- Serve as the main text with supplements created by the teacher

ONE DISTRICT'S JOURNEY

What follows is the description of the process used by one district to personalize their approach to selecting an ESL curriculum. The intent of this paper is to make that process transparent.

Brief district profile

This Minnesota school district has approximately 7000 students, ten elementary schools, a junior-senior high school, a middle school, and a second high school. The district has approximately 350 ELLs with a variety of languages represented, including Latinos and a large population of Somali and Sudanese former refugees. Some of the ELLs were born in the U.S. Many come from homes where there are issues of first language literacy. There are nine ESL teachers. Both push in and pull out models are used in the district.

In the following section, the four-step process that the district employed in reviewing their ESL curriculum is outlined. These steps included:

1. Exploring established characteristics of ESL curricula
2. Stating district priorities about curriculum
3. Eliciting feedback from other districts
4. Establishing district’s guidelines for systematic evaluation

Each of these steps will be described in more detail below.

Exploration of established characteristics of ESL curricula

The first step in the curriculum review process was to seek out several articles and textbooks that addressed the issues involved in selecting an ESL curriculum. These were summarized and the results examined by the ESL teachers and the authors to look for common characteristics to be aware of in the selection process (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2006; Garinger, 2002; Kessler, 1997). These characteristics were meshed with the existing process the district used for curriculum review, which specified certain features that should be included in any review. This step was essential because it enabled the district to explore what had already been discovered about successful ESL curricula and especially what the components of a successful ESL curriculum were and then personalize that with district expectations.

As part of this literature review process, a goal was to identify proposed criteria that went beyond the more obvious inclusion of language skills and assessment to address the unique, often not directly related to linguistic, needs of the language minority students in the district who come from limited formal schooling backgrounds. These criteria relate to such issues as fostering a community of learners, climate of respect, home-school connections, learning strategies, and alignment with the district curriculum. Although the review did not by any means yield an exhaustive list (this would be an ongoing process), and criteria specific to the district were needed, the information from this review was documented and is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Criteria for ESL Curriculum Established from Literature Review

<p>Overall Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Is there a clearly stated philosophy and approach? · Are there goals? · Is there a clearly defined audience? 	<p>Vocabulary and Content Based Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Does instruction go from broad to specific? · Are content and language integrated?
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- Are high expectations evident?
- Are a sufficient number of objectives addressed?
- Does the curriculum foster a community of learners and a climate of respect?
- How does the curriculum align with district content curriculum?

- Does the curriculum build background knowledge?
- Is there spiraling of vocabulary and content?
- Is the curriculum authentic and connected to the real world?
- Progression of skills

Reading and Writing

- How does the curriculum address reading and writing? What is the nature of the instructional model?
- Is there completeness of presentation?
- Is there adequacy of practice?

Listening and Speaking/ Oral Language Development

- How does the curriculum address oral language development?
- Is there completeness of presentation?
- Is there adequacy of practice?
- How does the program address pronunciation?

Grammar

- Is there adequacy of presentation of structures?
- Is there appropriate sequencing?
- Is there adequacy of drills and practice?

Assessment

- Does the curriculum assess students' prior knowledge and readiness?
- Is the assessment related to the instruction?

Instruction of Skills

- Does the curriculum provide scaffolding?
- Does the curriculum include higher level thinking skills?
- Does the curriculum include guided practice?
- Is the curriculum varied and challenging?

Other:

- Are there suggestions for home school connections?
- What is the appearance of the materials? Is it culturally respectful? Is it attractive?
- What is the availability of the materials?
- What is the cost?

- Is there controlled and free practice?
- Is there explicit instruction of learning strategies?

Stating district priorities about curriculum

Because the district was engaged in a program evaluation, pertinent information was gathered at this point from ESL teachers, administrators and mainstream teachers as to what they thought was important in an ESL curriculum. The results of these discussions and interviews were presented at an ESL department meeting for further discussion and final decision making. There was widespread agreement that the curriculum chosen needed to be aligned with district curriculum as much as possible. In particular because literacy was an important district goal, educators believed that literacy should also be stressed in the ESL curriculum, with particular emphasis on building content area vocabulary. They decided that other reading strategies used by the district should be a part of any new curriculum. These included looking for curricula that did the following: Built background knowledge (Marzano, 2004); emphasized content area reading (Readance, Bean, & Baldwin, 1989); used leveled readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996); provided opportunities for critical thinking and construction of meaning (Cooper, 2000); engaged the learners in authentic tasks and assessment (Routman, 1991; Stiggins, 2002; Tompkins, 2003); developed writing skills through process writing (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005); provided strategies for differentiation (Tomlinson, 2001); incorporated high standards and provided collaboration with mainstream teachers (Berube, 2000); and consisted of curricula that were appropriate for diverse learners (Sleeter & Grant, 2003).

They also were aware that one curriculum would not necessarily be appropriate for all ages and levels of proficiency. Prior to looking at any curriculum, they examined all of the texts and teaching materials they were currently using and rated them as to appropriateness and usefulness. As such, it became obvious what they were looking for and what they were lacking. As the first step in determining curriculum needs, each individual teacher filled out a grid of all the curricula they were using. An example that one teacher submitted is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Example of Format Used for Evaluating Current Curriculum

Materials	Grade level used	Focus or main objectives; purpose	Strengths	Weaknesses
Take home leveled library books	First, Second Third (last year)	Reading more at independent level,	At least 75% non-fiction, family involvement,	Not enough time to discuss the books

		exposure to new info, vocabulary, background knowledge, improving fluency	reading more at independent reading level, experiencing success	that have been read with the students Challenging to get new books home each day Accountability for reading more at home
ELL texts	First, Second Third (last year)	Used sometimes as additional resource to help students gain more background knowledge, concepts, and reading strategies	Thematic, good background units, includes strategies to teach, and 4 modalities of listening, speaking, writing, and reading are included in the lessons	Sometimes not challenging enough at first and second grade levels Separate program and curriculum does not always follow what is happening in main stream classrooms
Scott Foresman ESL Accelerating Language Learning				
Steck-Vaughn Phonics	Second, Third (last year)	To accelerate reading in English for student who had strong BICS in English	Very systematic and attractive to learn from, easy to use	Too much vocabulary if student does not have BICS in English
District reading texts and ELL components	First, Second	To use differentiated instruction, leveled readers, and best practices for ELLs, to help them develop oral and written language, and academic language	Integrated with the district's new reading curriculum that began to be used in grades K-2 this fall Improvement in collaboration with mainstream and sped teachers because using the same reading curriculum	Lack of time to teach all of the components Not having all resources of the ELL program (now using only the teacher's manual)
English Language Learners Treasures Macmillan/McGraw Hill				
Guided reading using nonfiction leveled readers	First, Second Third (last year)	To teach reading strategies in word recognition, comprehension strategies, to also	Taught in the push in program in a small group that included both ELL and mainstream students reading near the same reading levels	A year's plan of books to teach If there are more than 50% of students

		increase background knowledge		in the group who are not ELL
Support curriculum for classroom teachers in the new reading curriculum	Kdgn. First, and Second	To help teachers become more able to differentiate instruction for ELLs	Included in teachers' manuals and based on best practices for ELLs	Time for more collaboration and learning together
Macmillan/McGraw Hill				

Next the teachers met to determine what curricula they were currently using that they wanted to continue to use. They also determined what they were using in common. The information was placed on a grid like the one below so that gaps and commonalities became evident.

Currently Using

Level 5

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

New-comer

K 1-2 3-5 6 7-8 9-12

Finally, the teachers worked together to identify areas of weakness. There were several grade levels and proficiency levels that had minimal curriculum or materials that were inappropriate or ineffective. They listed specific types of curricula and materials they thought they needed at each level on a grid similar to the one below.

Identified Needs

Level 5

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

New-comer

K 1-2 3-5 6 7-8 9-12

Feedback from other districts

The next step, which was facilitated by the authors, was to inquire from other districts about curricula they were using, to elicit other teachers' feedback on the curricula and to compile a summary of the main features of each approach. Responses were received from teachers from ten different school districts in Minnesota about the ESL textbooks series/curricula that they use and their experiences with using them. Samples of the feedback that was received from teachers in the field are included with each textbook series and will be presented in the feedback in three sections, starting from the elementary level, to middle school and then to high school levels. While these comments are not meant as endorsements or criticisms of any particular textbook, they are representative of the feedback received and were useful to the district as they determined their own particular needs.

Elementary ESL

Textbook Series: *Scott Foresman ESL*

Publisher/s: Addison Wesley Longman/Scott Foresman

Authors: Jim Cummins, Anna Uhl Chamot, Carolyn Kessler, J. Michael O'Malley, and Lily Wong Fillmore

Description:

"This series is a content-based program (Grades K-8) that accelerates English language learning. It teaches students the academic language and content they need to achieve success in the mainstream classroom. Through explicit learning strategies, grade-level content materials, and a balance of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, Scott Foresman ESL helps students develop their higher-order thinking, their language ability and, ultimately, their self-esteem." (www.longman.com)

Sample teacher responses:

"Our school district adopted this curriculum within the last 5 years. The strengths of the curriculum are that it uses the typical content found at that grade level to teach English.

It focuses a lot on discussion and does have student consumables. I actually hate the curriculum and feel that the textbook is too high for limited English speakers and too low for students who are more fluent. In addition, it doesn't match what the classroom teacher is doing, so the kids are not engaged in learning something different." (Grades K-6)

"For my intermediate students, I modify the mainstream curriculum (Scott Foresman), and that works well. We do what they do in 2-3 weeks instead of 1. It would be nice to have more stories, though." (Grades 5 and 6)

Textbook Series: *Scott Foresman Reading*

Publisher/s: Pearson/Scott Foresman

Description: not available

Sample teacher response:

"I love this reading curriculum because it has leveled resources and targeted skills for each week. The teacher's manual has hints on how to better reach ESL students. The BEST part is the companion resource called "Adding English". It has parallel lessons for each main lesson the mainstream teacher uses. So I can use ESL strategies to help my students better comprehend the reading text, vocabulary, background knowledge, etc. The students like the fact that we are reinforcing and practicing the skills they are learning in the mainstream classroom and feel more successful. Other intervention resources help me practice grammar, reading fluency with lower level booklets on the same topic, worksheets, etc. This text book has a good balance of phonics, oral language practice, vocabulary, writing, strategies (i.e. compare/contrast), reading comprehension and grammar. You can find this text on-line at: <http://www.sfreading.com/>." (Grades K-6)

Textbook Series: *Avenues (PreK-5)/ Harcourt Trophies (PreK-6)*

Publisher/s: Hampton-Brown

Description: *Avenues*

- Beautiful, Language-Rich Resources
- The Best in Basic and Academic Vocabulary Development

Harcourt Trophies

Trophies is a research-based, developmental reading/language arts program. Explicit phonics instruction; direct reading instruction; guided reading strategies; phonemic awareness instruction; systematic, intervention strategies; integrated language arts components; and state-of-the-art assessment

- Grade-Level Content with Connection to Science and Social Studies
 - Time-Saving Tools for Teachers
 - Standards-Based with Specialized Strategies
 - Literacy for All Students
 - Multi-Level Writing Supports
 - Data-Driven Instruction with Multi-Level Assessment
 - (www.hampton-brown.com)
- tools ensure every student successfully learns to read. (www.harcourtschool.com)

Sample teacher responses:

“With the exception of Newcomers, all ESL teachers at my school use *Avenues*, and some of the classroom teachers also use it when they have high numbers of ELL students in their reading groups. Some of the classroom teachers also use *Avenues* when they have high numbers of ELL students in their reading groups. I use *Avenues* for K as a primary text and for Newcomers as a supplementary text. In K, I also use books from the website Reading A-Z, district Newcomer curriculum, and Harcourt Trophies ELL readers. I love *Avenues*, and so do the students, but I don't rely solely on that curriculum.” (Grades K and 1)

“Overall, I love it! There are so many different things to choose from for each week's worth of lessons. There are songs, readings, listening exercises, daily writing, etc. I think its strongest feature is the quality of the reading selections. I have two problems with the curriculum. First, I don't really like the written tests. Secondly, the writing portion, with another book called “English at Your Command”, is more complicated to integrate into lessons. All in all, I really think it is helpful for students. We use the *Avenues* curriculum with most, but not every student. Sometimes we use the ELL sections of the mainstream Harcourt Trophies curriculum. This is our first year of using *Read 180* with some students. *Avenues* works well with most levels, but we usually do other things with absolute newcomers. There are so many good choices in *Avenues* that I supplement some, but not too much. The main area where I always need to supplement is that we do not have enough leveled readers in the program. And there are always occasions when it is good to add something different to the weekly curriculum.”

“The kids are very aware with *Avenues* and Scott Foresman, if you use a level that is lower than their actual grade. I don't like this at all, and they don't either.” (Grades 5 and 6)

Middle School

Textbook Series: *Highpoint* (Grades 6-12)

Publisher/s: Hampton-Brown (www.hampton-brown.com)

Description:	Closes Gaps in Language and Equips Teachers for Effective	
Motivates Struggling	Literacy	Instruction
Readers and English Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Extensive vocabulary development and skills practice· Complete learning-to-read strand· Direct instruction in reading strategies· Abundant work with expository text· Comprehensive grammar instruction and practice· Fully supported Writing Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Multi-level teaching strategies to address diverse needs· Full array of assessments to diagnose, plan instruction, measure progress, and re-teach.· Varied teaching tools- from transparencies to technology, to audio and theme books!· Family newsletters in 7 languages to increase home involvement.

Sample teacher responses:

“For middle school, I like *High Points*.”

“I have used Hampton-Brown *Avenues* and *High Point* with middle school kids. I don't like either of them. To me, they echo the basal readers that we are trying to get away from. They are full of worksheets and other canned activities that seem like busy work to me.”

“Both *Avenues* and *High Point* really integrate language arts and the 6 traits writing method. I believe that this curriculum works really well if you have pull out method. It becomes a little more difficult to use in an inclusion model, which is what I am teaching this year. I have used it to supplement and guide what I do with third grade social studies curriculum. I have heard good things from ELL teachers in my district because they don't have to reinvent the wheel. Like all things it has pros and cons but it would definitely be worth your while to check it out.”

“*High Point* was good in the sense that it targets various content areas. However, I didn't care for it too much, because I didn't feel the lessons connected. As I used it I found myself adding more lessons of my own to extend the content.”

Textbook Series: *Making Connections*

Publisher/s: Cambridge

Description:

"*Making Connections* is a reading skills book aimed at the high-intermediate student who needs to prepare for academic reading tasks. The book has four high-interest thematic units, each with multiple readings on health, multicultural studies, language and the environment." (www.cambridge.org)

Sample teacher response:

"In my current middle school teaching job, I use an older series called *Making Connections* with my intermediate level students. I use it in conjunction with the mainstream curriculum, pulling things from here and there. *Making Connections* is not bad, but it's a little out-dated. If a more up-to-date version exists, it might not be a bad one to look into. "

Textbook Series: *Shining Star* (Grades 6-12)

Publisher/s: Longman

Description:

"*Shining Star*, a four-level program, gives students all the support they need to master reading, writing, literature and content, within a systematic language development framework. A flexible program, *Shining Star* can be used for newcomers through intermediate level students." (www.longman.com)

Sample teacher response:

"I have been working with the introductory level of the *Shining Star* series. I teach level 2 reading and writing. My class is about 12 students from 6th to 8th grade: Hispanic, Somali, and Ethiopian. I use the textbook and workbook as a point of reference and departure. We read the stories in the book. I use the workbook and activities in the textbook as I see fit; I would say about half of what is provided. I try to complement the text: for example, we watched part of a baseball documentary that featured Roberto Clemente after reading his biography in *Shining Star*. It takes about three weeks to get through a unit, each unit having two stories, one fiction and one nonfiction. I make a poster out of the reading strategy and feature it for the week. I also try to recycle the strategies we have gone over. For example, it was cause and effect with texts on earthquakes and a Greek myth. It was question words with texts on ball games and a Clemente biography. Some strategies are easier to use than others. I also have a

response notebook, and we are collectively reading a novel, neither of which directly relates to the textbook. I just try to weave them together. Since I am collaborating in some mainstream English classrooms, I'm trying to structure the level 2 class to prepare them for what is to come."

Textbook/Curriculum Series: *Read 180*

Publisher/s: Scholastic

Description:

"READ 180's adaptive, instructional software provides intensive, differentiated skills practice to motivate struggling readers. The software analyzes, monitors, tracks, and reports on student accuracy, noting not only incorrect answers, but also the types of errors made and the time of the response. According to how the student performs, the software continually adjusts instruction offering students immediate feedback. READ 180 goes beyond branched differentiation to offer truly adaptive instruction. After logging into the software, the students are directed through the four Learning Zones."

(www.teacher.scholastic.com)

Sample teacher response:

"*Read 180* is wonderful. It is a great Language Arts Curriculum that targets various areas for reading: Vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, etc. For this program I don't feel I need to supplement the material because it covers so much."

High School

Textbook/Curriculum Series: *Shining Star (Grades 6-12)*

Publisher/s: Scholastic

Description:

"*Shining Star*, a four-level program, gives students all the support they need to master reading, writing, literature and content, within a systematic language development framework. A flexible program, *Shining Star* can be used for newcomers through intermediate level students." (www.longman.com)

Sample teacher response:

"I enhance the units with selections from *A Multicultural Reader* (Perfection Learning). Shakespeare is also part of this course, grammar study, word study, independent reading and 4th quarter literature circles with novels of choice (*Red and Black*), and the *Cambridge English Grammar* in use with my high school newcomers, in addition to *Shining Star*."

"*Shining Star* teaches ELLs through content. It is based on strategy research of Anna Chamot on CALLA. The units are thematically developed and contain grammar mini lessons and a grammar focus for writing activities."

"I really liked it. I thought it did a nice job of choosing material that was interesting for high school students, and of teaching the language in context. I rotated between using the textbook and reading a fiction book with the class, and I thought *Shining Star* worked well with that method. I remember the second level text had a unit on WWI and included some personal stories of high school-age people who lived at that time. We read *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the same time, and were able to compare WWI to WWII as well as compare stories of teenagers who lived during each. I also thought the text offered a lot of good suggestions for teachers (how to modify the text, plan activities around the readings, etc.)."

I too use The *Shining Star* Series at the high school level but only at the lower levels (1 & 2). It tends to be a bit 'young', but I too add supplemental materials. I also find that the grammar focus does not always match the reading material so again it is taking some extra steps to pull out the grammar points. In the 3rd and 4th levels, I use literature books and try to focus on a more content-based approach to learning the language.

Connecting with other teachers, schools and school districts is an important and often highly useful tool for teachers, whether they are creating an ESL curriculum for the first time, reviewing and revising an existing curriculum or looking for new ideas and approaches for teaching and using their existing curriculum. The challenge that teachers typically face is the lack of time to connect with other teachers. Some possible ways to get into contact with other teachers includes subscribing to ESL list-serves and electronic forums (e.g., a list-serve maintained by the English Language Learner Division of Minnesota State Department of Education, available through the Department web site at <http://education.state.mn.us>, a forum facilitated by CAL, available at http://caltalk.cal.org/read/all_forums/?forum=eslstds, or one maintained by Dr. Patricia Hoffman at Minnesota State University (connect through sending e-mail to patricia.hoffman@mnsu.edu), attending local and national professional conferences, organizing book clubs or participating in Professional Learning Communities.

Upon receiving feedback from other districts, the ESL teachers in the sample district reviewed this information and selected three curricula to review. A request was made to the publishers for the desired materials.

District's guidelines for systematic evaluation

The final step was to personalize the information from the various checklists to reflect the district needs and priorities. This information was used to develop a rubric for evaluation. Many of these criteria may be similar to those other districts would develop, but some may be unique to the district. The most important outcome was that there was stakeholder participation to develop consensus and clear guidelines were established that would allow for an objective review by all teachers. Each teacher was then asked to review the materials and make a recommendation to the group.

Table 5. Textbook Evaluation Form

Selection Criteria for English Language Learner Curriculum

Textbook

Title

Publisher

Copyright Date

3 Strongly supports this element

2 Adequately supports this element

1 Element is included, but weakly supported or partially included

0 Element is not included in program

Curriculum/Language Acquisition

3 2 1 0 1.1 Materials are aligned and compatible with mainstream instruction (K-6

3 2 1 0 1.2 District Literacy Plan and other content area curriculum. Vocabulary and acquisition of language are explicitly instructed

Assessment

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2.1 | Materials help teachers diagnose what students can and cannot yet do (and prescribe how to use curriculum to address student needs) |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2.2 | Checklists and rubrics are provided to give meaningful feedback to students |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2.3 | Various formats are available for assessing student work |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2.4 | Assessment content correlates to unit objectives |

Oral Language Instruction

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|--|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3.1 | Series provides variety of options for students to listen and speak in English |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3.2 | Scope and sequence allows for flexibility to adjust instruction according to various levels of proficiency in speaking |

Reading Instruction

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4.1 | (Elementary) Materials align with mainstream instruction specific to K-6 reading strategies and concepts taught |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4.2 | (Secondary) Content reflects core knowledge as aligned with essential 7-12 learner outcomes for content courses in the District |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4.3 | Materials help students develop reading skills and strategies with non-fiction text |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4.4 | Content vocabulary is explicitly taught |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4.5 | Language is taught in context |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4.6 | Content in literature is appealing to students |

Written Language Instruction

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5.1 | Instruction in writing process is scaffolded |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5.2 | Lessons explicitly teach students each stage of the writing process |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5.3 | Examples of student writing are provided |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5.4 | Lessons link writing tasks to authentic purposes |

Grammar/Mechanics/Spelling Instruction

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6.1 | Lessons provide for grammar to be taught in the context of authentic writing activities |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6.2 | Lessons provide for mechanics to be taught in the context of authentic writing activities |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6.3 | Lessons provide instruction of spelling in word analysis approach patterns, word families, etc. |

Overall Content

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7.1 | Content is multi-cultural in nature |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7.2 | Content is gender-fair in nature |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7.3 | Content fosters methodical approaches consistent with procedures used by the teacher and school (learning styles, cooperative learning, higher order thinking skills, etc.) |

Diverse Student Needs

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.1 | Materials are differentiated and aligned with concepts/skills/strategies being taught |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.2 | Resources are provided for teachers to address diverse student needs (build background experience, link between known/unknown information, think at higher order levels of Bloom's, learn in inter and intradisciplinary ways, choose an individualized method of learning, etc.) |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.3 | Visual aids support the text to aid student understanding |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.4 | Student materials are at different reading levels so students have material
they are able to read |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.5 | Lessons help students make connections across curriculum |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.6 | Materials address needs of newcomers at all grade level groupings |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8.7 | Materials allow flexibility in delivery to accommodate various blocks of instructional schedules |

Teacher Manual

- 3 2 1 0 9.1 Manual is durable
- 3 2 1 0 9.2 Print is large enough
- 3 2 1 0 9.3 Page number matches page numbers in student text

Book Organization/Format

- 3 2 1 0 10.1 Outside appearance is attractive
- 3 2 1 0 10.2 Print is large enough to be easily read
- 3 2 1 0 10.3 Pages are attractively arranged without too much print or graphics
- 3 2 1 0 10.4 Diagrams, pictures, and charts are in color, of good quality, age-appropriate, and frequent enough to aid explanation of the text without being distracting

Home School Connection

- 3 2 1 0 11.1 Materials include component for parent communication (e.g. bilingual listening materials, lending library, explanation of concepts, etc.)
- 3 2 1 0 11.2 Tasks provide opportunities to practice language skills for authentic purposes
- 3 2 1 0 11.3 Content teaches parents "how to" assist and give feedback to students on concepts and skills which are taught

Overall Comments:

Evaluated by

Date

Grade Level

CONCLUSION

In summation, the efforts put forth by these ESL teachers to be systematic in determining what curriculum to ultimately purchase, while being attentive to their own unique program, may provide a model for others to use in evaluating their own curricular needs. Collaboration and networking among districts can also provide feedback and information about quality materials, meaningful curricula and useful teaching tools. The

end result will save both time and money as well as strengthen and improve existing programs.

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...AND THE BEAT GOES ON: FURTHER EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE NEED FOR ACCOMMODATIONS AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN HIGH STAKES TESTING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Andrea Erichsrud

Christopher Johnstone

ABSTRACT

This article describes research that used the think-aloud method to elicit responses from students on released high stakes test items. Four students who were English language proficient and four students whose first language was Spanish completed a mini-test made up of four mathematics items. In the process of thinking aloud, the students revealed that design (formatting) issues in items can cause some students to struggle, that read aloud accommodations are still necessary for students who struggle with English, and that culturally irrelevant information may mislead or confuse students who are new to this country. The evidence from this study demonstrates that we need further research and activities at the state and district level to ensure that high stakes assessments are both accessible and valid for all students.

INTRODUCTION

Educational culture in the United States has, over the past decade, focused increasingly on demands for accountability for all students. The passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 laid out a framework of educational goals for schools and school districts, requiring them to demonstrate that all students are proficient on state-selected high stakes tests. To this end, districts and schools have responded to the requirements of federal law by evaluating the effectiveness of their own programs to ensure that students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

While there has been much discussion about the successes and failures of schools based on high stakes test results, there is a continued need to ensure that the tests themselves are accurate measures of student learning outcomes. The high stakes nature of large-scale assessments requires that careful meta-analyses of the tests themselves are conducted on an on-going basis. If the fate of schools is based on, among other things, the results of large-scale assessments, then the educational community has a responsibility to ensure that such assessments are of high quality and reflect the intended educational outcomes of states and districts.

The need for high quality tests is germane to a society that places high value on the results of such tests. Such a need is exemplified when considered within the context of populations who are typically identified as at risk of school failure, e.g., English language learners. English language learners are a growing and visible population in the school-aged population in our country and reside in urban and rural areas alike.

Butler and Stevens (2001) noted that the 4.2 million English language learners in this country are a heterogeneous group and, like other groups, may have a variety of problems related to high-stakes testing. For example, Abedi, Leon, and Mirocha (2001) and Abedi and Dietel (2004) have found that ELLs score considerably lower on standardized tests than their native speaking peers, especially in the areas of reading and writing. Abedi (2004) has suggested that results on content assessments typically correlate with students' language proficiency level (the lower the student's proficiency the lower they will likely score on content assessments).

Because ELLs, by definition, are not proficient in English, there is the possibility that some of the language found in high-stakes testing could be problematic for this population. Challenging language is often the construct tested in high stakes language arts tests (it is reasonable, and a legal requirement for an eighth grade language arts test to assess eighth grade language abilities). Problems arise, however, when overly complex language that is *unrelated* to the construct tested is introduced.

Messick (1989) expressed concern for "construct irrelevant variance" found in tests. Construct irrelevant variance exists when the construct, or the testing objective, is obscured by excess information in the test item that is not necessary for completion of the item (Messick, 1989). In the case of ELLs, construct irrelevant variance may arise when an item (or test question) has overly complex language that has nothing to do with the item tested, or cultural references that are not familiar to the students. Other examples of construct irrelevant variance are if a test contains extraneous clues, graphics, or text that are not focal points of the test question, and are not necessary in order to answer the test question correctly (Messick, 1989).

When construct irrelevant variance appears to systematically disadvantage particular populations (or when the constructs tested are systematically outside of the schema of particular populations), bias may be present. ELLs most frequently encounter bias in the areas of language and culture. Kopriva (2000), for example, noted that ELLs may not be able to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and comprehension under the restrictions of large-scale tests that have been designed for mainstream students who share a common culture (i.e., the cultural components found in assessments often do not relate to ELLs). When second language learners are not familiar with the host culture, they are more apt to interpret questions differently than native speakers who are familiar with the host culture (Mohan, 1982).

Baily (2000) has posited that the language found in assessment materials is beyond the proficiency level of many of the ELLs. Specific vocabulary may also pose a problem for ELLs. In an experimentally designed study, Cunningham and Moore (1993) found that when the language of the test was modified, the students' performance increased. Their study showed that when everyday language and vocabulary was used in written comprehension questions, rather than academic language and vocabulary, the students' performance increased. ELLs may become frustrated when they have content mastered but are stymied by the language requirements of the test (Cunningham & Moore, 1993).

Because of the issues that ELLs have historically encountered with high stakes testing, and because the potential for construct irrelevant variance and bias are possible on any test, there is a pressing need for districts and states to examine the tests they use to determine the educational progress of ELLs.

HIGH STAKES TESTING IN MINNESOTA

In Minnesota, the assessments used for system accountability, or to show that all students are making progress toward set academic standards, are the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs). The MCAs are standardized math and reading tests given annually to all 3rd, 5th, 10th, and 11th grade students in the public schools. In preparation for the MCAs, school districts often implement other standardized assessments as a means of obtaining formative data about students and making placement decisions.

In the district where this research took place, a computer-adaptive standardized test is used to prepare students for the types of items they will face. This district (and presumably others) have also implemented it to measure student progress throughout the year. The test used to prepare students for the MCAs was developed to be "self-leveling" or "adaptive," which means that the goal is to test every student at his or her academic proficiency level – this helps teachers find areas to remediate before statewide tests. There is no audio component for the math portion of the preparation test, although the school district recently decided to offer a read aloud accommodation to ELLs who may need additional help.

Because of test security concerns, it was impossible to gain access to actual MCA items. Because the school district where the research took place uses the computer-adapted test as a preparatory test for the MCAs, however, it was decided that the computerized test might provide good information about the potential problems with bias and construct irrelevant variance that the MCA (or any other high stakes test) may have. For the purpose of this research, we used released items from the computerized test, which were available on another state's website.

Although using released, non-MCA items is a less-than-ideal way to truly assess the potential problems with high-stakes assessments in Minnesota, it is a reasonable approach because the computerized test's validity studies have demonstrated that it aligns well with the state standards and test items on the MCAs. The released items from which research was conducted come from computerized test with a large item bank, this item bank has items that have a range of difficulty levels.

METHOD

This study attempted to sort out some of the thorny issues related to high stakes testing and ELLs. Although the studies mentioned above have examined issues of language and bias in tests for ELLs before, this research was intended to inform school, district, and state-level practitioners and policymakers about tests which (as close as possible) mirrored the assessments found in their jurisdictions. The research questions which guided the study were: 1) How do students of varied cultural backgrounds approach typical high stakes test items? 2) What errors do ELLs make in comparison to their native speaking peers at the same independent reading level on math items? And, 3) to what extent is culturally biased vocabulary and concepts present in the math test items selected for this study?

Research Participants

The participants consisted of eight students ranging in age from seven to nine years of age (in grades two to four). The students all resided in a suburban district in the state of Minnesota. Four of the students were native English speakers born in the United States. The other four were ELLs of varying English proficiency levels who were born in Mexico. The ELLs received ELL instruction for 30-45 minutes daily in a separate setting. All of the ELLs spoke Spanish as their first language. Two of the ELL participants were born in Mexico while the other two ELLs were both born in the United States. One has lived in the United States for 3 years, while the other has lived in the United States for one year.

Throughout the study, each ELL was compared to a native speaking peer who was working at the same independent reading and mathematics level in the mainstream classroom. Independent reading and mathematics levels for all the students were determined by using *Guided Reading* assessments (Fontas & Pinnell, 1996; Fontas & Pinnell, 2001) and teacher-developed computation tests. Results of locally-administered assessments (demonstrating similarities in students) are found in Table 1.

Table 1: Local Assessment Results

<u>Student</u>	<u>Years in US</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>ELL (Y/N)</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ind. Reading</u>	<u>Math Comp.</u>
----------------	--------------------	--------------	------------------	---------------	---------------------	-------------------

1A	7	2	N	M	H	15/15
1B	7	2	Y	M	I	14/15
2A	7	2	N	M	G	14/15
2B	3	2	Y	F	G	15/15
3A	1	3	N	M	L	14/15
3B	8	3	Y	F	M	15/15
4A	9	4	N	F	P	15/15
4B	9	4	Y	F	P	15/15

Instruments

As stated above, students were tested using released items from a computerized adaptive test that a state uses for its accountability test. Items were selected based on RIT scores from the test that reflected the grade levels of students. A RIT (Rasch Unit) Scale is a measurement based on equal interval scoring that relates directly to a learning continuum or scale (NWEA, 2003; Van Horn, 2003). RIT scores range from 150 to 300 with scores of 150-190 typically found in the third grade and scores of 240-300 in the high school grade levels (NWEA, 2003). The learning continuum contains separate sections for each subject (mathematics, reading, and language usage). All items selected for this research had Rasch scores that ranged from 161 to 191.

Procedure

Each student was given a paper copy of four mathematics test items. The test items were downloaded from a pool of released items found on the Idaho State Department of Education website that released the items. The test items were chosen because they had RIT scores between 161 and 191 (second and third grade difficulty level) and based on the first author's previous experience with similar items from the actual test that seemed to cause frustration for ELLs. The items were printed to represent the format in which the student would see the test item on his or her computer screen during the actual test as best as possible without access to the actual items.

Research was conducted one student and one question at a time. A copy of the first item was given to the student and the student was asked to start by reading the question aloud. The student was then asked to work through the problem and to verbalize his or her thoughts as he or she was working to solve the problem in either English or Spanish (based on student preference). This same process was repeated for each of the four questions. While the students were participating in the think-aloud protocol, their responses were videotaped to ensure that all utterances were captured. One student was not comfortable with the idea of videotaping, so this student's responses were recorded

longhand. Each think-aloud session took between 20-40 minutes, however, there was no time limit put on the student. The same process was repeated for all eight participants.

Throughout the think-aloud activities, a standard script was used. The only cue given to students was to "keep talking." According to Ericsson and Simon (1995), think-aloud activities reveal the most information when facilitators use as few cues as possible. Therefore, the standard script and the occasional reminder to "think out loud" were the only instructions given to students. On occasion, students were unable to complete an item. If the researcher felt additional information was needed, a word in the item was read aloud in order to continue the protocol.

Data Analysis

The data was initially analyzed using a think-aloud coding guide, based on a guide originally developed by researchers at the National Center on Educational Outcomes. The first author of this article watched each videotaped session and then completed each of the areas of the coding guide. The coding guide was divided into the following three categories: Reading of Test Item, Problem Solving of the Test Item, and Questioning. Each of the main categories had very specific sub-categories that were used as a checklist, as well as space to record notes, researcher questions, and student responses.

The coding guide was also used to analyze the reading process and fluency of the student, as well as the problem solving process and product, including a general description of the student's problem solving process. This process was followed for seven of the eight students. One student did not participate in the video taping process, so the responses for that student were written down, rather than video taped. To ensure inter-rater reliability during coding, another ESL teacher also reviewed all of the videos and used the assessment guide to analyze the student responses. There were no discrepancies between the two raters' coding guides.

Next, the coding guides and videotapes were used to transcribe the think-aloud dialogues for each of the students. Transcription was completed one test item at a time for a total of four test items. In total, all thirty-two think-aloud dialogues were transcribed. Dialogues and coding guides were then compared between the ELLs and the native-English speaking students. Patterns as well as discrepancies between the two groups of students in each test item were noted, as well as illustrative quotes that would help readers understand the subtleties of assessment issues.

RESULTS

Transcriptions and coding guides yielded important information concerning the issues that ELLs face on high stakes tests. Although it is impossible to include all transcription and student data in this section, each item is summarized below, preceded by a brief description of the item itself. These items are freely accessible to the public on the Idaho State Department of Education website.

Test Item 1

The first item had a RIT of 161, which would be considered below second grade level. (NWEA, 2002). The learning continuum goal listed for this item was measurement (Idaho Department of Education, 2004). The item consisted of a graphic representation of a calendar that asked students to use calendar skills. This item included multiple-choice questions such as 'What is the first day in December?'

One of the native English-speaking students had difficulty with this item. This student had difficulty with the item because he paid no attention to the graphic of the calendar. In his mind, he understood the question to be asking him to pick the first day of the week, rather than asking which day of the week was the first in December. His comprehension of the question was at its literal level. The remaining three native English speakers all answered the question correctly and did not appear distracted by the graphics present in the calendar.

Three of the ELLs had difficulty with this question. Two of the ELLs, students 1B and 2B, picked Sunday, an incorrect answer choice because, according to their responses, they saw the sun in the first box of the calendar, which made them think of Sunday. The other ELL, student 3B, chose Sunday because it was the first day of the week seen on the calendar.

Student 4B was the only ELL to answer this question correctly. She was aware of the weather graphics in the calendar, as she mentioned in her verbal responses that the graphics were obviously meant to be distracting. However, the graphics did not seem to distract her or keep her from choosing the correct answer.

Test Item 2

The second question had a RIT of 180, which is a second grade level question. The learning continuum goal listed for the test item was geometry. There were no directions listed for the students beyond the actual test question and answer choices. The item consisted of the question: *Which are polygons?* The answer choices were all in text format. There were no graphics with this question. Below is a representation of what the

students saw during the study, as well as how they would see the item on the computer screen in a real testing situation.

Which are cubes?

1. boxes
2. basketballs
3. keys
4. soup cans
5. magazines

None of the native English-speaking students displayed any difficulty in understanding this question. They all answered the question correctly. However, one of the students, student 2A, had difficulty reading the word "cubes." It was decided to read the word "cubes" aloud to this particular student, because he would have otherwise been unable to complete the activity. In a real test, the student may have guessed or skipped this particular item.

Three out of four ELLs displayed difficulty with part of all of item 2. Student 2B was distracted because she did not know what a soup can was. She knew what soup was (her mother frequently made homemade soup), but she apparently had no previous experience with canned soup and therefore had difficulty visualizing the shape of a can of soup. Although this student was unable to determine if a soup can was a cube, she demonstrated she was familiar with the mathematical concept of a cube. This student drew a picture of a cube while working on the item. In this case, she was simply not familiar with the cultural concept of canned soup.

Students 1B and 4B were not able to read the word "cube." The researcher read the word for these students in order for them to continue with the problem solving process. According to current computerized test procedures, this accommodation would not be available if the student was taking the test independently on a computer. The final ELL student answered the question correctly and seemed to have a good grasp on the concept of a cylinder as well as types of real life objects that could be classified as cylinders.

Test Item 3

The third question had a RIT range of 191, a third grade level question. The learning continuum goal listed for the question was problem solving. There were no directions listed for this item. The item consisted of the test question and five answer choices. There were no graphics for this question. Below is the question the students saw during

the study It is also how they would see the item on the computer screen in a real testing situation.

Randy needs 30 tokens to get a CD. He has 10 tokens and a friend is giving him 5. How many more will he need before he can get the CD?

1. 35
2. 15
3. 25
4. 10
5. 5

Test Item #3 presented the least difficulty for both native English speakers as well as ELLs. All of the native English-speakers answered the question correctly. None of them struggled with reading any of the text present in the test item. One of the students, student 2A, made reading errors in the test item, but those errors did not interfere with his ability to comprehend to test item.

In addition, all of the ELLs answered this item correctly. There was one concern with comprehension of the concept of tokens for student 2A. She was not familiar with the process of collecting tokens in order to exchange them for prizes. However, this did not seem to hinder her ability to complete the problem solving process. She answered the item correctly without the knowledge of token collecting. Whether or not she would have been able to answer the question without encouragement to “keep talking” and “keep thinking” is unknown.

Test Item 4

The fourth item had a RIT of 190, which is considered at third grade level. The learning continuum goal listed for this item was Number Sense and Numeration. There were no directions listed for the test item. The item consisted of the question and five answer choices. The question read as follows: *In what place is the letter r in the word scooter?* The answer choices were ordinal numbers displayed in text format as follows: A. first, B. third, C. fifth, D. seventh, E. ninth. Below is a representation of what the students saw during the study, as well as how they would see the item on the computer screen in a real testing situation.

In what place is the letter r in the word scooter?

1. first
2. third
3. fifth

4. seventh

5. ninth

All of the students in the study completed test item #4 correctly. One of the native English-speaking students, student 1A, initially struggled with the *th* ending for the ordinal numbers, but she was able to correct her mistake and it didn't keep her from completing the problem solving process correctly.

Many of the concerns for the ELLs were in the area of reading. Student 2B and 3B had some difficulty reading some of the words in the test question as well as in the answer choices. Student 2B had difficulty reading the word "scooter." Eventually, the word "scooter" was read aloud by the researcher in order to facilitate completion of the activity. The student was able to work through the reading of the ordinal numbers independently and was able to choose the correct answer. Student 3B had difficulty reading the ordinal numbers that were present in the answer choices. This student made the mistake of using a short vowel sound rather than the long vowel sound. However, he made the correction himself, and his reading did not affect his ability to answer the item correctly.

Student 2A lacked knowledge of what a scooter was. Her inability to read the word "scooter" acted as a distraction, but the student was able to complete the problem solving process despite her lack of vocabulary. It is unknown whether the student would have given up or guessed in a real testing situation.

Student 3B had some difficulty understanding the format of the question. He did not understand that the r was simply an underlined version of the letter "r." The student looked at the letter and asked, "What is this?" He made a comment that he thought it was a "decoration, or symbol" However, after reading the question and answer choices, he was able to figure out that it was the letter "r," and was able to complete the problem solving process correctly.

Results that emerged from the items above indicate that there was not wholesale bias issues present in the items. Issues of some sort, however, were present in all items. The think-aloud methods used provided insights into the meta-issues that students face when completing test items. Such issues may lead to incorrect answers or simply increased aggravation and frustration because of students' lack of familiarity with the cultural or linguistic loads of items. For example, Item 1 had construct-irrelevant information (weather graphics), which distracted ELL students more than English proficient students. Item 2 contained a cultural icon that was unfamiliar to one of the ELLs (a soup can) and tested a mathematical concept that was appropriate, but difficult for some to read. Item 3 presented few, if any problems for students. One ELL struggled with a culturally-bound concept (tokens for prizes), but was able to overcome confusion and answer the question correctly. It is unknown how this concept may have affected

the larger ELL population. Finally, one ELL did not have knowledge of what a scooter was, but was still able to complete the item. Another ELL struggled with the underlined letter "r" in text.

DISCUSSION

This study was a qualitative study with a small sample size. Although data were rich and descriptive, readers should note that findings from this study may not generalize across settings. Furthermore, the experiences of the students who participated in this study may not generalize to the experiences of all ELLs. Teaching and assessing ELLs takes careful consideration because of the heterogeneity of students both within and between populations whose first language is other than English. Further study is needed to quantify the relative impact of item design on students who are learning English as a second language. Although research done at a statewide or national level will be more instructive in concretizing the impact of item design on specific populations, this study did have several noteworthy findings.

Overall, this study found that there are subtleties in every test item that may introduce construct irrelevant variance or bias. Although evidence from think-aloud studies did not find that there were wholesale errors made on any item because of design flaws, design issues did have effects on student performance and comfort levels during the research. Based on the results of this research, we reiterate what research has told us already, that bias and construct irrelevant variance are sometimes found in assessment items, and that bias and construct irrelevant bias appears to differentially affect English language learners.

Based on the results of this study, three major themes arose. Such themes are important for stakeholders to consider when preparing and taking high stakes testing. The first overall theme is that construct irrelevant variance may differentially affect English language learners. Based on prior research, we know that ELLs struggle with reading and comprehending test items. Such learners may then look for assistance from graphic information (as demonstrated in item 1). If the graphic information in an item is misleading or irrelevant, students may be led astray. Therefore, careful consideration must be made to the added value of visuals for students. What test developers may think are interesting visuals may be distracting to students.

Related to the effects of reading difficulties is the need for read aloud accommodations for ELLs. Students clearly understood what a cylinder was, but had difficulty decoding the word. In mathematics tests, the constructs tested are mathematics. Therefore, tests such as those drawn from for this study should allow read aloud accommodations for ELLs who struggle with reading. By eliminating extraneous factors (such as reading

ability), schools and districts can get a more valid understanding of students' mathematical, science, and social studies ability.

Finally, although the effects were minimal, cultural bias was found in three of the items. Soup cans, tokens, and scooters were all unfamiliar terms to students. The items described in the previous sentence seem like they would be common to all students, but think-aloud data demonstrate this may not be the case. This presents a challenging dilemma for test developers and illustrates the need for sensitivity reviews that can assess test items for their appropriateness. The effects on problems solving were varied, but including such terms may produce a level of discomfort or confusion for ELLs that students familiar with such terms do not face. Minor discomfort when taking tests is not a well-researched issue, but when stakes are high, all facets of testing are important to consider.

The results from this study reflect the current thinking on assessments and reiterate the importance of considering construct irrelevant variance, bias, and the need for accommodations in testing. While this article was meant to add to the larger body of knowledge in assessment, its primary purpose was to inform district-level leaders about possible issues in statewide assessments for ELLs and encourage replication studies by others.

Teachers and administrators interested in improving the conditions in high stakes assessment may wish to take an active role in ensuring that construct irrelevant content and bias are removed from tests and that appropriate accommodations are allowed. Teachers may contact their state department of education representatives to find out when "sensitivity review panels" are conducted for high stakes tests. These panels allow constituents to analyze items for possible bias or other distracting content. Teachers knowledgeable of ELL issues would be helpful additions to such panels.

Additionally, district administrators have choices concerning the types of assessments they choose to prepare students high stakes tests. When selecting tests, administrators can be sure that accommodations can be built into the test structure. Accommodations such as those that allow tests to be read to students are a valid approach to testing ELLs in mathematics. Principals and administrators will need to consult state policies on accommodations for high stakes tests themselves.

Overall, work the test items in this research did not have flagrant issues, but each item had subtle biases and other construct irrelevant variances. Therefore, there is a continued need to research and address such issues. Research and action is the responsibility of all stakeholders, including parents, university personnel, administrators, and teachers. As educators, expect our students to perform at their highest level. As

consumers of assessments, we need to hold the same high expectations of the tools used to measure students.

Authors

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The Lion's Share and Dhegdheer

Ahmed, Said Salah. (2007). *The Lion's Share/Qayb Libaax*. St. Paul: Minnesota Humanities Commission.

Hassan, Marian A. (2007). *Dhegdheer*. St. Paul: Minnesota Humanities Commission.

Katie De Kam

Something exciting has hit my classroom. This is the kind of thing that kids are crawling over each other to get closer to, they are stealing it off the "teacher-only" pile of otherwise uninteresting papers on my desk and engaging in comparative discussions on during recess. It has everything to do with the very essence of my students and has proved to be that thing that helps students truly see themselves in the curriculum. I had no idea what was in store when I checked these popular books out of the library.

This excitement started with two books, both Somali folktales, and both written in two languages, Somali and English. My fifth grade students, most of whom are Somali, are head-over-heels about them. The stories, *The Lion's Share* and *Dhegdheer*, are a part of the four-book series called The Somali Bilingual Book Project sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Commission. Both books have the perfect blend of qualities that make the folktales endearing to all readers, and for the Somali audience, provide a spotlight on their culture that makes them stand proud.

The Lion's Share is written by Said Salah Ahmed and illustrated by Kelly Dupre. It is a story with a lesson to learn about a greedy lion king and his unfortunate subjects. The story begins with the "beasts of prey were hunting together in the forests of Somalia. Late in the afternoon they found a big fat camel." As the story develops, it becomes apparent that the lion will be taking "the lion's share" of the precious camel meat, while the other beasts of prey will be lucky to go home with one or two bites of the kill. At the end of the story, the animals have learned and begun to chant, "The lion's share is not fair, the lion's share is not fair."

While *The Lion's Share* teaches us that sometime the bad guys get the good stuff, *Dhegdheer* has a message of justice: A wicked woman will get what she deserves. The book is written by Marian A. Hassan and illustrated by Betsy Bowen. Dhegdheer, which means Long Ear in Somali, is a boogeyman figure whose story is very common in Somali folklore. She is a fierce cannibal who is hunting for her next meal with her super-human qualities such as keen hearing, ability to run very quickly, and a magical talking vessel in which she stores her human flesh. When an innocent widow and her chubby child come upon Dhegdheer's hut, they are chased through the Hargega Valley and ultimately are rewarded with safety because of their innocence. In the midst of the chase, however, Dhegdheer loses her life to the valley because of the sins she has committed. As a

result of Dhegdheer's death, rain, joy, and song are able to return to the valley once again.

There are several qualities that make *The Lion's Share* and *Dhegdheer* so enticing for the Somali reader. The very fact that the books are bilingual is their most compelling element. Both books are authentically Somali in text in that the authors are Somali/English speakers themselves and so there is no beauty of language lost in the translation. Said Salah Ahmed and Marian A. Hassan have saturated their books with carefully chosen words in both languages. My Somali translators tell me that there is no sacrifice of quality language so that the stories can be translated. In fact, poetic devices such as alliteration are found in both books in both languages. Marian A. Hassan even goes as far as to include rhyme in both languages at several points in *Dhegdheer*. It is obvious that these books are not written more for the readers of one language over another; instead they are meant to be read in each language equally. In my classroom, we were able to read the stories in both languages. I used the books as a bridge between a poetry unit and a writing unit with a focus on word choice. Students could pick out poetic devices in both languages and see how the devices could be used in prose writing in addition to poetry.

The oral culture of the Somali people is another thing that is highlighted in the books and is appealing to the Somali audience. The authors keep a strong voice of the oral storyteller in their work, shying away from more formal descriptors. Said Salah Ahmed uses colloquial phrases like, "You, Ali with the short leg." Marian A. Hassan uses two bits of oral literature that are commonly memorized by Somalis. One segment is a poem that Dhegdheer recites as she is on her chase for the woman and child. When I read the poem to my class in English, they just continued to listen, but when they heard the Somali translation, they all burst out laughing. Confused as to why this was so, I asked them what I had missed. Hands shot up in the air. One student said, "My grandma always said that [poem] to me when I was four years old and running around the apartment." Another student said his mother used to comfort his little brother with that poem when he was crying. It seemed that everyone had a memory attached to the rhyme. The last line of the book also quotes popular oral tradition. "Dhegdheer dhimatoo! Dhulkii nabadeey" is a line from a catchy folk song that means "Dhegdheer is dead! The land has peace."

But the strength of the books does not lie in their appeal to Somalis only; they have universal appeal to all readers. We can easily compare the life lesson found in *The Lion's Share* to any number of Aesop's fables and *Dhegdheer* can be compared to the story of Hansel and Gretel. These striking similarities in themes of folktales across cultures help us see the common humanity among us all. However, in these books, the well-described setting and vivid characters put the extra twist on the tales to make them authentically Somali. These similarities-yet-differences would place these folktales well in the scope of any unit on East Africa in any type of classroom, ELL or not, K-12 with students in

grades 1-6 probably getting the most enjoyment out of the stories themselves. Anyone with a third grade reading level would be able to read them independently.

The illustrations in the books also bridge the culture gaps between the non-Somali readers and the Somali readers. Kelly Dupre, illustrator of *The Lion's Share*, uses block prints that provide the distinct backdrop of an African tale. Her gouache enhancements provide extra zing to the personalities of the characters, making their feelings come out more, and even giving the sun that look of scorching rays typical of equatorial countries like Somalia. On the other hand, Betsy Bowen, illustrator of *Dhegdheer*, chooses a look of generalized washed figures, enhancing the ghost-like sense of the characters and the creepiness of the tale. Both illustrators showcase the harsh parts of Somalia's landscape and lack of vegetation, helping non-Somalis gain an understanding of the setting.

The overall goal of the Somali Bilingual Book Project has definitely been successful. The Minnesota Humanities Commission published these books with the goal of advancing "family literacy opportunities that positively impact the literacy levels of Somali immigrant and refugee families." Half of the books published in this series are being given away free of charge to Somali families in literacy and school programs in Minnesota. The books certainly do their job in building literacy in both languages as learning to read one language supports learning to read in the other. Also, as the Somali population continues to grow in America, the need for people literate in Somali will also increase. The need to give students Somali literature, therefore, is as paramount to their development as it is to give them appropriate English materials. *The Lion's Share* and *Dhegdheer* are just the ticket to help that literacy development happen.

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www.minnesotahumanities.org

Reviewer

Katie De Kam teaches 5th grade language arts and 5th/6th ELA at Minnesota International Middle School. She would like to thank her students and Somali co-workers, especially Abdi Elmi, for their insight into the Somali language and culture in the texts.

All New Very Easy Stories: A Picture-based First Reader

Heyer, Sandra (2006). *All New Very Easy True Stories: A Picture-Based First Reader*. White Plains: Pearson Education.

Michael Coggins

The cover of Sandra Heyer's *All New Very Easy True Stories* invites the prospective reader to open it and begin flipping through. Being a book of true stories, the people pictured in the photographs appear eager to relate some narrative from their own lives. This reliance on imagery and pictures is appropriate, given the intended audience of absolute beginners and students with low literacy levels. As the second in the *True Stories* series at this level, it is one of the stated goals of this book to provide additional material for students who wish or need to remain at this reading level a while longer, particularly those with highly developed oral skills but underdeveloped reading skills.

While the table of contents itself does not readily suggest a syllabus for a potential reading class, it does offer several choices for teachers to add to their lesson plans and keep their lessons fresh, as intended. This is apparent on first glance at the variety of unit titles, some of which intimate their being used as complements to other lessons on topics such as phone etiquette and novice computer literacy. Each unit starts with a pre-reading picture, followed by a story board of further pictures accompanied by each line of the upcoming reading. Then with only a photograph of the main character or characters, the text itself is presented for the teacher to read aloud and the students to read along respectively, followed by post-reading exercises on pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, speaking, and writing.

Each reading is a grammatical and lexical simplification of a real newspaper article, presumably taken from American or Western news sources. This is apparent in the topics of some of the readings (e.g., computer usage, single-family dwellings, snow skiing, American football), the countries overtly mentioned in some stories (e.g., England, Australia, Scotland), as well as the clothes and racial makeup of the people in the drawings and photographs. We see exemplified such values as the acceptance of women in official positions, interracial friendships, single retirees living alone, and individual-oriented recreational sports. The cultural load of these pictures is quite clearly American/Western.

The post-reading exercises can be used with low-level readers with developed oral skills. In the pronunciation section, students are asked to listen and repeat; in the subsequent vocabulary section, oral skills are pressed into service for spelling. The comprehension exercises exploit these oral skills to reinforce comprehension, but it is in the speaking and writing sections that the material becomes personalized by students adding their own experiences or preferences.

The strength of this book lies not only in its being an additional resource from the already successful *True Stories* series, but also in its own organization and content. The units each have enough material from pre- to post-reading that a teacher could use one as a major part of his or her lesson plan without the need to cannibalize it for parts. At the same time, each unit is open enough to be expanded upon depending on the teacher's purposes and lesson goals. The book's major weakness is the cultural load of the material. It would be nice if more Asians and Hispanics were represented in the pictures. After all, these are probably much of the book's readership. Part of the value of these true stories, however, is in their veracity.

There could be a limitation of available sources or the risk of compromise if there was a refocus to reflect the true faces of immigration. That said, *All New Very Easy True Stories* is a wonderful resource for teachers in need of a first reader.

Reviewer

Michael Coggins has worked as a volunteer ESL instructor in Minnesota. He holds a B.A. in Linguistics, an M.A. in South Asia Studies, and is currently working toward his M.A. in ESL at the University of Minnesota.

Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources

Dollahite, Nancy E. and Haun, Julie (2006). *Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Tor Lindbloom

A guide for advanced ESL students writing research papers, *Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources* is divided into two parts. The first takes students step-by-step through the technical process of writing their paper: analyzing source material, writing a thesis statement, forming coherent paragraphs, creating an introduction and conclusion, and composing a bibliography. This section contains extensive practice on such tricky issues as paraphrasing, summarizing and using citations. It also has helpful advice about how to avoid plagiarism, give effective feedback to peers, make sense of an instructor's writing assignment, and even overcome writer's block.

What truly distinguishes this book from others on composing papers from sources is that it includes the sources themselves. Part Two of *Sourcework* contains original texts on four timely themes: heroes, globalization, non-violence and bioethics. Each theme begins with an introductory activity for students, presents 5-7 interesting articles with various perspectives and concludes with questions which students can use as inspiration for finding a research focus.

The authors recommend that teachers using *Sourcework* as a classroom text begin by choosing a theme, reading and discussing the provided sources collectively, then working through Part One to compose a paper based on this theme. Their first paper completed, students can compose others on the same theme, a different theme, or on a theme of their choosing based on independent research. The final chapter of Part One provides guidance for this process, including selecting and narrowing an appropriate topic, searching for information and even evaluating the reliability of websites.

Like many modern textbooks, *Sourcebook* also has its own internet resources, which provide additional materials on writing an argumentation essay, using grammar transformations in paraphrasing and grids and checklists for peer reviews. The second section of the textbook is expanded with discussion/comprehension questions for each article, an annotated bibliography of other possible sources on each topic and five additional themes to write about and discuss. A password-protected instructor's site contains assessment tools, additional assignments and possible syllabi for the course.

Despite the fact that *Sourcework* contains real articles on exciting themes and is peppered with quotes from other interesting sources such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, it lacks some pizzazz. Part of this is due to its paucity of illustration, consisting solely of the black-and-white photograph of a nautilus shell which opens each chapter. Certainly, more imagination would also have been welcome in the example paragraphs and essays contained in the text. One "model" conclusion, for instance, opens with the less-than-stellar lines: "What do we do when we have a problem? Leave it alone? Or try to solve it?" (p. 101). Granted, research papers are different than more creative forms, but they still need to engage the reader. In "A Guide for Students," a helpful page which provides an alternative table of contents, one finds a heading on making papers "sound good." Looking up the listed pages, however, leads only to a section on using linking words and other marks of cohesion.

This evident lack of attention to style and originality is perhaps connected to a larger issue. Students using *Sourcework* and other writing guides like it are often encouraged to follow a very strict structure for their papers, including a thesis statement with supporting points and clear topic sentences for each paragraph. Needless to say, these elements are often missing from native speakers' papers. Indeed, I could find no example of a source in Part Two which followed this form. Are such detailed guidelines helpful for students tentatively beginning the daunting task of writing a research paper, or do they stifle creativity? Perhaps there are other more subtle criteria readers use to judge the quality and organization of texts which can in turn be taught to students.

This difficulty aside, the most interesting and controversial aspect of *Sourcework* is the fact that themes and even sources are prescribed for the student. The authors defend this decision by noting that having students work on the same topic creates a sense of community in the classroom. Of course, it also might inhibit motivation. This concern should not, however, keep one from looking into this excellent manual. Instructors, after all, are not obliged to follow every indication in the text. *Sourcework* is clear, user-friendly and extremely thorough, which makes it suitable for any learning environment, including self-study. Despite the reservations noted above, I would highly recommend it for students and instructors alike.

Reviewer

Tor Lindbloom has spent the past eight years teaching ESL to high school students, university students and adults in Slovenia, Slovakia and the Republic of Georgia. He is currently a first-year student in the MA in TESL program at the University of Minnesota.

All Clear Listening and Speaking 3, 2nd edition

Fragiadakis, Helen Kalkstein. (2007). All Clear Listening and Speaking 3, 2nd Edition.
Boston: Thomson Heinle.

Cameron Jaynes

Nearly a decade after the first edition was released, *All Clear* has now been integrated into a three part series with *All Clear Listening and Speaking 3* (formerly *All Clear Advanced*) as the highest level text. Designed for advanced students, *All Clear 3* employs integrated skills in order to allow students to comprehend and use idiomatic expressions and lexical chunks. An attractive, light, and portable book, it embraces the fundamental aspects of Communicative Language Teaching.

Each of the eight chapters follow a similar format, opening with a ‘warmer’ to set up the theme of the chapter and followed by a listening (not authentic yet “natural”) dialogue which introduces the lexical items for the chapter. Transcripts of the dialogue are provided with the target language in bold, and in following sections stress patterns are indicated with accent marks. After a quick comprehension check and paired recitation of the dialogue, a thorough explanation of the target phrases is provided. Students are then treated to a progression of exercises to ensure their grasp of the ‘chunks’. Beginning with matching, continuing to gap fill, error correction, and culminating in completion of another dialogue; there is sufficient opportunity and repetition to help concretize the terms. The remainder of the lesson is a hodgepodge of listening and speaking activities in and out of pair and group formats and involving role plays and panel discussions designed to allow for free-practice of the intended phrases. Potential writing assignments and suggested supplementary internet research ideas are located at the end of each chapter.

While the well-intentioned attempts to bring the ‘real world’ into the class via on-line research assignments are well structured and interesting, this provides a distinct problem for many classroom contexts and compositions. Regrettably not every student has the time for homework assignments, nor does every student have access to the internet. In the event that students do have time and access, many of the activities could be interesting and rewarding. Students are encouraged to engage in self-discovery by researching lexically or thematically related idioms. Also, research of additional (provided) thematic concepts associated with that of the chapter, e.g., ‘elevator etiquette’ could provide interesting conversation fodder for the following lesson.

At the end of each chapter are ‘contact assignments’ and ‘expression collection’ activities which require the student to venture forth into the world and ask native speakers the meaning of additional phrasal verbs, and to “Every week, find three expressions from the real world that are new to you [the students]” (p.18). The text assumes that the students have access to native speakers (as in an ESL setting) who are willing to explicate the meaning and use of grammatical items, and furthermore that the students are in an environment that allows them to eavesdrop on native speakers and transcribe their idiomatic findings.

Criticisms aside, given the appropriate classroom context, cultural inclinations, or inhibitions these activities could prove to be quite enjoyable and enriching for the ESL classroom environment. The advanced level, general language of the lessons, and chapter themes such as homelessness, violence in the media, and kids’ behavior in public, suggest that *All Clear 3* would lend itself to an older audience and would be suitable for a university or advanced secondary level course.

All Clear 3 is a quality text that goes to great lengths to make idiomatic phrases more accessible to the advanced learner. Its contextual examples and explanations of idioms and phrases are thorough and effective. Background and overviews of not only ‘meaning’, but also ‘form’ and ‘use’ allow students to acquire a deeper understanding of the target language. The integration of reading, writing, listening, and speaking provide ample opportunity for students to integrate the phrases into their active vocabularies. *All Clear 3* has many strengths and is worth taking a look at.

Reviewer

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