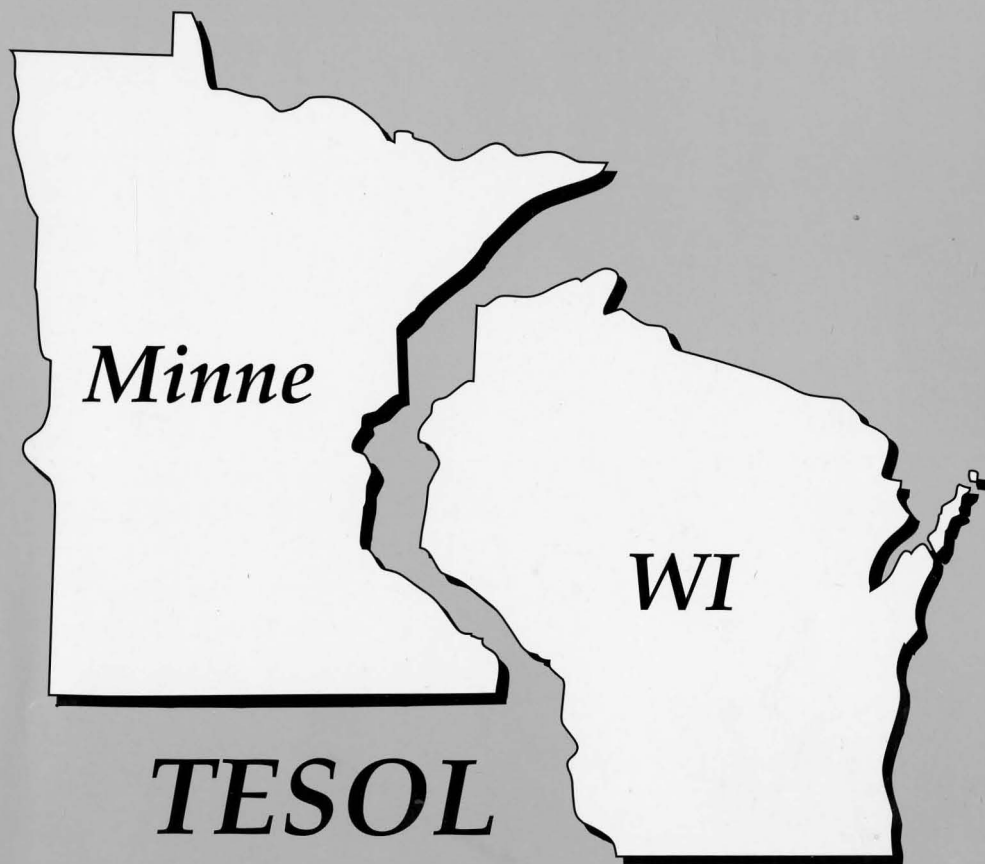


Minnesota and Wisconsin  
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages



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***Journal***

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*A Journal for Minnesota and Wisconsin Teachers of English  
to Speakers of Other Languages*

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The *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal* seeks to publish articles of importance to the profession of English as a Second Language in the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Articles in the following areas are considered for publication: instructional methods, techniques, and materials; research with implications for ESL; and issues in curriculum and program design. Book reviews and review articles are also welcome, as are short descriptions of work in progress on any aspect of theory or practice in our profession. Reports of work in the areas of curriculum and materials development, methodology, teaching, testing, teacher preparation and administration are encouraged, as are reports of research projects that focus on topics of special interest. Descriptions should summarize key concepts and results in a manner that makes the information accessible to our readership. We also invite commentary on current trends and practices in the TESOL profession, and we encourage responses or rebuttals to any articles or remarks published in the *Journal*. If the editors announce a themed volume, manuscripts will be requested on a specific area of interest.

- **Manuscripts**

Manuscripts should conform to the style book followed by TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Please include a brief (e.g., 100-word) abstract and short biographical statement.

Submit **five** paper copies of the manuscript and abstract. Upon acceptance of your article for inclusion in the journal, you will be asked to send us a computer diskette of your article.

Contributions to Volume 19 should be submitted to:

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## INTRODUCTION

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This volume marks six years of collaboration between Minnesota and Wisconsin on the *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal*, and over nineteen years since the beginning of the *MinneTESOL Journal*. We are pleased to continue this affiliate collaboration. This volume also marks our first theme-based collection. We have drawn together an array of articles focused on literacy to explore ways those in our profession are involved in this issue. The articles resonate with one another particularly with respect to identity and the development of literacy in all age groups.

Our first article, by Kathryn Henn-Reinke, addresses ways to support bilingual literacy development for native Spanish-speaking elementary students through small group work in the classroom. The issue of first language literacy development as it applies to developing literacy in English is crucial for all of us to consider regardless of the age group we may be teaching.

In the second article, Molly Collins suggests ways to foster literacy through a college-level course centered on the literature of the American immigrant. One of the significant contributions of this course is the ability of immigrant students to identify with the themes and characters in the novels. The course can thus provide an entry point into the culture of college for immigrant students.

In the third article, Patsy Vinogradov addresses models for adult ESL literacy development and presents practical activities and lessons. In combination, these three articles offer readers common principles as well as important differences in literacy development across age groups and settings.

In the fourth article, Michael E. Anderson, Bonnie Swierzbin, Kristin K. Liu, and Martha L. Thurlow present the issues involved in reading assessment and accommodation for English language learners in Minnesota. The authors include recommendations for professionals involved in giving the Basic Standards Tests in the state which can be applied immediately. It is a privilege to have the careful and sustained work on assessment done by the National Center on Educational Outcomes accessible to our readers.

This volume includes one book review. *New Immigrants in the United States*, edited by Sandra Lee McKay, presents an overview of immigrant studies and could be an important resource for many in our field.

Finally, two poems by Hawa Farah are included in this volume. Ms.

Farah was a student this past year in the Commanding English Program, General College, University of Minnesota; she wrote these poems when she was a senior at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, MN. Ms. Farah reveals a depth of understanding of the experiences of being an immigrant and the daily struggle for identity in confrontation with forces of assimilation and isolation. These poems serve to illustrate the important work TESOL professionals must perform: to support human beings in their efforts to read the world and learn the words of a new language through which to share their stories.

We wish to thank the members of the Editorial Advisory Board in both Minnesota and Wisconsin for all the effort that went into producing this volume.

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## **La Club de Lectura: *An Oasis for Struggling Readers in Bilingual Classrooms***

---

KATHRYN HENN-REINKE

*University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh*

*La Club de Lectura* is an option for assisting struggling readers in bilingual classrooms. In this action research project students in grades one through three worked in small groups with an educational assistant in a simplified reading program which draws from the principles of Reading Recovery and strategy-based literacy development. The results of the project were very positive and the model has been implemented in several other bilingual classrooms.

During the last several years I had the opportunity to work extensively with a number of classroom teachers and students in elementary bilingual classrooms. I noted that a majority of the students in any given classroom progressed at a predictable rate. However, there was always a small group within each class that lagged behind their classmates despite the concentrated efforts of the teachers to significantly change their rate of learning. As the semesters went along and I learned more about the basic principles of Reading Recovery and strategy-based literacy instruction<sup>1</sup> (Clay, 1990; Goodman, 1996; Swartz & Klein, 1997; Weaver, 1994), I realized that this type of specialized intervention might offer the best hope for helping these students maximize their learning potential. However, few urban districts had the financial resources to hire teachers specially trained in such reading programs. And finding such teachers who were also fluent in Spanish would be next to impossible. Therefore, the following plan emerged as an intervention option: focus on the underlying principles and format of Reading Recovery, assist students in developing some basic reading and writing strategies, and create a positive community of learners to support learning in small groups. Since the opportunity to work with individual students on a regular basis, as recommended by Reading Recovery, was not feasible, we explored the option of meeting with small groups of four students. Because classroom teachers would not have the luxury of working intensively for 45 minutes per day with these groups, it was decided that an experimental design would be developed in which educational assistants would be

trained in a simple reading intervention model and assist me in working with the students on a regular basis. This training would enable the educational assistants to reinforce the intervention strategies with the experimental group throughout the school day.

The project, which came to be known as *La Club de Lectura*, was carried out as an action research project in the spring of 1998. Two groups of four students each were selected to participate in the project. The groups met for 45 minutes two to three times per week over a nine week period, from January through March. All of the work of the project was carried out in Spanish.

## SUBJECTS

Groups from two bilingual classrooms in the same school were included in the action research project. In each classroom I asked the teacher to recommend the students who were experiencing the greatest academic difficulty for inclusion in the project. One group of students consisted of four first grade students. One of the students was female and three were male. All of the students were learning to read in Spanish. Two of the students spoke only Spanish and two of the students were conversant in both Spanish and English. The second group of students consisted of three second grade students and one third grade student. Two of the students were male and two were female. All of these students were also learning to read in Spanish. The girls were Spanish dominant and the boys were Spanish-English bilingual.

All of the students selected for participation in this project were part of a developmental bilingual program in the district. Students enrolled in the program at this school were assigned to a self-contained bilingual classroom with a bilingual teacher and educational assistant. All students in the first grade classroom received daily instruction in ESL from an ESL specialist. Second and third grade students received ESL instruction on a small group, pull-out basis.

I met with the teachers and educational assistants prior to the beginning of the project to establish the process and goals for *La Club de Lectura*. I met informally with the educational assistants each day as we worked with the children to explain the process (and literacy development in general) more fully. One of the educational assistants had been with the first grade teacher for several years and was very familiar with the children and the classroom routine. The second and third grade educational assistant was hired shortly before the project began. She was a student in an educational program at a local technical college and became very involved in working with the children. I was somewhat familiar with the children prior to the beginning of the project. During the first semester I

had read to the first grade class once a week and had led them through various guided reading activities. In the second and third grade classroom I had worked with the children who were to be included in the project one day per week for about six weeks during the first semester to determine whether this project should be pursued. Because it seemed to have a positive effect, we expanded upon the plan for this study during the second semester.

## SESSION FORMAT

The children were individually screened to determine their levels of literacy development and sessions were planned to meet the needs of each group. Each session followed the same general format and the same basic elements were used with both groups. The session began with students independently rereading stories previously introduced, which most of the students chose to read aloud, initially. The second component involved an activity that enabled students to focus on the features of sounds, syllables and word patterns, often referred to as *making words* (Clay, 1993; Cunningham, 1991). Students then wrote and shared a story. The session ended with the introduction of a new book. (Each of the components is described more fully below.) The order and content of the activities remained somewhat flexible depending on student reaction.

The groups varied in that the first graders did not begin a new book each day. We generally introduced a new story every fourth or fifth session with them. The first graders enjoyed making words and writing stories most and they put more effort into these activities. They very much enjoyed the stories and read them enthusiastically, but their interaction with print was fairly superficial. On the other hand, the second and third graders cared much less for writing and often found it difficult and tedious to write, especially in the beginning. Their efforts were focused on being able to accurately read and react to the printed page and this seemed to absorb them most completely.

Building community was an important component of this project. We felt that more relaxed students would be better risk-takers in La Club de Lectura environment. We conducted our sessions in the classroom so the students would not feel that they needed to be removed for special help. Other small group activities took place at the same time so we generally did not disturb one another. At the end of these small group sessions in the first grade classroom, other children often pleaded with us to allow them to join the group, which helped us confirm that we had not stigmatized the work of this group. Little needed to be done to build a sense of acceptance and openness toward our little groups since both of the classroom teachers emphasized these practices in the classrooms. I

also tried to involve the educational assistants in the activities as much as possible so that we shared responsibility for the groups' learning and so that they could continue to support the learning of these children during the rest of the day.

The four components of the program are outlined more fully below.

## **Rereading Books**

Rereading books was a very important component of this project. As the students, especially at the second and third grade level, reread text at least three things happened: (a) They became more familiar with plots and characters, (b) they focused more fully on the use of the strategies, and (c) their confidence in themselves as readers increased. If they grew tired of certain books, we removed these books from the selection to be reread each day.

We introduced the use of picture, context or experience cues prior to reading and reinforced them during rereading. At the second grade level students were asked to identify how they knew certain words, how they could make certain predictions, why they reread certain passages, and what they would do to help themselves when they were stuck on a word or an idea. Being able to reiterate the basis for selection (i.e. metacognition) and the use of appropriate strategies were seen as key elements in helping students become successful readers.

## **Making Words**

The various patterns used for making words (Cunningham, 1991) were an attempt to help children examine the sound and print features of words and relate these understandings to actual text. We used many words from the stories, as well as a systematic approach of addressing simple to complex letter-sound relationships.

For example, students are each given a set of small letter cards, containing a single letter on each card, to be used for the day's lesson. The lesson would begin with having the children form simple consonant-vowel combinations with the letter cards in Spanish, such as *da, de, di, do, du*. From here they proceed to the formation of words containing these syllables, such as *dedo, dama, duda* and *dino*. The ability to physically manipulate the letter cards helps students gain a better understanding of sound-symbol relationships. After the words are formed the students are asked to clap out the number of syllables in the word just formed. Syllable segmentation is another important skill that the children can then apply to their reading experiences. Because Spanish is so phonetic, students usually began to move quite rapidly through this activity once they learned the basic sounds and could see patterns in word formation.

## Daily Writing

Daily writing activities initially served mostly to help students learn and solidify sound-symbol relationships. As the sessions progressed students came to recognize the interrelatedness of reading and writing and their writing reflected that enrichment.

## Introducing New Books

Introducing new books provided an excellent vehicle for teaching the children various skills and strategies to support comprehension. Reading in its fullest sense involves communication between the author and the reader (Weaver, 1994). In order for this to happen the reading material must be of interest to the child. Therefore, we surveyed the students' interests and strove to select books which the children would enjoy reading and rereading. When connection between the author and the reader is broken by a loss of understanding on the part of the reader because of context, grapho-phonics, or prior knowledge miscues, the reader needs to have a repertoire of strategies to reconnect with the author (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Goodman, 1996; Weaver, 1994). We strove to focus on four basic strategies with our students: picture clues, context clues, prior knowledge, and grapho-phonics.

## STUDENT PROGRESS

The first sessions with the second and third grade group were very different from the final sessions. All of the students were at the emergent level of reading at the beginning. All four were being considered for retention. The third grade student was very conscious of his inability to read and seemed to find every possible excuse to avoid interaction with print. He always needed to tell a story or get a pencil--anything to take attention away from the work at hand. He would look at the pictures in the books but didn't seem to see how they could help him with the story. He had transferred to this school at the beginning of the year and had quickly gained a reputation for having discipline problems.

During the final week of this study the third graders in the class were to take the state level third grade reading test. The Reading Resource teacher included our third grader, Eliseo, in the testing group but feared he would be totally frustrated by the experience. Instead, he happily took the test and proudly announced that he'd used his reading strategies, especially *¿Tiene sentido?* (Does that make sense?), when he got stuck. His discipline problems declined significantly and it was now difficult to get him to stop working at the end of a session. It was most rewarding to watch Eliseo come to see himself as a capable learner.

The two second grade girls, Juanita and Nadia, also began the sessions as non-readers. They spoke very limited English and were both extremely shy. Sharing the writing samples at the end of the sessions provided an opportunity for the students to get to know one another and this helped both of the girls become more relaxed. Juanita and Nadia first began to show development through the making words segment of the lessons. From there they began to enjoy reading and rereading their books. By the end of the project both girls had developed solid control of context and word analysis strategies. They still needed to work on reading fluency but that would improve with continued opportunities to read. It also seemed that their growing command of conversational English was a factor in their emerging confidence as learners. Although the sessions were conducted in Spanish, they initiated the practice of beginning and ending our work together by sharing little anecdotes in English. They now laughed more frequently and spontaneously participated in the learning activities and conversations.

Jaime was a bit ahead of the other three in terms of reading ability. By the end of the sessions, he was reading at a second grade level and his teacher placed him in a reading group with proficient second grade readers, where he worked very successfully for the remainder of the school year. His fluency was very strong and he now read aloud only when asked to do so or to share a passage with the group. He was the only one of the group who was no longer inhibited by books with more text and fewer pictures.

On various occasions each of the students in this group independently practiced rereading in order to share something they had enjoyed or to show parents, teachers, classmates, or siblings how they were improving in reading. The classroom teachers were very instrumental in creating opportunities for the students to showcase their newfound reading expertise.

All four students in this second and third grade group experienced high levels of anxiety when it came to writing and none of them could easily read back their own writing initially. By the end, however, all of their writing could be deciphered not only by me but by an outside reader as well. Veronica, the educational assistant for this group, responded to their requests to write a long story by having them do TV story rolls, featuring frames from a story written and drawn on a large roll of paper. We helped them focus on outlining a problem and solution before they began writing their stories. Doing a more involved story at this point really served to move writing ability forward, but the important issue here was that the impetus to move in this direction came from the students, indicating their readiness for more sophisticated writing activities. Earlier in the semester they wanted to simply copy the books they

were reading. Our first reaction was to allow only original writing, but on closer examination it became apparent that they were doing a great deal of rereading in this activity. It also took some pressure off them to write independently and gave them a sense of accomplishment to have something down on paper. They often shared these writings with others in the classroom. As their confidence in writing grew, the copying gradually disappeared and they moved into independent story and journal writing. Their development in writing ability grew as a result of the collaborative practice they received in the classroom both from this project and from their teacher.

In grade one at the start of the project, all of the students could recognize the letters of the alphabet and experienced little confusion with individual letter sounds. All were enthusiastic participants in La Club de Lectura and all loved books and stories. But all of them seemed reluctant to write independently at first. They preferred stringing a few words together from the word wall and other sources of environmental print around the room. The sentences were often unrelated to one another and generally began with *Amo a mi mamá* (I love my mother) or *Mi Mamá es bella* (My mother is pretty). By the end of the sessions, they were able to write several related sentences and read them back to the group. José, for example, had joined a soccer team and was so excited about it that soccer became his only topic of writing. Writing from a topic sentence was being developed by the classroom teacher on a daily basis and we were able to reinforce that concept in La Club de Lectura.

In the beginning none of the first graders was able to work very independently at making words. By the end they were able to readily make three and four syllable words that followed regular sound-letter patterns, and separate these words into syllables. The educational assistant for this group and I noticed that the students were not transferring knowledge of word analysis to their reading, so we began to focus more on helping the children make links between the making words activities and actual reading. The first graders happily reread previously introduced books each day, but after a couple of weeks they had not moved closer to one-to-one correspondence between voice and print. This indicated that developmentally they remained at an emergent stage of literacy, where they focused on the illustrations for meaning and ignored the print. We divided the group into pairs for this segment and each of us read with one child at a time to help each child focus more on text. With very little intervention other than the individualized focus and having the students track the words with their fingers as they read, there was soon a much closer voice-to-print match.

Joshua was much younger than the others in the first grade group and initially it was very difficult for him to focus on the activities. He



worried much more about morning snack than about his reading or writing, though he truly loved stories. As time went on he began to focus on the activities of the group more fully. Joshua used strategies that he had acquired up to that point very effectively, even though they proved to be quite cumbersome. For example, he knew all of the letters, sounds, and picture symbols for the alphabet, so if he wanted to write a word he would isolate the sound and then recall the picture symbol which would trigger the letter form for him. For the word *mi*, for example, he would say *mmmm de mesa*, then look at the picture of the *mesa* (table) to double check the letter *m*. Then he would say *iiiiiii de isla* (island) and locate *isla* and write *i*. This process gradually became more automatic for him and his writing speed improved a great deal.

Carolina was extremely quiet at first so it was difficult to identify her learning needs. Selecting a topic for writing and completing journal entries were particularly troublesome for her. There were several words that Carolina did not pronounce clearly and this interfered with her spelling ability. But Carolina was one of those overnight success stories. It seemed that one day she came to school and she could read. She began using grapho-phonetic and context cues more regularly. Her reading rate slowed, a clear sign of the transition, as she moved from telling the story from the pictures to actually reading the text. Her confidence began to grow with her improved reading ability and a pretty smile began to appear on her face with greater frequency.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This type of intervention in the bilingual classroom merits further study. In the second and third grade group all of the students moved from emergent to strong transitional-advanced beginning level readers. None of the students was retained, though summer school was required as a condition for promotion for three of the four students. Informal follow-ups one and two years later revealed that the students still at the school (two students moved away) were working at grade level and had a positive attitude about school and their own academic development.

The second and third grade group was very easy to work with and moved forward very quickly. It seemed that even though they were delayed in their reading ability they had already acquired a background understanding of the reading process. They quickly learned to apply the reading strategies to gain meaning from text, indicating they probably had some understanding of what the strategies were and how they could be used but needed individualized assistance in making the application work.

Everyone involved with the project agreed that for both groups the

time frame was too short. We met two or three times per week, depending on the scheduling of other activities, but it was clear that meeting four or five times per week for about 12-15 weeks would be much more beneficial for the students. The small groups of four students worked effectively for the second and third grade group, probably because the level of literacy development was fairly similar for each member of the group. Meeting with first grade students in a group of four was very difficult and perhaps working in pairs would have been more effective. There was a much broader range of reading and writing ability with this group than with the older group, although differing levels of maturity and attention span may have influenced the work of this group more than differences in academic level.

One of the challenges of a proposal of this nature is to provide the training and support necessary for educational assistants. I found that I could give the assistants enough background to effectively conduct the sessions but I didn't have the time needed to help them understand the philosophy and theory behind what they were doing. Over the course of several semesters this understanding could be developed with regular in-service sessions, which would vastly improve teacher skills for working with delayed learners. Perhaps a joint district-university grant could help put the training in motion.

Language development was definitely a factor in the reading process. Some of the students involved in this project had transferred from other schools and were reading in Spanish when it was not clear that Spanish was their dominant language. Testing for language dominance is a necessary part of the beginning reading process. Students experience greater difficulty when they must try to read in their less dominant language, which puts them at greater risk of falling behind their peers in academic progress (Freeman & Freeman, 1996; Ovando & Collier, 1998). Proficiency in English seemed to play a role in the way the students in the second and third grade group perceived themselves. For example, Nadia was very anxious to show off her expanding fluency in English and this seemed to parallel her growth in Spanish reading and her level of confidence in herself. It could be that she was merely reflecting the positive effects of newfound school success, or it could be that she perceived that students with English proficiency had greater access to learning in the school setting.

Students who are experiencing difficulty in the classroom need individualized attention. However, outside assistance generally is only effective when it complements the work already being done by the classroom teacher. In this project both of the classroom teachers were very confident, competent teachers. They understood the work of this project and collaborated fully with me. Therefore, they were able to support and

extend the work begun in La Club de Lectura during the rest of the day. They provided opportunities for the students to showcase their work and occasionally allowed them to invite a few classmates to join our sessions. Students' pride in their accomplishments was evident in both groups and they appeared to view themselves as a more integral part of the class as their skills grew. This seemed to happen not only because they received the individual support they needed for literacy development, but also because their efforts and growing competence were celebrated by the classroom teacher, making the students feel like more legitimate members of the learning community. In this way La Club de Lectura did, in fact, function as an oasis for students who were struggling with literacy development.<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Reading Recovery (Clay, 1990) is a program designed for students who have not experienced success in acquiring literacy skills by the end of grade one. Specially trained teachers meet individually with students and work through a prescribed sequence of activities designed to help students master the cueing systems of prior knowledge, syntax, semantics, and grapho-phonics. Strategy-based literacy instruction enables the classroom teacher to assist students in the development and application of strategies related to the cueing systems.

<sup>2</sup>The La Club de Lectura model has since been implemented in several other bilingual classrooms in first through third grade. The feedback gained from this study was taken into account in subsequent work. For example, educational assistants and teachers now participate in a training session at the beginning of the school year and educational assistants receive ongoing in-service sessions throughout the school year on La Club de Lectura and literacy development in general. There is a more formalized assessment procedure used throughout the program and the beginning sessions have been redesigned to help emergent readers focus more fully on print. Most students who enter the project exit within about six months with grade level skills in reading and writing.

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## ***The Multicultural Classroom: Immigrants Reading the Literature of the American Immigrant Experience***

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MOLLY COLLINS

*University of Minnesota-Twin Cities*

This qualitative study focuses on the experiences of immigrant and refugee college freshman enrolled in an immigrant literature course at the University of Minnesota, and discusses how such courses fit into a theory of multicultural education. Students were interviewed and surveyed to explore the ways in which this course was accessible and meaningful for them. The purpose of this study was to assess whether or not students shared a common identity as immigrants; if studying relevant themes facilitated the development of academic skills; and how an immigrant literature course can provide an entry into the culture of college for immigrant students.

For immigrant and refugee students, entering the university is an experience that may be filled not only with hope and opportunity, but also with tension and opposition. Multicultural theory proposes that the academy has been biased in favor of Anglo culture. This has contributed to the low rates of minority and language minority attendance and graduation in post secondary education. Immigrant students face this dual experience in academia of both linguistic and cultural difficulties. These obstacles can prove formidable as students try to find their place in the university, and try to adapt to the culture of the university and its expectations. They may feel like outsiders in the university setting, and may encounter these cultural and language barriers as insurmountable obstacles. Moreover, immigrants or refugees have varied educational backgrounds ranging from college completion in their home countries to an American high school diploma to an interrupted or marginal education. For teachers seeking to provide relevant and engaging materials, the literature of immigrants can be used with positive results. While students may come from many different backgrounds and experiences, they share a common identity as immigrants.

In this study, first year students enrolled in General College course 1364: *Literature of the American Immigrant Experience* discussed their expe-

riences as college freshmen. Surveys and interviews of the students found that they shared an identity as immigrants and identified with themes in the literature. Students thus were motivated to learn. Finally, students felt more knowledgeable about college culture after taking this course.

The Commanding English (CE) program at the University of Minnesota's General College is a program primarily for refugee and immigrant students who have been accepted to the university, but who score between 64 and 79 on the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB) test. The program is designed to teach academic skills with an intense focus on developing English language skills. A total of ten Commanding English students participated in a survey (see Appendix); they were representative of the students in the CE program, with a variety of ages and countries of origin. Ages ranged from recent high school graduates to students in their late twenties. Countries of origin included Vietnam, Bangladesh, the former Soviet Union, Sudan, Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela. Five of these students were selected for follow-up interviews; they also represented this diversity of ages, experiences and countries of origin.

GC 1364: *Literature of the American Immigrant Experience* is required for Commanding English students as part of the curriculum of the program. The stated course goals are to "explore American immigrant experiences through literature by and about American immigrants"; to build fluency, increase vocabulary, and develop critical thinking skills "by participating in discussions and by completing written responses to the readings"; and to develop academic skills in writing and reading (Course Syllabus, 1998). Course assignments call for a high volume of reading both of literature and expository text. Writing assignments in this course are also quite substantial. For example, the students in this study wrote a daily journal, three take home essay tests, and a course research project. Attendance and participation in discussion are also required and considered in the grade. The reading for this course Fall quarter, 1998 covered a range of immigrant experiences from Europe, Asia and Mexico: Students in this study read the novels *Breadgivers* by Anzia Yezierska, *Nisei Daughter* by Monica Sone and *Living Up the Street* by Gary Soto. A course packet, also required reading, encompassed a variety of topics ranging from background historical information designed to provide context to the literature, to poetry, to modern issues in immigration. Themes of immigration featured in the literature and packet were: reasons for immigration, old world-new world, immigration policy, discrimination, language and culture, and intergenerational conflict.

## IDENTITY AND THE UNIVERSITY

When immigrant and refugee students enter an American university, they are expected to fit a discourse model, based on standard academic and rhetorical models, which is implicit and culturally based (Soter, 1992). In fact, the college freshman experience requires a new level of literacy for all students (Johns, 1992). This new level of literacy is itself defined by culture, and academic literacy in the United States has been defined in a very specific way by the dominant culture (Walters, 1992). Furthermore, according to the available research it can be maintained that "literacy involves special community- and context- specific ways of taking from texts, rather than merely knowledge of certain discrete facts" (Walters, 1992, p. 13). African American students in one study, for example, experienced "not so much linguistic [problems] as code related ones" (Soter, 1992, p. 51). This implies that the ways students respond to and interpret texts are rooted in their home cultures, and may vary from culture to culture. Furthermore, students may feel that the university sees their home culture and language as only a deficit to be overcome in order to succeed (Lu, 1992), and that success in academia requires giving up their home culture. Students may resist what they see as an attempt by the university to redefine them as mainstream. Students risk "losing their difference" (Gay, 1993, p. 30) in the process of becoming proficient academics. They may come to feel alienated from their home communities:

Minority and foreign students face the possibility of being confronted with a disciplinary language and culture so distant from their own that to join such a culture would mean alienating themselves from other highly valued personal and occupational communities at home. (Casanave, 1992, p. 174)

Universities often maintain an ideology of acculturation which blames students' resistance to and fear of acculturation for their lack of educational success (Lu, 1992).

Research reveals that students from outside the dominant culture have a very tenuous relationship to the university and may experience alienation from the university as they do not see their experiences or cultures represented in its curriculum. Additionally, the type of literacies that are required and expected at the university are culturally based, and not explicitly explained. The role of the instructor then becomes highly significant in aiding the student in academic success. Mainstream American culture as represented by the university may leave immigrant and refugee students without schemata to utilize for their success. By studying the literature of other immigrants, students who may not share a home



culture can bring their identities as immigrants to the course. Students can use relevant personal experiences in which they are the experts in course discussions and reading, and their common identity is validated.

Students in this study identified strongly as immigrants. They saw themselves as part of a larger group of people who had made their way from another country to make their home in the United States. Despite their diverse circumstances, ages, and countries of origin they felt a connection with others in similar circumstances. And furthermore, they felt that being an immigrant carried positive connotations. Alex (names have been changed), a Venezuelan student stated, "We identify as immigrant. We don't see you black or white... when it comes to immigration, the INS, or society in the United States, you are an immigrant no matter where you are from."

Survey results showed an overall positive correlation to questions about student understanding of the experiences and contributions of immigrants past and present. Students indicated that they had a better understanding of the category *immigrant* from GC 1364, and that students felt they had learned meaningful information about immigrants past and present. Students saw immigrants as contributing in large ways to American society: "American society doesn't realize that this country was built by immigrants," Alex complained. John, an older student from the Sudan, stated,

When people really live in the U.S., they should learn these things [immigration history], because it [*sic*] is the ABC of the culture of the U.S. So to learn this course, it means that they are shaping themselves and America's shaping them too to be part of the United States.

Overwhelmingly, students reported that they could see themselves or their experiences in the themes of the literature. Students identified such themes as *discrimination*, *language*, and *culture* (student surveys). Jessica, a 21 year old Haitian woman student said,

It's like a lot of the experiences, a lot of the things they talk about, is [*sic*] familiar experience. For example the book we had with Sara, *Bread Givers*, it's like things you experienced with your parents and growing up in America.

Another student, David, a student from Bangladesh, said, "We can relate to the books... [they are] I feel [in] someways similar to me." This identity as immigrant makes the literature of the course relevant to students who are themselves immigrants.

## GAINING ENTRANCE TO THE ACADEMY

In addition to appealing to this shared and positive identity, students also perceived the course as providing a part of their acquisition of skills needed by the university. Immigrant and refugee students in the Commanding English Program at the University of Minnesota face the challenge of meeting the harder tasks of college, much as any other college freshman, but often have the extra challenges of being poorly prepared for higher education, and the need to improve their English before they can achieve their educational goals. GC 1364, as a college literature course, provides ample opportunity for students to do a large amount of both reading and writing. Students learn to complete the analytical and discourse requirements of writing about literature, while completing a heavy reading load of 50-75 pages of reading per class. Skills taught in this course specifically include reading for main points and literary themes, journal writing, literary analysis, and research on themes of the class.

Students who participated in this study felt that not only did they learn new academic skills, but also that their motivation to learn and succeed was positively impacted by the relevance of the curriculum to their experiences. They reported that the literature in turn reinforced their commitment to their own success. Survey responses designed to elicit information regarding students' feelings about their academic development indicated that students felt that their reading and writing skills increased as a result of this course. Students felt that GC 1364 was a good introduction to college courses, and the level of work required in college. As David said, "It was a lot of reading, so it helps me to improve my reading skills." Alex, a college graduate in his own country, felt that for other students, this course represented the transition from high school to college. He said, "In college you have to read a lot, and you have to get used to it. It gives you kind of a sense of what's going to be the next four years[sic]." Jessica indicated that for her too, this was a transition, that in GC 1364 she learned how to write an essay for the first time. Other students indicated that they learned specific writing tasks, such as writing introductions, identifying themes, and writing summaries, essays and journals.

Students felt that their motivation to complete course tasks was positively impacted by the relevance of the literature. Students themselves connected the relevance of these themes to their own motivation to succeed and engage themselves in the course work. Students in this study reported that their interest in course materials made them want to complete assignments. As Jessica said, when reading *Bread Givers*, "There were times it wasn't due, I didn't have to read a page of it, but I read it because it was interesting. I feel like I have to read more just to know

what was going to happen next." David agreed that GC 1364 affected his motivation to read and write; as he said, "Sometimes when I wrote my paper, my assignment, I think about I put myself on it [*sic*], and it will help me to write more and more, plus sometimes I use my own evidence and own example, so sometimes papers getting more stronger [*sic*] with evidence." Jaime, a 20 year old Honduran student felt that the themes of the course made it interesting to learn and participate, and that the course wasn't "just like a class you are supposed to take...or you just want to take. It is...like you can feel it inside, you can say, OK, now I know what's going on...I think that was interesting and you know I like it."

Furthermore, students felt that by reading about a topic with relevance to their own experiences, their ability to learn was facilitated. David clearly viewed his experiences as an immigrant as beneficial in taking this class, stating that this experience would put him at an advantage over a non-immigrant student enrolled in the same course: "If you ask some students who didn't go to any other country, who are not immigrants, they don't know what it is like immigrant [*sic*]...and it's going to be hard for them...for the immigrant person it's I think easy." For John, the course was very positive in facilitating his learning "because the students were immigrants, and could understand about the college life more perfectly."

Significantly, students indicated that learning about the experiences of other immigrants helped them to remain committed to their own education and success in America. Themes and experiences that students read about gave students examples of immigrant success and challenges that the students could use to meet their own struggles in college. John reported that he used the experiences of the immigrants he learned about in GC 1364 in his daily and college life: "You can use the previous immigrants' experience to solve problems." He stated that for immigrant students facing difficulties, learning the history of immigrants will encourage their success, because "they will know before them, there were some people who were here, some immigrants, who come here and have the same problems, so why not them? Why not them to overcome [*sic*] those problems too?"

Students in this study indicated that through reading about other immigrants' struggles and concerns, they were able to develop a stronger commitment to their own success, and develop strategies for success based on the experiences of other immigrants before them. As Jaime put it, "When I was taking that class, I just focused on how the immigrants...just worked hard in order to succeed and I learned from there that I can do something for myself, and this is an opportunity for everybody." The experiences in the literature itself reinforced students' own motivation to achieve success, and to meet challenges.

## THE CULTURE OF ACADEMIA

Some of these challenges have to do with understanding and maneuvering in the new culture of college—the not-so-explicit rules and standards of academia. In addition to developing students' academic skills, instructors in the academy concerned with the success of their immigrant and refugee students often face both the task of easing the alienation experienced by their students, and of making the non-explicit language and discourse tasks clear and accessible to their students. For instructors who are seeking to make their courses inclusive, work needs to be done that does more than “acknowledge (tolerate) difference and more than celebrate difference as ‘interesting material’” (Gay, 1993, p. 34). Instructors need to find ways to help their students become insiders in the culture of academia through not only curriculum changes, but instructional changes as well.

Instructors need to make the rules and expectations clear and accessible to all students (Bartholomae, 1993; Delpit, 1988; Rose, 1985; Soter, 1992). Instructors who have creating a multicultural university as their goal have a complicated role: not simply teaching the curriculum, but also the implicit academic discourse and rhetorical expectations to their students. In order for the student to succeed, “the student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do” (Bartholomae, 1993, p. 13). Therefore, the role of the instructor is to help students become insiders in the academy. Educational programs that ignore the culture of power which exists in classrooms and that do not make the rules of that culture of power explicit do a disservice to minority students because “to act as if the culture of power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same” (Delpit, 1988, p. 285). Academic instructors have themselves achieved a high level of academic success that shapes their expectations as academic readers. When students do not meet these expectations, regardless of their linguistic proficiency, they are likely to fail.

While all beginning college students need to take on new academic tasks and skills to meet the demands of college, for the immigrant or refugee student, the culture of academia may be unfamiliar and strange. A student may feel that the expectations not clearly stated in the syllabus pose the most difficult challenges. Expectations about how to succeed, how to communicate with professors and instructors, or even how grades will be determined may be new concepts to the immigrant student. Students in this study indicated that they learned important information in GC 1364 about exactly these less explicit expectations of the college culture.

Most students in this study felt that the course GC 1364 was a good introduction to college life. More than simply improving skills, this course

gave students an introduction to the academic expectations of college. Students reported that the following features of college culture were new to them: working hard, communicating with instructors, completing work for deadlines, setting and achieving goals, and realizing that grades are based on performance and are not arbitrary. As John stated,

We went to class, we worked hard, we got grades and no one discriminated you [*sic*] because it depends on what you did. And with that competition, I feel ok, I feel like, you get what you did [*sic*]. And it's good. I don't put myself down. Because I work hard, I got a commendation from the instructors or from other friends. So equality is there.

Learning about relevant themes can facilitate the transition from previous educational experiences to the culture of college by allowing students to draw on their experiences as they enter the world of American academia.

## CONCLUSION

The pedagogical implications of this study are most significant in the area of developing an inclusive and relevant curriculum for college level immigrant students. This study found that a course on immigration literature fits strongly within the framework of multicultural education. As Kutz, Groden and Zamel write, multicultural curriculum gives "students who are frequently marginalized an opportunity to see their own cultural perspectives included in course material " (1993, p. 85). With immigrants and refugees, teachers may struggle to find relevant themes and curriculum for students from a wide variety of backgrounds. The curriculum of GC 1364 gives immigrant students this opportunity. Students responded positively to the themes in this literature, seeing their experiences reflected and sharing a common identity that transcended cultural background.

In addition to motivating students, an immigration literature course may provide instructors with an opportunity to open doors to academic success for their students by using this relevant material to engage the student in academic tasks and requirements. Students reported that they could see themselves in the literature, and that they could draw on their own experiences to complete academic tasks such as interpretation, analysis, and formal written course requirements. Students were able to use their own expertise to enhance discussion and course assignments. This study shows that immigrant students' transition to the college environment is facilitated when they see themselves in the curriculum of the university. Through the course design, students acquired important skills, both academic and cultural, needed to succeed in a college environment,

which was in turn reinforced by the experiences read about in the literature and course packet.

There is a need for relevant and engaging curriculum for immigrant students in the college curriculum. Using literature of the American immigrant experience, this need is addressed by bringing relevant and meaningful materials into the classroom. Additionally, it is hoped that this study will lead to a better understanding of how immigrant students construct their identity, and how, within the framework of multicultural education, a course studying the experiences of immigrants is a relevant and meaningful introduction to college level work and college culture for students who are themselves immigrants.

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## APPENDIX

### 1364 Literature Survey

Strongly Agree		Don't know		Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

1. From taking GC 1364, I understand more about the issues facing immigrants to the United States in the past.
2. I don't understand about the issues facing immigrants today any better because of GC 1364.
3. Reading about the experiences of other immigrants is a good introduction to college courses for students who are immigrants.
4. From taking GC 1364, I understand more about the issues facing immigrants now.
5. After taking GC 1364, I feel that I am not more prepared for college reading courses.
6. I didn't learn anything new about past immigrants to the United States in GC 1364.
7. Reading literature on another topic would be a better introduction to college reading.
8. I am better prepared for college-level reading as a result of the reading and writing I did for GC 1364.

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## ***A Look at ESL Instruction for Literacy-Level Adults<sup>1</sup>***

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PATSY VINOGRADOV

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Refugees and immigrants with little or no literacy in their first languages continue to enter adult ESL classrooms. Particular attention from adult ESL educators is required to meet the needs of these literacy-level students. After exploring various factors that affect this population, the author presents six goals for an ESL literacy course, which are then detailed in a curriculum matrix. Moving from course design to daily classroom activities, the author suggests a series of principles for working with literacy-level adults as well as a sample lesson.

Refugees and immigrants from across the globe with limited native language literacy continue to enter the United States and ESL classrooms. This population of students presents a particular challenge for ESL providers. "Not only must [refugees] possess certain minimal literacy skills to meet the demands of daily life in this country, but they must learn a new language at the same time" (Haverson & Haynes, 1982, p. 6).

These students are often sent into beginning ESL classes where the basic ability to read and write is assumed. However, it has become clear that "a special class is necessary because the non-literate student has problems that require special attention" (Ranard & Haverson, 1981, p. 7). ESL professionals must first understand who these students are and what factors affect their learning.

The following article explores a range of issues related to successful instruction of literacy-level ESL adults. Following a brief description of the types of programs available and factors that affect these students, unique characteristics of these learners and suggested curricula are detailed. Surprisingly little has been written about how best to meet the needs of literacy-level adults. This paper attempts to offer some tentative answers.

### **WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?**

Three major categories of adult ESL students need literacy instruction: pre-literate, non-literate, and semi-literate learners.<sup>2</sup> While each



group is distinct, together they form what I will refer to as *literacy-level ESL students*. The definitions that follow are adapted from Haverson and Haynes (1982) and Shank (1986). The definitions refer to the students' literacy and education in their *native* languages.

### **Pre-Literate students**

These learners have had no contact with print in their native languages. Included in this category are students from an oral tradition in which there is no written language or whose language has only recently developed a written form. In the Twin Cities, for example, many of the Hmong speakers are pre-literate learners. It should be noted that pre-literate students may be so only temporarily. Pre-literate learners may encounter print in their native languages later in life or after immigration or forced migration to the United States.

### **Non-Literate students**

These students have no reading or writing skills but come from a language group that does have a written form. Their literacy level stems from their lack of education rather than a lack of print environment. Some learners in this category have lived in rural areas where written language could not be easily accessed and was not needed for daily life. Other learners' lives have been disrupted by war, and public education in their society has been nonexistent for perhaps a generation of learners or more. In the Twin Cities area, many Somali, Ethiopian, Mexican, and Vietnamese speakers may be considered non-literate.

### **Semi-Literate students**

Learners in this category have had very little formal education in their native language, probably not more than 3-4 years. They have had some exposure to print in their native languages and may be able to recognize some common words by sight. Haverson and Haynes (1982) speculate that this category of literacy-level students is the largest, but this may not be true for the Twin Cities. As Minnesota's immigrant population changes to include large groups from Somalia and Laos, the number of pre-literate and non-literate students rises. In the Twin Cities, semi-literate students come from all over the globe, but many are from East Africa, South America, Mexico, and Southeast Asia.

## **TYPES OF PROGRAMS**

Naturally, ESL programs differ greatly, but commonalities in goals persist. Literacy-level ESL students are often new arrivals to the United

States. Their immediate needs are for basic survival in their new environment, and a major part of this goal is employment. Another aim of literacy-level ESL programs is to build a foundation in literacy skills that will allow the learner to continue acquiring English in mainstream ESL classes. Such a foundation of skills includes basic English literacy.

To say that a certain program teaches only survival English, English for work, or basic literacy skills is to greatly simplify the work of adult ESL education. What actually occurs in a classroom is a mix of the goals, assumptions, and preferences of the program, the textbook, and the teacher. What follows is by no means a description of specific programs but rather an explanation of the three focuses (survival, work, literacy) that programs tend to take. I must emphasize that I have yet to find a program that deals with only one of these purposes. Each program I have had contact with includes a mix, but even so, one overall focus is always apparent.

## **Survival English**

Many literacy-level students are new refugees to the United States. Therefore, most programs for such students are focused on *survival skills*. Survival programs are intended to ease the difficulties of resettlement by teaching immigrants the skills they need to function in their new culture right away. Survival skills include basic language and skills needed in daily living. Topics covered in these classes include introducing yourself, buying food, buying clothes, banking, filling out forms, calling 911, seeing a doctor, and so on. The emphasis is on oral language that students need immediately to function independently in their new environment. Written language in Survival English programs is limited.

## **English for Work**

Within the Survival English context there is another emphasis in literacy-level ESL programs: job readiness and job retention. Oral language in such programs focuses on job interviews, following instructions, asking questions at work, calling in sick, and other work-related language functions. Written language is limited to print the student is likely to encounter: forms, safety instructions, and written job-related directions. English for Work programs also may introduce other essential skills such as basic mathematics and chart reading, as well as cultural topics such as appropriate dress and behavior at an American workplace.

After completing Survival English or English for Work courses, students may, in fact, be able to function in daily life. They can go to the store, get a job, call 911, and so on. I do not question the value of these

skills, but to achieve the self-sufficiency these programs so highly regard, students must also be prepared for further study of English. Programs like those listed above must also introduce skills that will prepare the student to continue studying English. Without further study, students do not have the tools to move up from entry-level jobs; they are left with only the English they need to get by, not what they need to progress and to become full participants in their communities. These needs can be addressed by what should be the final and long-term goal of literacy-level ESL instruction: English literacy.

## ESL Literacy

If educators and social workers expect refugee students to truly resettle in the United States, they must help them achieve more than survival English. While Survival English and English for Work may be the first goals of an ESL program, these should not be the last. "Developing literacy for learning--for example, reading to review text and aid memory or writing to take notes on information presented or read--is essential for less literate adult immigrant learners if they are to succeed in mainstream programs" (Savage & Mrowicki, in Savage, 1993, p. 26). The demand for ESL is great, and literacy-level students should be prepared to continue their study of English, either in ESL classrooms or on their own. Without this vital further study, they may not have the literacy tools to move beyond low-paying jobs and submissive roles in their new country.

Given the heavily oral goals of Survival English and English for Work, students are left with more developed listening and speaking skills and less developed reading and writing skills. Print is introduced in a very limited manner, with a focus on memorizing those words the student is likely to encounter. However, a program that moves beyond this and provides students with basic English literacy will enable learners to work in different and probably better paying settings. Students will be able to understand print they have not encountered in the classroom, and most importantly, they can continue learning English beyond the functional and memorization stage. As JoAnn Crandall (1993) suggests, "It is clear that there are large numbers of individuals with little or no prior education in their home countries who desire both English language and literacy skills to permit them access to enhanced educational, social, political, and employment opportunities" (p. 2). ESL literacy is also important for parenting: "Another factor...is the recognition of the role of parental literacy in children's school achievement, especially important in multilingual families where children have the added need of acquiring a second language" (Weinstein-Shr, in Crandall & Peyton, 1993, p. 3). Clearly the argument for including basic English literacy in ESL programs is

strong. With the added skill of literacy, adults who are otherwise just surviving can achieve so much more.

## SUCCESS-RELATED FACTORS

Literacy-level adults are a unique group. They differ from other ESL students in many ways. Not only are they adult learners; they may be first-time learners in a formal school setting. They are parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Some have never lived in an urban environment. Many of these learners have fought in wars, have been forced from their homes, lived in refugee camps, been imprisoned, and suffered through hunger and trauma. Many have lost family members and friends, or have left them behind in uncertain conditions. They are all in a new place that is unlike their home country, raising their children in a culture that is foreign and perhaps threatening to their way of looking at the world. Some work in very questionable conditions, with little or no way of defending their rights as workers and as residents of the U.S.

The ESL learner does not leave her life behind when she enters our classroom. The war comes with her, as do her children's needs, her lost siblings, her poor health, and her memories of a time when the world made more sense. To begin thinking about how to successfully instruct literacy-level adults, we must begin with the entire person--with all the factors that come with each student. The field of second language acquisition is just beginning to look at the impact of these complicating factors on language learning: native language literacy, age, trauma, family demands, cultural and individual beliefs, and sociopolitical concerns.

Of all the adult ESL programs I have encountered, the vast majority claim survival ESL as a basic goal. Many consider survival English as their only aim. Many ESL professionals have realized that, as argued above, this goal, while certainly important, is limiting. "Survival skills have been defined as those necessary for 'minimum functioning in the specific community in which the student is settled'" (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 476). Few will argue it is not a worthy goal to help students survive. However, perhaps by teaching and expecting *only* survival skills, we are in fact putting immigrants and refugees in a sociopolitical box which they then cannot get out of. If we do not give them the tools to compete for better paying jobs, argue for their rights, and participate fully in their communities, we are helping to keep them in submissive roles in society.

Auerbach and Burgess (1985) observe, "[Adult ESL] texts often prepare students for subservient social roles and reinforce hierarchical relations within the classroom by precluding the creation of meaning and the

development of critical thinking skills" (p. 475). Every curriculum "reflects a particular view of the social order, whether implicitly or explicitly. This 'hidden curriculum' generates social meanings, restraints, and cultural values which shape students' roles outside of the classroom" (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 476).

Freire presents a distinction between *adaptation* to the immigrant's new society or *integration* into it:

Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality. To the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from the external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he is adapted. (as cited in Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 488)

By designing our curricula and lessons to facilitate our students' acquisition of the skills and language needed to integrate rather than to adapt, we widen their options in their new country. No longer are they limited or held back in submissive roles and low-paying jobs; they are able to get out of the survival English box.

How can we best help students integrate into their new communities? In order for a person to truly become part of her community and defend her rights in our society, literacy is needed. The Curriculum section of this paper looks at course design as well as principles and techniques that can help guide adult ESL educators who work with literacy-level learners.

## CURRICULUM

### Goals of a Literacy-Level Course

Through a series of class observations and interviews with teachers of low-literacy adults, a variety of goals can be named for literacy-level students. Given this input and that of programs around the country that shared their curricula with me, the following goals are those that I believe are most fitting for an ideal literacy-level ESL course.

**1. The learner will become comfortable with a school and language learning setting.** This means that the students should be able to participate in class activities, seek assistance, and use strategies for language learning.

*Subgoals:*

- Hold a pencil.
- Write left to right.

- Raise one's hand to ask a question.
- Join in pair and group work.
- Come to class on time and prepared.
- Use learning strategies such as reading aloud, copying and grouping words.

**2. The learner will obtain basic literacy skills.** Literacy skills include learning sound-symbol relationships in order to sound out words when reading and writing, as well as attaching meaning to printed language. Most importantly, literacy includes making the connection between oral and written language. Learners should be able to read and write simple language in order to deal with the print they encounter, to express their ideas and feelings, and to record and review information presented in class.

*Subgoals:*

- Pronounce the names of letters (*My name is spelled P-A-T-S-Y*).
- Associate letters with their corresponding sounds (*The letter B makes the sound "buh"...*).
- Write the letters of the alphabet.
- Recognize same and different letters and both upper and lower cases.
- Recognize same and different words, as well as word boundaries.
- Sound out simple words encountered in daily life and guess at their meanings.
- Use creative spelling to write, therefore connecting oral and written language.
- Increasingly be able to read and understand simple language without visual prompts.
- Learn basic English letter combinations and spelling rules.

**3. The learner will obtain basic numeracy skills.** Numeracy includes counting and dealing with money and prices, telephone numbers, and so on, as well as basic mathematics.

*Subgoals:*

- Recognize, write, and say the names of numbers in sequence.
- Recognize, write, and say number sets such as telephone numbers, social security numbers, prices, and ages.
- Deal with money and prices.
- Sort and put number sets in order.
- Use and understand basic charts and graphs.
- Do basic mathematical computations.

**4. The learner will be able to give personal information, both in writing**

**and orally.** This is the first step to achieving self-sufficiency in the United States, a goal of most, if not all, adult ESL programs.

*Subgoals:*

- Introduce oneself orally to someone else.
- Say name, address, telephone number, birth date, and so on clearly.
- Fill out various personal information forms.
- Interrupt and correct someone who writes or says his or her personal information incorrectly.

**5. The learner will be able to converse on a simple level.** Conversation involves both speaking and listening. Conversation topics may include talking about one's family, health, job, and so on, while other programs may allow for more student input, therefore finding topics that are of particular interest to the learners.

*Subgoals:*

- Name and comprehend simple nouns and verbs (*family, job, go, want*).
- Exchange information about family, health, feelings, and so on.
- Acquire conversational ability to accomplish daily tasks at the grocery store, bank, doctor's office, and so on.
- Exchange reactions to field trips, pictures, and school activities.
- Increase one's ability to talk about topics with less contextual support and topics which are unfamiliar to the listener.

**6. The learner will become more familiar with the United States and its culture, as well as services available to its residents.** As a society's culture and language are forever intertwined, students of ESL are also students of American culture. This is a delicate issue. The ESL instructor must be respectful and interested in the students' cultures, while presenting useful information and points of view from the U.S. Teachers should approach cultural discussions by way of comparing and thereby including student cultures whenever possible. This goal can also be seen as civics education, offering the student a way to become familiar with her rights and responsibilities as a resident of the United States.

*Subgoals:*

- Gain competence talking about one's home culture, as well as similarities and differences between it and that of the U.S.
- Learn cultural facts about local laws and customs.
- Learn where and how to find more information on cultural top-

- ics of interest.
- Discuss important or challenging aspects of living in the United States.
- Depending on the program, some courses may choose to include parenting, worker’s rights, and other cultural topics as students’ interests and needs dictate.

## Sequence

Ideally, lessons reflecting the six goals above should be presented together, in an integrated fashion. However, this is not easy to do every day! Finding a balance among literacy, numeracy, cultural, and conversational goals is important, and it can also be difficult. When looking at the above subgoals, it is clear that some must come before others. For example, a student must be able to associate letters with their corresponding sounds before she can attempt creative spelling or learn basic spelling rules. In an effort to organize a curriculum for ESL literacy-level instruction, Table 1 sorts the many subgoals into five phases. The rationale behind the curriculum chart was to give a course some guidelines, a path to follow, while allowing for maximum flexibility and student input.

Each phase, under ideal conditions, represents a unit of instruction that could be completed in approximately 60 hours of instruction. That being said, as all teachers know, different students learn at very different paces. What “clicks” for one student may take weeks or months for another to grasp. Adult education programs are, by nature, messy. Students begin at very different places and have less than ideal attendance. Clearly, students bring much more to class than perfect attention and motivation for English and literacy. There are distractions, obstacles, and a thousand other variables that affect this all-too-neat curriculum. However, it is a place to start. It is a reference for teachers, administrators, and students. It allows a teacher to work with a student and realize, “This learner is at Phase 5 in conversation, but at Phase 1 in literacy skills. OK, here are the gaps we need to work on.”

Goal 6 (*The learner will become more familiar with the United States and its culture, as well as services available to its residents*) is not included in the curriculum chart. Cultural contexts cannot be pre-set with any certainty; what is vital to learn in class cannot necessarily be predicted before the course begins. I have left this cultural goal off the chart in order for teachers to select these topics together with their students. Cultural goals can be altered to fit any of the phases. Furthermore, in order to be effective, they must arise out of the students’ needs and interests. More discussion and ideas about this sixth goal follow.

**TABLE 1**



ESL Literacy Curriculum sequence	Goal 1 <i>Learner will become comfortable with a school and language learning setting.</i>	Goal 2 <i>Learner will obtain basic literacy skills.</i>	Goal 3 <i>Learner will obtain basic numeracy skills.</i>	Goal 4 <i>Learner will be able to give personal information, both in writing and orally.</i>	Goal 5 <i>Learner will be able to converse on a simple level.</i>
Phase 1 Subgoals:	-Hold a pencil -Come to class on time -Write left to right	-Pronounce names of letters -Associate letters with their corresponding sounds -Write the letters of the alphabet	-Recognize, say, and write numbers in sequence	-Introduce oneself to someone else orally	-Name and comprehend simple nouns and verbs ( <i>family, job, go, want...</i> ) -Use communication strategies like <i>I don't understand</i> and <i>Please say that again</i>
Phase 2 Subgoals:	-Review Phase 1 subgoals as needed -Come to class prepared -Raise hand to ask questions	-Review Phase 1 -Recognize same and different letters -Recognize upper and lower cases	-Review Phase 1 -Recognize, say, and write number sets like telephone numbers, social security numbers, prices, and so on	-Review Phase 1 -Say name, address, telephone number, birth date clearly -Fill out simple information form	-Continue Phase 1 -Use conversational ability to accomplish daily tasks at the grocery store, bank, and so on -Begin exchanging reactions to field trips, pictures, and school activities -Use more communication strategies, like <i>What does ___ mean?</i>
Phase 3 Subgoals:	-Review Phases 1-2 as needed -Join in pair and group work	-Review Phases 1-2 -Recognize same and different words -Recognize word boundaries	-Continue Phase 2	-Continue Phase 2	-Continue Phases 1-2 -Use more complex communication strategies, (listening for key words, using clarification questions)
Phase 4 Subgoals:	-Continue Phase 3	-Review Phases 1-3 -Sound out simple words encountered in daily life and guess at their meaning -Use creative spelling to write	-Review Phases 1-3 -Sort and put number sets in order -Do basic mathematical computations	-Review Phases 1-3 -Fill out increasingly complicated information forms	-Review 1-3 -Continue to converse about more difficult topics while reviewing past material -Continue to build repertoire of communication strategies
Phase 5 Subgoals:	-Review Phases 1-4 -Use learning strategies	-Review Phases 1-4 -Increasingly be able to read and understand simple language without visual prompts -Learn basic English letter combinations and spelling rules	-Review Phases 1-4 -Deal with money and prices -Use and understand basic charts and graphs	-Review Phases 1-4 -Interrupt and correct someone who writes/says personal information incorrectly	-Increase one's ability to talk about topics with less contextual support and topics which are unfamiliar to the listener

## Presentation

Now that a framework curriculum has been established, how can we as teachers take this into our classrooms? What appears simple and clear on paper turns into something quite different as we plan our lessons.

The easiest way to begin is with the goal that is purposely not on the chart: familiarity with U.S. culture and services. By choosing a topic, or a *cultural context* as I call them here, the rest of the goals manage to fall into place.

Cultural contexts will work best if they are of immediate need and interest to the students. Teachers should collaborate with their learners to find out what is important to them when choosing upcoming topics. Planning out the entire semester in advance does not allow for student input. Whatever cultural context arises, it can be adapted to the phases the students are currently working within.

The following list includes some of the many cultural contexts the literacy-level ESL students may wish to pursue. Some are likely to be seen in Survival English programs, others in work readiness programs, while others are more general topics for programs that plan thematically:

Calendars and time	Library and School
Clothing	Money and banks
Describing people	Music and Art
Emergencies and Safety	Occupations
Family	Outdoor recreation
Feelings	Parenting
Food	Post office and Mail
Greetings	Signs and Directions
Health	Time Cards at Work
Holidays	Transportation
Housing	Weather
Job Interviews	Winter activities

For example, a number of students are looking for work and have expressed an interest in working nearby. One of the students brings in a flyer they received in the mail from a local produce company (a business that prepares produce for restaurants and stores) that says the company is now hiring. The instructor chooses to make this the cultural context for the next unit. Early in the first week, they visit the company for a tour. The students are mostly in Phase 4 of the curriculum chart.

Under each of the six goals, the following subgoals can be set for this particular cultural context:

***Goal 1: (Become Comfortable with School and Language Learning Setting)***

- Work with a partner to create sentences or phrases about the trip to the produce company.
- Work in a large group with the instructor to talk and write about the trip and discuss pros and cons of working for this company.

***Goal 2: (Obtain Basic Literacy Skills)***

- With printed material from the company, work on sounding out and guessing meanings of words.
- Use creative spelling to write about the experience at the produce company.

***Goal 3: (Obtain Basic Numeracy Skills)***

- Practice sorting labels of products from the company.
- Use the company's inventory forms to practice counting and calculating types of products.

***Goal 4: (Be Able to Give Personal Information)***

- Learn how to fill out this potential employer's application materials.
- Role-play human resource staff member and potential employer; practice giving and correcting personal information.

***Goal 5: (Be Able to Converse on a Simple Level)***

- Learn vocabulary related to this workplace.
- Practice asking supervisor for assistance, instructions.
- Role-play co-worker conversations.
- Role-play calling in sick, asking for time off, schedule change, etc.

***Goal 6: (Become More Familiar with U. S . Culture and Services)***

- Learn about this potential workplace, the pros and cons of working there.
- Find out how to apply for this and similar jobs and what qualifications or skills are necessary.

In summary, the curriculum chart is to be used as a general guide, a way of organizing one's thoughts for a unit of instruction. It is not a format for planning a day's lesson, but rather a way of structuring a particular topic. It is very much a guiding tool that requires the instructor and students to complete the specific goals and tasks. Choosing topics and subgoals that are of immediate need and interest to the students al-

lows their voices to be part of the decision-making. This matrix can simply guide the planning of a unit and help teachers build upon their students' current abilities.

## BEST PRACTICES

Our activities in the classroom grow directly from the principles that we keep as teachers of literacy-level adults. From interviews with teachers, class observations, and my own experience, I gathered a set of 12 principles regarding teaching literacy-level ESL students. They are as follows:

1. Hands-on activities facilitate understanding and learning.
2. Visual aids help students learn.
3. Connecting the classroom to real life is important.
4. Physical movement helps students adapt to the school setting and encourages participation.
5. Connecting oral language to written language is crucial.
6. Incorporating technology in instruction is beneficial for language learning and future employment.
7. Frequent breaks are important.
8. Using cultural comparison as a basis for speaking and writing empowers students and allows for rich language use.
9. Activities that encourage cooperative learning are beneficial.
10. Meaningless copying from the board or textbook is of minimal value.
11. It's best to give students the time they need to complete tasks in class, and not assign nightly homework.
12. Talking about how to learn a language (language strategies) helps students acquire English more efficiently.

To better understand how these principles can be applied, a sample lesson follows, which is described as it was implemented. After each section of the lesson, the principles that were put into practice are listed.

## SAMPLE LESSON

### Language Experience Approach: Produce Company

9:30-10:30      Field Trip

During this hour, all students in the program carpool to a nearby produce company for a tour with a manager. The tour takes place in English, with more advanced students helping the lower levels with difficult vocabulary. Literacy-level students are engaged and listen care-

fully, but appear to comprehend very little of the manager's explanations. However, the tour is very visual, and it is not difficult to understand what the workers and company do.

During the field trip, the literacy-level teacher takes Polaroids of various important parts of the company. The literacy-level students offer suggestions and point at places she should photograph. She takes eight shots altogether.

*Principles put into practice:*

- Hands-on activities facilitate understanding and learning.
- Connecting the classroom to real life is important.
- Physical movement helps students adapt to the school setting and encourages participation.
- Activities that encourage cooperative learning are beneficial.

#### **10:30-10:45      Break**

Students carpool back to the school and meet in the classroom, all levels together.

*Principles put into practice:*

- Frequent breaks are important.

#### **10:45-11:00      Response to the Produce Company**

A teacher leads a discussion about the pros and cons of working at this particular company. A list is generated on the board with student and teacher input. The teachers are careful to list positive things about the job. (Since this program is job-readiness oriented, the lessons often focus on possible employers and reasons to accept or not accept certain positions.)

Students ask questions, including some about the medical insurance and company pay policy. Although the literacy-level students are not actively participating, they do appear to be listening intently, and they ask each other questions in the L1.

Next the teacher asks students what jobs they know and why these jobs could be good or bad. Some native language is used among the students. Literacy-level students appear to tune out of the discussion at this point.

After a couple of minutes, the literacy-level teacher chooses to pull her students out of the large group and continue in their own classroom.

*Principles put into practice:*

- Connecting oral language to written language is crucial.

### **11:00-11:45      Students Generate a Text about the Field Trip**

"What was the first thing we saw at the company?" the teacher asks. A short conversation follows, with mostly one-word contributions from the students. The teacher validates every response. Next the students are put in pairs and given one of the Polaroids. They are asked first to talk to each other about their picture, to think about some words that go along with it.

The teacher circulates and helps students remember what machines are called and compliments their ideas. Next, the pairs are asked to write down a sentence that describes their picture. Students work intently to create sentences, talking to each other in both English and the L1. The teacher circulates and hints, but does not write or spell for the students. They may consult past notes as needed.

When each pair has something to say, they are asked to turn to a nearby pair and share their pictures and sentences. The pairs check each other's work and offer suggestions. Now each pair sets their picture and sentence on the table, and students mill around, looking at each one and deciding what order the sentences should go in. They stand up and look at and read each one, and talk to each other about which goes where. After a few minutes, they decide on an order for the sentences and pictures. The pairs write their sentences on the board in their order. The teachers write them down quickly as well:

1. Trucks bring food to the company.
2. People wash the food.
3. Sometimes machines wash the food.
4. People check the food.
5. People chop the vegetables.
6. People put food in bags.
7. People weigh the food/how many pounds.
8. The company sells the food.

First the teacher reads the sentences aloud and explains any questions about meaning. Students repeat after her. Then students are asked to read the sentences in unison. Finally students are asked individually to read their sentences aloud.

#### *Principles put into practice:*

- Visual aids help students learn.
- Connecting the classroom to real life is important.
- Connecting oral language to written language is crucial.
- Activities that encourage cooperative learning are beneficial.
- Physical movement helps students adapt to the school setting and encourages participation.

### **11:45-12:00 Break, or Quiet Time to Read**

Students are given time for a break. Some students leave the room for a break, while others look intently at the board and at their notebooks. Some students read aloud to themselves or each other. Some students take this time to copy the sentences into their notebooks. Some help each other understand by using the native language.

*Principles put into practice:*

- Frequent breaks are important.

### **12:00-12:15 Sentence Scramble**

The teacher returns, and they read through the sentences one more time. For a couple of minutes she points to individual words and asks students to read them. When they struggle, the teacher helps them sound it out by looking at each letter. Then the teacher erases the board and asks students to close their notebooks. She hands each student a half sheet of paper with the sentences typed on it, in mixed up order. She hands out scissors and students cut the sentences into strips.

Next students must read and put the sentences in the correct order (as they had been on the board). As they finish, the teacher checks them and points out errors. While others are finishing, students are asked to read their sentences to a neighbor.

*Principles put into practice:*

- Hands-on activities facilitate understanding and learning.
- Connecting oral language to written language is crucial.
- Activities that encourage cooperative learning are beneficial.

### **12:15-12:30 Letter Practice**

Students put the sentences away and open to a clean piece of paper. As the teacher reads out a word from the text they have written, students are asked to write down the first letter. They do a couple together to check for understanding, and then they continue on their own. After four words (*company, people, trucks, food*), they check their answers together. Then they do another 10 words (*bring, machines, weigh, bags, put, wash, bring, machines, pound, to, sometimes*).

Now the teacher asks them to write down the first two letters of the word she says aloud (*chop, check, truck, bring*). This is obviously more difficult for the students.

Finally, students are asked to write down the last letter they hear (*food, put, check*). Answers are checked together on the board.

At 12:30, students are told that if they have time, they should look over their sentences again and practice. They will continue with this text tomorrow.

*Principles put into practice:*

- Connecting the classroom to real life is important.
- Connecting oral language to written language is crucial.
- Meaningless copying from the board or text is of minimal value.
- It's best to give students the time they need to complete tasks in class, and not assign nightly homework.

## CONCLUSION

Adult ESL educators will continue to work with many students who lack native language literacy. By better understanding who these students are and what factors may affect their learning, instructors can gain perspective on the needs and challenges of this population. Through student input and careful course design, we can attempt to fill in the gaps of limited or interrupted education. Only through literacy will students be able to climb out of the survival English box and become full participants in their communities. Principles underlying effective instruction to literacy-level adults need to be put into practice and further explored. A number of techniques that have proved useful in the literacy-level classroom are outlined here, but clearly, more research and teacher collaboration is needed to spread the word about best practices in teaching ESL literacy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This article was adapted from a larger publication, *Successful Instruction for Literacy-Level Adults*, with the permission of the Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA). The full publication is available as a CARLA Working Paper through this website:

<http://carla/acad.umn.edu/working-papers.html>.

Vinogradov, P. (2001). *Successful instruction for literacy-level adults*. CARLA Working Paper Series #17. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

<sup>2</sup>Some educators claim that ESL students literate in a non-Roman alphabet language comprise a fourth group. However, their situation is quite different. These students are educated, highly familiar with print and fully literate in their native language but are simply not familiar with the English sound-symbol relationships. Learning a new alphabet is considerably less of a task than acquiring literacy itself. I do not include this group among literacy-level ESL students. A person learns to read only once.



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## THE AUTHOR

Patsy Vinogradov began teaching English in Chelyabinsk, Russia, in 1994. After teaching overseas, she worked with immigrants and refugees in Lincoln, Nebraska before moving to Minnesota in 1998. She earned an MA in ESL from the University of Minnesota in 2000, and her main interests remain with refugees, particularly those with limited education.

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## APPENDIX

### Recommended Teaching Materials

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## **ImAgInArY WoRlD**

**Imaginary world is a world where I am the queen.  
It's a world where everyone respects me for who I am.  
It's a world where I don't have to invent a new me.**

**Imaginary world is where love is being truthful to yourself.  
It's a world where love means completely trusting the other.  
It's a world where I don't have to act.**

**Imaginary world is a peaceful place where hatred doesn't exist.  
It's a place where everyone respects, admires & values the other.  
It's a place where I could witness all kinds of animals gathering  
around the river  
without fear.  
It's a place where I can watch the orange greenish bird fly  
above the lake.**

**Imaginary world is a place where eyes don't water.  
It's a place where a broken heart is a transgression.  
It's a place where promises symbolize a great deal.  
It's a perfect place where I have everything I desire.  
It's a world where I don't have to pretend.**

**Hawa Farah  
2000**

## ***Issues Related to ESL Students and Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests: A Synthesis of Research from Minnesota Assessment Project***

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**MICHAEL E. ANDERSON, BONNIE SWIERZBIN, KRISTIN K. LIU, AND MARTHA L. THURLOW**

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Minnesota Assessment Project was a four year research project examining the participation and performance of LEP students in the Minnesota statewide accountability system. This article summarizes some of the findings of this research as it relates to inclusion, participation and performance, and accommodation of LEP students in statewide tests. Emphasis is placed on the current state of knowledge on testing the reading skills of students with developing literacy in English and the issues that surround this process.

With the reauthorization of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, states in the U.S. are creating accountability systems to ensure that all students reach high academic standards. To meet the requirements of Title I, which states must do in order to continue to receive Title I funding, all students must be included in these accountability systems. Further, these accountability systems are required to include as a primary component a state-level assessment system. Minnesota, like most other states, has implemented a system of statewide accountability testing in its public schools. This system includes standardized testing of students in the areas of math and reading at grades 3, 5 and 8 and in the area of writing at grades 3, 5, and 10. In addition, a system to measure students' progress toward high standards has been implemented at the high school level. In order to gain a true picture of how all of the students in Minnesota are progressing toward educational standards, it is important to include all students in this system. For this reason, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning (CFL) was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to study the participation and performance of limited English proficient (LEP) students and students with

disabilities in the state's accountability system. This project, called the Minnesota Assessment Project, was a collaborative effort with researchers, teachers, teacher educators and policy makers throughout the state.

As part of this four year grant, researchers at the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota conducted several studies to gain a better understanding of the participation and performance of these students in the accountability system. This article is a brief synthesis of the findings as they relate to LEP students, especially in the area of reading tests. The issues discussed are organized under three major topics related to the research conducted during this project: inclusion, participation and performance, and accommodations.

Over the years that the project took place (1996-2000), the knowledge base on including LEP students in graduation standards grew considerably. As the new accountability system in Minnesota has been refined so have educators' and researchers' understandings of the issues facing students, parents, teachers, and policy makers. This article summarizes some of the research from the Minnesota Assessment Project that has influenced our current understanding of ESL students' participation in these tests. Some of the terminology has also changed over these years such as the growing preference for the term English Language Learners (ELLs) over the policy term Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. In this article the term LEP will be used because it is the term still used at the state and federal level and is consistent with the language used throughout the Minnesota Project reports, even though the authors acknowledge the overemphasis this term puts on limitations.

## INCLUSION

Some people may ask why it is important to include LEP students in standardized reading tests when they may not yet be fully proficient in English. There are several reasons that LEP students need to be included in educational accountability systems. First, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) requires that all students, including LEP students, be included in statewide accountability systems. Second, in Minnesota students must pass the eighth grade Basic Standards Tests (BSTs) in reading and mathematics and the tenth grade writing tests in order to be eligible to graduate from high school. Not graduating from high school can have a severely negative impact on students' post-secondary educational achievement and work prospects (Boesel, Alsalam, & Smith, 1998; Coley, 1995; Hodgkinson & Outtz, 1992). Third, if a school system truly wants an accountability system to reflect the progress of all students towards high achievement, all students need to be included in the system.

As part of Minnesota Assessment Project, parents of LEP students

and LEP students themselves were interviewed in focus groups after the first round of Basic Standards testing in order to better understand their opinions and concerns about the testing system (Quest, Liu, & Thurlow, 1997). Parents in all of the focus groups reported that they wanted their children to take advantage of all of the educational opportunities available to them in school so that they could be productive and contributing adults in the future. This included taking part in the statewide testing system. One mother said that the tests are important in showing that her son is successful in school. Other parents commented that the tests are necessary to ensure that students can read, write, and do basic mathematics skills the parents viewed as essential for students continuing their education beyond school. However, parents were quite unclear about how the statewide testing differed from other tests given throughout the year.

Students in the focus groups also wanted to be included in the system. Although some students did not understand the purpose of the tests during this first year of testing, those that did felt that they could pass them and graduate from high school if given the support and opportunity to do so. The focus groups demonstrated a clear need for better communication about the Basic Standards Tests with LEP students and their families. Focus groups recommended the following ways of communicating with parents of LEP students: (a) sending home written notes, (b) communicating with social service organizations or community elders, (c) utilizing native language media such as newspapers, (d) using the native language of the parents to communicate with parent organizations that are active in some schools, and (e) including testing information in registration meetings at the beginning of the year.

## **PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE**

Although policy may require students' participation in accountability testing and students and parents may advocate for inclusion, LEP students and students with special needs have often been left out of accountability systems in the past (Zlatos, 1994). For this reason, part of the research conducted during the Minnesota Assessment Project examined the actual participation of LEP students in the state's testing system. The participation rates for eighth graders taking the Basic Standards Tests during 1996 to 1999 are shown in Figure 1. During these years several factors played a role in students' participation. When the BSTs were first offered in 1996, they were optional and only about 80% of all eligible students in the state took part in the testing (Liu, Anderson, & Thurlow, 2000). In 1997, school districts were able to choose between the BSTs and another set of standardized tests. It was not until 1998 that the BSTs were

required to be administered for accountability purposes. Comparing the data from 1998 and 1999, it can be seen that LEP students' participation was high, that is, near 90% each year, and increased slightly from 1998 to 1999. Under Minnesota testing guidelines, the only LEP students who can be exempted from testing in eighth grade are those students who have been in the country for less than one year and also have very limited English skills.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Participation Rates for the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests 1996-1999**

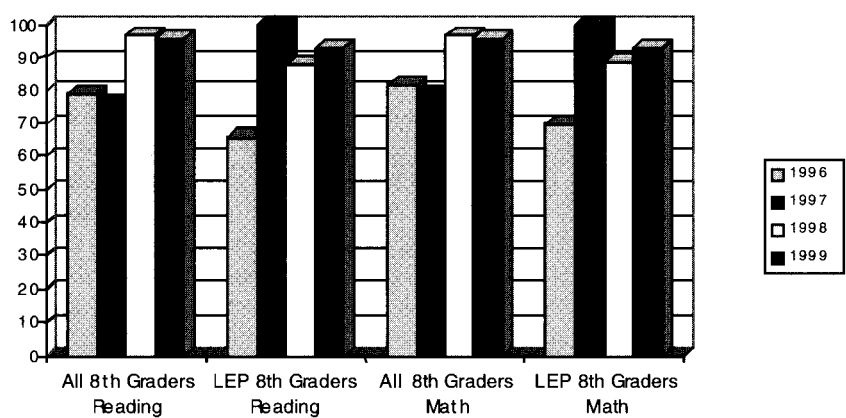
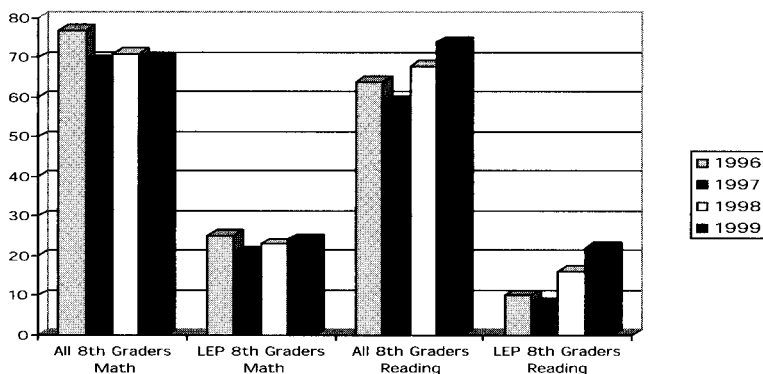


Figure 2 shows the passing rates for the BST reading and math tests during 1996-1999 for all eighth graders and for LEP eighth graders. The passing rates in 1997 dropped slightly from those of 1996 for both groups, which may be due to the fact that the percent correct needed to pass the test was raised to 75% in 1997 from 70% in 1996. Since 1997, however, the percentage of all students passing the reading test has increased steadily from 59% to 74%. These gains have mirrored the gains of LEP students on the reading test. The passing rate for LEP eighth graders has risen from 8% in 1997 to 22% in 1999. In comparison, passing rates for the math tests have remained more stable over these years for all students, including LEP students.

Because initially LEP students seemed to have more problems with the reading tests than the math tests, much of our research on performance and test accommodations concerned the reading tests. To increase understanding of how LEP students perform over time on the BST reading test, the Minnesota Assessment Project also assessed the performance of students who did not achieve a passing score for graduation purposes

**FIGURE 2**  
**Passing Rates (Percent Passing) for Minnesota Basic Standards Tests**  
**1996-1999**



in the first round of testing for the school years 1996-1998 and subsequently retook the tests. Specifically, we asked if there was a range of first-time scores that predicted passing the test on the second try. Between 1997 and 1998, 20% or fewer of LEP students who retook the BST in reading passed. In contrast, among all students, 52% passed the reading test on the second attempt (Spicuzza, Liu, Swierzbins, Bielinski, & Thurlow, 2000). LEP students who scored below 64-68% of reading test items correct on the first attempt had less than a 50% chance of passing the test the second time. However, there was a small group of students who scored below 25% correct on their initial test attempt but still passed the test (scored over 75%) on their second try. Knowing that LEP students struggled with the reading tests and also recognizing the importance of including these students in the accountability system, part of the research conducted for the Minnesota Assessment Project focused on ways to reduce the barriers that might stand in the way of students best demonstrating what they know on these tests. The most common practice for reducing these test barriers are test accommodations that address test setting, format, or presentation factors that may adversely affect a student's performance.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Although testing accommodations seem to hold some promise for helping LEP students better demonstrate what they know on standardized tests, a strong knowledge base does not yet exist on the impact and



appropriateness of testing accommodations for these students. Many of the accommodations allowed for LEP students on statewide tests were originally developed for students with disabilities and may not be appropriate for LEP students because they do not address the language barrier (Rivera & Vincent, 1997). Surveys of state accommodation policies for LEP students have shown that the accommodations allowed as well as the definition of LEP varies by state (Rivera, Stansfield, Scialdone, & Sharkey, 2000; Thurlow, Liu, Erickson, Spicuzza, & El Sawaf, 1996). Some states allow no accommodations on any tests. In some states, accommodations, especially translations, are not allowed on the reading tests although they are allowed on the math tests. The question remains how to accommodate for the barriers of emerging language skills when the test is a test of reading English.

Table 1 shows the accommodations and translations allowed on the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests. In Minnesota, an accommodation is a change to the test or test setting that does not alter the standard being tested. A translation, on the other hand, may alter the standard being tested and thus results in a special designation on the student's transcript ("Pass-Translation") when the test is being taken as a graduation requirement.

As part of the Minnesota Assessment Project, researchers looked at accommodations in two ways: first, what accommodations are being used by LEP students in Minnesota and second, what accommodations not currently available might be helpful to help LEP students better demonstrate what they know on the tests.

In 1999, test administrators were asked to record whether a student received an accommodation on the Basic Standards reading or mathematics tests given in eighth grade and what that accommodation was. The

**TABLE 1**  
**Accommodations and Translations Permitted for LEP Students**  
**Taking the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests (1998-1999 School Year)**

Accommodations	Translations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audio cassettes in English (math only)</li> <li>• Script of the audio cassette (math only)</li> <li>• Clarification or translation of test directions</li> <li>• Extended time</li> <li>• Individual or small group setting</li> <li>• Writing directly on the test booklet</li> <li>• Short segment test booklets (math and reading only)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translations (math only)</li> <li>• Oral interpretations (math and written composition only)</li> </ul>

data indicated that less than three percent of LEP students used any accommodation on the reading or math test (Liu, Anderson, & Thurlow, 2000). These numbers seem extremely low considering that for other student groups who use accommodations on tests, students with disabilities for example, more than half may use accommodations (Elliott, Bielinski, Thurlow, DeVito, & Hedlund, 1999).

It appears that accommodation use among LEP students in Minnesota was underreported or underused or both. The data from the Minnesota study could very well be underreported since they were collected on a separate form from the test answer sheet and the sheet was not filled out by most test administrators. The lack of research-based information on what accommodations most benefit LEP students makes the collection of accommodation use data extremely important. In order for educators to know whether the accommodations they are providing their students are useful, they need to know how they are being used. More states need to collect accommodation information as part of their reporting processes. Some states have begun to do so, but it may be several years before we have enough data to fully assess the state of accommodation use and make the testing situation more equitable for LEP students.

Finally, since there are no translations currently offered for the Basic Standards reading test, some of the research of the Minnesota Assessment Project examined the use and usefulness of bilingual accommodations. For this study, the reading passage was provided to students in English and the test questions were provided in a side-by-side bilingual format as well as aurally in their native language via a tape recorder. The tape-recorded questions were provided because educators had expressed concern about the usefulness of written translations for those students who are not literate in their native language. During the first phase of this research, nine native Spanish-speaking students took portions of the bilingual version of the test and were interviewed about their use of the accommodations. This was done to try out the translated portions to make sure they were functioning correctly and also to get in-depth opinions about the accommodation from a small group of students.

Overall, the students did not report having difficulty using the side-by-side translations or the native language tape. Most students used the written form of the test questions instead of the audiotape. The majority of students reported using primarily one language version of the questions (either English or Spanish) and referring to the other form only when they encountered difficulties. Most of the difficulties were reported to be unfamiliar vocabulary words. Even though only one student achieved a passing rate on the test passages, three of the nine students reported preferring to take the test only in English. Although students were tested

individually, each room often held two students working in different corners. The accommodation might have been used more often if it had been combined with an individual test setting since social pressure seemed to play a role in accommodation use (Liu, Anderson, Swierzbis, & Thurlow, 1999).

In the second phase of the study we gave the test to a larger group of students. Fifty-three native Spanish-speaking LEP students took the accommodated version (with side-by-side English and Spanish written questions and a Spanish audiotape of questions). Fifty-two native Spanish-speaking students took the test in English with no accommodation and a control group of 101 general education students also took the unaccommodated test. The bilingual version of the test appeared to be most helpful for those students with moderate English proficiency. Those with higher proficiencies did not use the translations and those with lower proficiencies who relied heavily on the translations scored low on the test. There was not a significant difference in mean test scores between the accommodated and unaccommodated LEP student groups (Anderson, Liu, Swierzbis, Thurlow, & Bielinski, 2000).

Students in the second phase of this study also reported using the translations to check unfamiliar vocabulary items. When asked which version of the test they would prefer to take for the actual Basic Standards Tests, about two-thirds of the students preferred some sort of bilingual accommodation, while one-third preferred an English only version. These preferences are interesting considering that very few of these students achieved a passing score on the test. Thus even though some students did not come close to passing the test, they chose not to use the accommodations. Perhaps the most important thing that this study of experimental accommodations demonstrates is that one cannot assume that because an accommodation is given to a student, that the accommodation will be used. It appears that peer pressure or a student's level of comfort in using a translation can affect the use of an accommodation. Future studies on reading accommodations should take use as well as usefulness into account. In addition, test accommodation decisions need to be made on an individual basis.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings mentioned above, the Minnesota Assessment Project offers the following suggestions to educators who would like to improve the test taking experiences of LEP students:

- Find out who is communicating with parents of LEP students about participation in the statewide accountability tests and when and how that communication occurs. Help your school to figure out

ways to communicate with families well in advance of the time when tests are administered. Talk with families about how the accountability tests are different from other tests given by the district or school.

- Encourage administrators and others responsible for remedial programming for LEP students who have failed the Basic Standards Test to direct the remedial efforts equally across all groups of LEP students who have not passed. Remedial efforts focused only on students closest to passing the test miss students at the low end of the continuum who may actually make more progress in skills from one test attempt to the next.
- If you are involved in recommending an accommodation for an LEP student taking an accountability test, make sure to talk to the student and his or her family about the accommodations available. For a variety of reasons students may not want to use accommodations that are available to them. If they want to use a particular accommodation, they may need to test in an individual setting or in a small group of other students who are using the same accommodation. Students may also lack skills that are needed to benefit from a certain accommodation, such as not having strong literacy skills in their native language.
- Encourage your school and district to make test participation and accommodation decisions on an individual basis, rather than for the entire group of LEP students as a whole. What works for one LEP student does not necessarily work for another one.
- Encourage test administrators in your building to record as much data as possible about which accommodations individual students are given on a test. Ask to see the data showing which accommodations are used most frequently by LEP students taking reading tests and look at how these students perform on the test. These steps will help you make test decisions that are most appropriate for LEP students.
- Work on skills and strategies for dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary in English reading passages.

This article reports on the beginning stages of building a statewide accountability system that includes all students, with special attention paid to the issues relating to LEP students. Trends in performance and participation data in this type of system are preliminary at best and more years of test data are needed to be able to talk reliably about performance trends for any students. Educators need to continue to monitor data such as LEP student performance, participation and accommodation use in order to refine and improve the accountability system and curriculum for these students. These data, if accurately measured, could be used to

create more valid assessment environments for LEP students. When performance information over time is known, the impact of the implementation of state accountability systems on the education of LEP students can be examined.

## NOTE

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## A BIRD FLYING UP THE SKY

I looked up the heavens on a sunny day,  
I noticed a bird flying up the sky.  
I wondered what it would be like to fly carefree.  
Not troubled about what would happen today or tomorrow.  
Not worrying about what to eat the next day or year.

I wished I could be the peaceful &  
Unconcerned bird flying up the sky.  
I wished I could observe the world with its eyes  
Not fearing about what the future holds for me.

I wished I could understand &  
Appreciate the meaning of life like the bird.  
I wished I could distinguish right from wrong.  
I wished I could accept the world the way it is.

I wished I could conceal the unanswered questions.  
I wished I could comprehend the unspeakable questions.  
I wished I could value & accept myself  
like the bird flying above me.

Hawa Farah  
2000

## Review

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The *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal* welcomes evaluative reviews of publications relevant to TESOL professions. In addition to textbooks and reference materials, these include computer and video software, testing instruments, and other forms of nonprint materials.

***New Immigrants in the United States***, Sandra Lee McKay and Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong (Eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

*New Immigrants in the United States*, edited by Sandra Lee McKay and Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, presents a wealth of information about the social and educational implications of immigration which can assist second language educators in advocating for their students with colleagues, school administrators and decision makers. The editors contend that a reexamination of immigration issues is imperative as public interest in the topic of language education has heightened because of ever-increasing numbers of immigrants in our nation's public schools. Furthermore, they believe that any decisions concerning English programs should be informed by findings from the field of second language acquisition and current research on language usage within language minority communities.

The editors are quick to point out their ideological perspective. They regard the linguistic diversity of the U.S. as a valuable resource rather than a problem. Moreover, they argue that "English language learners have a dual right to gain proficiency in English through effective language programs and to maintain their mother tongue if possible...these two processes are interdependent" (p. 3). Acknowledging that education alone will not ensure that the newcomers gain access to all that America offers, the editors include within the text a series of articles calling for a social and political investment in these language learners.

The text is divided into three parts and consists of sixteen chapters. Each chapter presents information, provides suggestions for further reading and includes a list of references. There is no index. The first part includes historical data about immigration as well as information on the process of second language acquisition and language maintenance within immigrant communities. The second part focuses on several prominent immigrant groups, describing their history, language backgrounds, and language use patterns. The final section explores the connection between



successful language learning and social and political decision-making.

In Part I, author Reynaldo F. Macias gives an overview of U.S. immigration from 1664 through 1899, and then offers a vast amount of U.S. Census data from 1900 to the present to detail what he refers to as "the full linguistic beauty of the U.S. human bouquet" (p. 53). The statistics are presented in a straightforward, if overwhelming progression. The countries of origin of the immigrants, the languages spoken at home by these groups, the self-reported ability to speak English by the immigrants, the changes in the non-English speaking population of the U.S., state by state LEP K-12 enrollments, and the racial composition of the U.S. (1990 Census) are included. Interestingly, he also includes a table showing the registration in foreign language classes at U.S. institutions of higher education to emphasize his message that the linguistic diversity of our nation can be a resource, not a liability.

In the second chapter of this section, Calvin Veltman presents research findings documenting the process of second language acquisition within immigrant groups in the U.S.. This research shows a clear language shift within all immigrant groups to make English their preferred language. It also demonstrates that the rates of this language shift to English are so high that native languages are not maintained beyond the second generation. Popular wisdom to the contrary, Veltman contends that "there is no evidence that continued immigration poses any threat to the linguistic integrity of the United States" (p. 90). He emphasizes that all new immigrants, especially those of school age, clearly are eager to learn English to make it their principal means of communication.

To substantiate this research, in Part II, the editors take a closer look at eleven immigrant communities identified by the Department of Education as representing the most populous language groups of English language learners in the public schools. Each chapter begins with an overview of the group's immigration history, includes information on current demographics, and summarizes research on language use within the community. Because of this format, readers can use the text as a resource handbook, picking and choosing which groups to read about.

Of particular interest to Minnesota and Wisconsin readers are several chapters on Spanish speakers, one chapter concerning the Hmong, Khmer and Laotian communities, and another on Soviet immigrants. Because of its reliance on 1990 Census data when selecting groups to focus upon, the text does not include any information on our region's more recent immigrants. There is no information on African immigrants. Missing also is information about non-Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. This is indeed a loss because the existing chapters offer insightful information about the various groups' immigration experiences and attitudes which could have implications for the language classroom.

While the chapter dealing with the Hmong community offers little new information, author M.G. Lòpez underscores the changes and tensions within the community as a filiarchal family structure often displaces the adults' traditional role in the family and community. The author emphasizes the importance of bilingual education as a means to maintain well-being in the community.

The short chapter on Soviet immigrants focuses on issues of language acquisition of a more elderly student population. It describes a prevailing skepticism in this group towards all institutions which often results in dissatisfaction with language instruction.

Part III of the text looks at some of the educational and social implications of the preceding data. McKay writes of the importance of educational investment. She points out that while there is no one right way to educate English language learners, programs which have been identified as successful share certain features. These programs have high expectations for their students, demonstrate close collaboration between content and language teachers, and are committed to parent involvement in the education process.

Rachel Moran looks at the American public school system, where local control and local responsibility often are at odds with national immigration policies. She advocates increased federal intervention to assist states in coping with the impact of high levels of immigration.

Finally, Bonny Pierce writes of the problems inherent in subtractive bilingualism, when loss of the mother tongue has devastating effects on the learners' family and community. She argues that "teachers should strive to encourage immigrant language learners to invest in both the target language community and the immigrant language community" (p. 459).

As part of the Cambridge Language Teaching Library, *New Immigrants in the United States* was designed for use by pre-service and in-service language teachers and administrators, and could be used in undergraduate or graduate teacher education courses. Reading this book from cover to cover would be a daunting task; however, it could be used as a source book for all interested in learning more about issues of immigration and acculturation. More importantly, for those of us seeking up-to-date factual information to present to those who make decisions about the lives of our students, it can serve as a valuable resource.

## THE REVIEWER

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