

## FROM THE EDITORS

Learning typically requires repetition. As language educators, we have seen this truth time and again. As professionals seeking to grow and develop, we can also recognize its truth. We suggest that whether reading this *Journal* edition on a phone, on a computer, on an e-reader, or on printed-out pages, it may be worthwhile to take note of at least one interesting thing you've read, and set up a way to have a second encounter with the information: Email that line to yourself; mention it to a co-worker in the hallway; write it down on a slip of paper that you'll find again at the end of the day; bring it up in a staff meeting or with your walking partner – build in some form of repetition. Professional development (learning) typically requires repetition.

In the first article of this year's volume, Douglas Paul Margolis explores the topic of oral error feedback, based on classroom observations made during his Ph.D. research. While it is clear that students want and expect feedback on oral errors, the literature is not consistent on which feedback methods are most effective. To help teachers make the decision of how to handle oral error feedback, Margolis begins his article by discussing four examples. The author then suggests a framework for helping teachers evaluate and respond to oral errors.

In the second article, we learn that nearly half of Adult Basic Education (ABE) learners in Minnesota enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, but until recently little was known about the background and training of the teachers who work with ESL students in ABE programs. Reporting on a survey of ABE teachers in Minnesota, Kim Johnson, Kelly Marchwick, and Astrid Liden describe ABE/ESL practitioners' educational backgrounds, work environments, classroom challenges, and professional development needs as a step towards designing and delivering pertinent and meaningful professional development to this workforce.

Next, Deirdre Bird Kramer, Cynthia Lundgren, and Ann Sax Mabbott report on a method of using Bloom's Taxonomy to help explain to colleagues the importance of discussing academic language functions and language objectives. K-12 ELL educators should find this report particularly useful as a tool to help shape their discussions and presentations with colleagues in other disciplines. This is a timely topic that you may want to think twice about as you help your students understand the "bricks and mortar" of language.

The books reviewed are similarly worth a second thought. In her review of the textbook *Four Point: Listening-Speaking 2, Advanced* Kristin Kline Liu summarizes both the content and the strengths of this advanced level, college preparatory text, while Anneliese Cannon gives an appraisal of *Inside: Language, Literacy and Content*, part of an extensive, comprehensive reading series for grades 4-8.

Miranda Schornack reviews *Literacy and Second Language Oracy*, a book which focuses on an under-researched group of English language learners: adults with low literacy skills in their L1. Marta Ljungkull and Sadaf Rauf examine *Meeting the Needs of Students with Limited or Interrupted Schooling: A Guidebook for Educators*, a reference book for K-12 teachers who may lack sufficient experience with immigrant or refugee students with limited or interrupted formal education.

In their review of *English L2 Reading: Getting to the Bottom*, Amy Frederick and Paul Kroshus examine a text that considers bottom-up approaches to teaching L2 reading and how they can be incorporated into the classroom. Susan Ranney reviews and compares two books focused on teaching 'academic English,' *Building Academic Language* by Jeff Zwiers and *Academic Language for English Language Learners and Struggling Readers* by Yvonne Freeman and David Freeman. The topic is getting more and more attention, especially in K-12 ELL classrooms. These books could be a place to continue reading on the issues introduced in the Kramer, Lundgren, and Mabbott article above.

Finally, Peter De Costa takes a look at *Exploring Learner Language*, co-authored by Elaine Tarone and Bonnie Swierzbin, one of the co-editors of the *Journal*. This is an introductory second language acquisition textbook that merges theory and practice, including hands-on practice with language analysis using case studies.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of the *MinneWITESOL Journal*, and invite you to consider submitting something for next year's volume. We are glad for your submissions, your comments as readers, and the support of our institutions as we put the Journal together.

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## HANDLING ORAL ERROR FEEDBACK IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Douglas Paul Margolis

### ABSTRACT

Good oral error feedback strategies can boost student motivation, advance language learning, and increase student perception of instructional effectiveness, but the oral error feedback literature offers a confusing picture of what is appropriate feedback. Many teachers have heard that recasts, a type of feedback that involves reformulating the student's error into the correct form, is an appropriate approach, especially because it may avoid increasing student anxiety. Other teachers have probably heard that recasts are not effective and that pushing students to self-correct is a more appropriate technique. In fact, the research literature on oral error feedback has advocated both perspectives, and some writers have even advocated against providing error feedback altogether. This paper looks at four error feedback interactions from class observations in an EFL context to highlight issues that may help teachers make appropriate decisions for handling errors in their classrooms. These feedback interactions come from the author's doctoral research (Margolis, 2007). The paper first examines the nature of errors and feedback in the classroom, then identifies key decision points in error feedback interactions, and finally suggests a framework for evaluating oral error feedback effectiveness.

### INTRODUCTION

A good strategy for handling oral error feedback can boost student motivation, build confidence, and create a satisfying learning experience. The nature of such an oral error feedback strategy, however, remains unclear and even controversial. Some researchers suggest that teachers should not correct student errors. Truscott (1999), for example, has presented a detailed case against giving oral error feedback on grammar, suggesting that the risks are not worth the potential rewards. He cites several teacher and student obstacles to effective oral error feedback, including ability to unambiguously identify the error, correctly assess the intended meaning, and appropriately address the error within the context of other pressing lesson concerns, to name a few. Studies offering data to support these contentions include Allwright (1975), Fanselow (1977), and Hendrickson (1978), among others. Moreover, DeKeyser (1993) found no main effects in a year long comparison study between a class receiving regular error feedback with one not receiving it. Lyster, Lightbown, and Spada (1999), however, reject Truscott's reasoning, and passionately present a case supporting the provision of error feedback, believing that students do benefit from it. In fact, surveys seeking student preferences about error feedback, consistently report a desire for it--not unanimous, but high majorities. Table 1, below, from Margolis (2007), summarizes nine such studies that taken together surveyed over 3000 students in six different countries studying English and other foreign languages. Of all the findings in the oral error feedback literature, the fact that large majorities of students express a desire for receiving feedback is arguably the most stable and trustworthy.

Expressing a preference for error feedback on a survey, however, is not the same as receiving or acting upon feedback provided for errors. When researchers put students to this test, giving them oral feedback, their desire for it somewhat dissipates. Yao (2000), for example, found that students did not always like the feedback they received. Cathcart and Olsen (1976) found students becoming so overwhelmed by the feedback that they changed their original

**Table 1.** Error Feedback Preference Studies, from Margolis (2007, p. 29)

Investigators	Focus	Subjects	Approach	Findings
Cathcart & Olsen (1976)	Learner EF preferences for the classroom	149 adult ESL students	Survey about classroom EF preferences	Learners strongly desire EF
Chenoweth, Day, Chun, & Luppescu (1983)	Preferences for EF in NS-NNS conversations	400 adult ESL students	Survey EF preferences for interactions with NS friends	Strong preference for more EF in social encounters
Oladejo (1993)	Alignment of learner preferences with teacher practices	500 EFL Ss at the National University of Singapore	Survey based on Hendrickson's (1978) 5 questions	Consistent with prior research, strong preference for EF
Schulze (1996)	Differences between T & Ss beliefs across different L2s	824 Ss + 92 T Of multiple FL courses at U of Arizona	Study included observation and a survey of Ss preferences	Ss: favored FonF regardless of TL but T beliefs were not aligned
Musayeva (1998)	Create a "corrective profile" of Ts to compare against Ss preferences	2 Teachers with 2 EFL classes each, 74 Ss in university prep class in Turkey	Observed classes per Chaudron's (1977) model; interviewed Ts; surveyed Ss	Found small amount of parity between EF practices and EF preferences
Yao (2000)	Learner view of EF, preferences, & alignment w/ Teacher practices	18 1st & 2nd year undergraduates (3 per class—6 diff. classes) ESL	Observed 24 hours of classes (4hrs per T); interviewed Ss for preferences	Learners regarded EF as necessary, but did not always like it
Schulze (2001)	Compare Colombian students & teachers with the 1996 study's data	607 Ss + 122 Ts from language classes at univ. in Colombia, plus 824 Ss & 92 Ts from 1996	Survey	Ss & Ts from both cultures, all L1s/L2s, had similar attitudes as Schulze (1996), above
H.J. Lee, (2004)	Proficiency level effects on learner preferences and teacher practices	280 EFL university students in Korea & 31 English NS Teachers	2 studies, 1 survey of EF preferences; the 2nd journal & interview data on 2 teachers	Ss wanted more EF; Ts feared providing too much. High & low proficiency Ss answered similarly

EF=Error Feedback, NS=native speakers, Ss=students, Ts=Teachers

favorable attitudes. Finally, for the error preference studies that included teacher opinions (see for example, H.J. Lee, 2004; Musayeva, 1998; Schulze, 1996, 2001) a predilection to avoid giving oral error feedback was found. Teachers worried about silencing students and creating too much anxiety. The findings regarding teachers are almost as consistent as those regarding student preferences, suggesting that teachers have legitimate concerns, from experience, that justify caution when deciding whether or not to give feedback. In fact, for many teachers, perhaps

all, the decision to give feedback is far from simple. It greatly depends on the error, context, student, available class time, lesson plan factors, and other considerations.

In light of the various issues that teachers must consider when contemplating oral error feedback, suggestions in the literature advocating for a particular feedback type over another (for example, Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997), seem frustratingly unhelpful. These studies put forth an argument for error correction, of a particular type, without consideration of the errors, student, lesson plan, or other factors. One might argue that basic research needs to first establish a causal relationship before these other factors can be considered; but if the real classroom variables that teachers must cope with are not factored into these studies, how can we ever be confident that their findings generalize back to classroom pedagogy? This paper suggests we cannot. Through analyzing specific error feedback interactions in actual classroom contexts, this paper raises questions about oral error feedback research methodology and endeavors to help teachers better recognize options available for maximizing the effectiveness of their feedback. After first examining four error feedback interactions from Margolis' (2007) doctoral research<sup>1</sup>, we then consider specific attributes of oral error feedback interactions that offer teachers choices for calibrating feedback to the unique context. Finally, the paper suggests how teachers might evaluate the effectiveness of their feedback strategies.

## ORAL ERROR FEEDBACK INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Oral error feedback interactions have been investigated in many studies (see for example, Chaudron, 1977; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Sheen, 2004). A common research design in these investigations follows the corrective discourse model developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997). Their study considers error feedback to be a speech act entailing three moves: (a) the error, (b) feedback, and (c) optional uptake. The error is an "ill-formed utterance" (p. 45). Feedback is classified into one of six different types--(a) explicit correction, (b) recast, (c) clarification requests, (d) metalinguistic feedback, (e) elicitation, and (f) repetition. Uptake in their model "refers to a student's utterance that *immediately follows* the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance" (emphasis added, p. 49). This approach is then largely employed to investigate whether particular feedback types are better than others (i.e., Lee, 2006; Mori, 2002; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Sheen, 2004; Suzuki, 2004; and Tsang, 2004). Two consistent findings from these studies, for example, are that (a) recast feedback is generally the most frequently deployed type, and (b) elicitation feedback is generally more effective at producing uptake.

These studies, however, are not without their critics. Long (2006), for instance, has taken to task the concept of "uptake," arguing that the Lyster and Ranta (1997) approach includes almost anything as uptake, even wrong responses to the feedback. Ohta (2000), moreover, complains that the Lyster and Ranta (1997) model does not take into account the positive effects of feedback on peer auditors. Hauser (2005) challenges the definition of recasts, suggesting that rather than reformulating the student's intended message, teachers might in fact be co-constructing the message with the learner. This paper also challenges the Lyster and Ranta (1997) approach on two new levels: (a) first, their definition and handling of errors; (b) second, their characterization of the whole error treatment sequence in terms of the feedback type. Regarding the first issue, even Lyster and Ranta (1997: p. 51) acknowledge that "the effect of error type on feedback type is an important variable," but put off this analysis to a

<sup>1</sup> These error feedback episodes come from a total database of 203 episodes obtained from observations of 12 class sessions of three courses taught by three different instructors. The context was EFL with Korean L1 learners. See Margolis (2007) for more details.

future study. As for characterizing the error feedback interactions by feedback types, they are suggesting that all recasts, elicitations, repetitions, and etc. represent the same general features from one error treatment sequence to the next. Put another way, the context, the participants, and prior attention to the error issue have no relevance to the nature of the feedback. Perhaps so, but if this view is wrong, then researchers may be clumping together groups of error feedback interactions that are no more similar to each other than a dog to a zebra or a fish. Let us first look at the error issue and return to this zebra one below.

Researchers have classified errors in many ways. Margolis (2007) found fourteen systems for classifying errors in the literature and grouped them into three categories. One group categorizes errors in terms of the error source, which may include developmental factors, L1 interference, grammatical or phonological language features, processing limitations, and the like. Labeling errors as "interlingual" and "intralingual" (Tomasello & Herron, 1989), or "phonological," "syntactical," and "pragmatic" (Chaudron, 1988), are examples of these taxonomies. A second group categorizes based on the effect of the error, such as whether the listener comprehends the message, the error causes the learner to be stigmatized, or if the error is even noticed. Examples include Corder's (1967) "covert" and "overt" distinction and Burt and Kiparsky's (1974) "global" and "local." A third category of classification includes errors based on pedagogical concerns: "high frequency" versus "low frequency" (Hendrickson, 1978), "treatable" versus "fossilized" (Cowan, Choi, & Kim, 2003), or even, "on-topic" versus "off-topic."

This complexification of errors in the language classroom is necessary for understanding the amazingly diverse universe of error possibilities in any given language context. In other words, to compare error feedback types without consideration of error feature differences may completely distort the reality of how feedback functions in classroom contexts. In fact, Coggins (2008) investigated teacher attitudes toward different types of errors and found that decisions to correct errors and ratings regarding the urgency of error correction greatly depended on error type and context. Moreover, many of his teachers suggested that the history between a student and teacher in regards to an error is an important factor when considering provision of feedback. Recognizing then that not all errors are equal, the problem of determining which distinctions are important in error feedback research remains, not to mention the concomitant issue of coding errors reliably.

If researchers are ever to be able to understand oral error feedback in language learning classrooms, they must account for the potential effects caused by different error types. To illustrate this point and raise additional issues regarding oral error feedback interaction, consider the following transcript from an EFL classes observed by Margolis (2007).

**Extract 1.** Recast – Next-Turn Feedback (Margolis, 2007, p. 112)

1. Byunggu<sup>2</sup>: I want to say I like *that* blue jeans and--
  2. Teacher: Those.
  3. Byunggu: So I should say, 'I like those...'
  4. Teacher: Yeah.
- [Four turns, 6 seconds]

Extract 1 resembles the typical error feedback interaction depicted in many research articles. Turn 1 contains an error, a singular demonstrative where the plural is required. Turn 2 is the teacher's feedback. In this case, the teacher has provided a recast of the erroneous part, clearly isolating the problem and briefly drawing the student's attention to form (cf., Long & Robinson, 1998). In Turn 3, the student provides clear uptake, demonstrating understanding that (a) an error

<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

was made, (b) the precise nature of the error, that is, the demonstrative form, and (c) recognition of the gap between his interlanguage and the correct form. Then the teacher reinforces the feedback and ends the episode. This interaction perfectly fits the "error treatment sequence" model envisioned by Lyster and Ranta (1997: p. 44). The teacher appears to have successfully addressed this student's grammatical error in only six seconds--a very efficient use of class time. In this interaction, the particular error hardly seems to matter at all. Margolis (2007), however, found that this type of error feedback interaction might only account for half of the error feedback interactions in language learning classrooms. Consider for example, Extract 2.

**Extract 2.** Explicit: Non-Adjacent-Turn Error Feedback (Margolis 2007: p. 42)

1. Hwajin: *And I don't like skinny jeans.*
  2. Ss: Hmm, yeah.
  3. Hwajin: I really want to try that on but I can't because of my thick thighs and—  
<laughter>
  4. Minji: I agree.  
<laughter>
  5. Minji: I like it but I cannot wear
  6. Hwajin: Yeah
  7. Minji: It looks great, but
  8. S?: It looks—  
<long pause>
  9. Teacher: So really tight jeans; is that what skinny jeans means?
  10. Hwajin: Yes, yeah.
- [Ten turns, 26 seconds]

In Extract 2, the teacher is clearly giving feedback to the learner's utterance in Turn 1, but has the student made an error? If she meant to say "tight jeans," then the use of "skinny" was wrong. However, if she meant the fashion style, called "skinny jeans," she did not make an error at all. So how do error feedback researchers handle this kind of issue? The problem is that researchers could code it differently, leading to findings that vary depending on the researcher, not the data. Another issue about this feedback interaction is the number of turns between the "error" utterance and the feedback. Seven turns separate the two utterances. Feedback, of course, does not always occur in the turn immediately adjacent to an error. Classroom-situated oral error feedback researchers following the Lyster and Ranta (1997) model, however, only include feedback that immediately follows the error. Consider, for example, Lyster and Ranta's (1997) approach (also used by, J. Lee, 2006; Lochman, 2002; Mori, 2002; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Suzuki, 2004; and Tsang, 2004):

The sequence begins with a learner's utterance containing at least one error. The erroneous utterance is *followed either by the teacher's corrective feedback or not*; if not, then there is topic continuation. If corrective feedback is provided by the teacher, *then it is either followed by uptake on the part of the student or not...*  
(emphasis added, Lyster & Ranta, 1997: p. 45).

This perspective of error interactions, while avoiding the dilemma about skinny jeans, would completely miss the feedback provided in Turn 9. Teachers who frequently provide feedback in nonadjacent turns might even be described as giving no feedback at all, which would seriously undermine the validity of such studies and offer only confusion to second language acquisition theory and language pedagogy. Moreover, exactly what type of error feedback occurs in Turn

9? The first clause seems like a recast, but the second is prompting for a student metalinguistic response. If we call it a recast, we are equating this ten turn episode of 26 seconds duration to the four turn episode that lasted six seconds cited above. Are they the same? Do we have two zebras? Or, would it be more realistic to code one as a dog and the other a zebra? Extract 3 raises even another coding issue.

**Extract 3.** Long Error Feedback Interaction (Margolis, 2007: p. 98)

(Talking about anti-social behavior in Korea)

1. Youngsoo: Speeding.
2. T: Speeding?
3. Youngsoo: Yes
4. T: That's your problem too?
5. Youngsoo: I think speeding makes the Seongsu Bridge, Bridges, the speeding in Korean people makes so many problems, Which is uhm Breakdown Seongsu Bridge -
6. T: Speeding caused the bridge to fall down?  
Fall down--breakdown
7. Youngsoo: Yes, (*Bballi Bballi*) culture.
8. T: I don't think so, I think that was, I think that was poor construction; but maybe speeding, maybe speeding hurt it worse. How could speeding -Go fast? Its like, its better for the bridge. Its Less weight.
9. Moonsuk: Ahh, poor bridge.
10. T: Right?
11. Minji: Here speeding means ah go beyond the speed limit when you drive her
12. T: Yeah, but speeding. Your less time on the bridge.
13. Jin: I mean speeding, what she meant by speeding, that means doing something quickly.
14. Minji: Quickly. Quickly, quickly. Not speeding.
15. Byunggu: Ahh, not like not driving--
16. T: Ahhh No speeding means driving fast. Only.
17. Youngsoo: Only?  
<laughter>
18. T: Yeah. Ahha. I see what you mean, the poor construction because they did it quickly?
19. Youngsoo: How can we express the 'quickly culture' in English?
20. T: Poor workmanship.  
<laughter>
21. T: Not caring.
22. S? & Yoonhee: Poor workmanship.
23. T: Yeah, We wouldn't call it speeding. When you worry more about deadline than actual quality, so we would say Poor workmanship, or shoddy workmanship or something like that. Ahh I understand now. I thought speeding, why would that be cause for the bridge to fall down. Fast? Speeding is only vehicles.
24. Youngsoo: Yes
25. T: Sorry I misunderstood. Anything else?

[Twenty-five turns, 67.5 seconds]

Extract 3 offers an example of a "covert error" (Corder, 1967), a learner's utterance that is not obviously incorrect. In Turn 1, for example, Youngsoo offers "speeding" as an example of a social problem in Korea. At that point, the teacher might question her opinion, as he appears to do in Turn 2, but it would be wrong to code Turn 2 as feedback to the form of what she has said. In fact, the first obvious feedback occurs in Turn 6 where the teacher has recasted the student's previous turn. The teacher's attention, however, seems to be directed at what he apparently considers a ridiculous notion--that speeding can cause a bridge to collapse. Youngsoo, in Turn 7, may have realized a problem occurred. She gives the Korean expression for what she intended to say (*Bballi Bballi*), which helps Minji and Jin in turns 11 and 13, respectively, to recognize the error and begin correcting it. The teacher then adds explicit or metalinguistic feedback in Turn 16, followed by Youngsoo's response, "Only?" Her response suggests that she now realizes that she had made an error and that her understanding of the usage of "speeding" requires narrowing its scope in her lexicon. The rest of the episode she attempts to learn how to say what she had originally intended.

Clearly Extract 3 presents problems for the coding scheme put forth by Lyster and Ranta (1997) cited above. This approach would not begin to see an error feedback sequence until Turn 5 at the earliest, and it would be over at Turn 7. They would then need to code a second, unrelated error sequence around Turns 14-17. The problem, however, is that both error sequences are related and part of this twenty-five turn exchange. To pull these internal interactions out of the whole distorts the feedback reality. Moreover, this sequence demonstrates how several people can be involved in providing the feedback, not just a teacher. Plus, the recast within this episode could hardly be equated with the recast of Extract 1. In this case, the error is connected to a whole fabric of meaning the student is attempting to articulate; the student responds to the feedback, but her response is a fundamental re-evaluation of her original, covert error, not the error in the preceding turn of the feedback. Calling the two interactions, "recasts," gives about as much helpful information as calling a kangaroo and a zebra animals. Too much information is lost. Labeling both "recasts" distorts the nature of the error feedback interactions and undermines the analysis. In other words, labeling the interaction by a feedback type fails to project the essential elements that allow for valid comparison of different error feedback interactions.

Even when the error feedback interaction is between the teacher and one student, the nature of the dialogue may differ dramatically from the picture painted by the research literature. For example, in Extract 4, the student appears to reject the teacher's feedback and challenge the teacher's credibility.

**Extract 4<sup>3</sup>.** Legitimacy Challenge (Margolis, 2007: p. 140)

1. Eunjin: It's a round shape and there is a back, there are two long r- r- Long what? Long ru--
2. Teacher: Ribbons? Ribbon?
3. Eunjin & S?: Not ribbons, just the stripe, it's cloth.
4. Teacher: Ribbon is cloth.
5. Eunjin: Yeah, but ribbon make shape
6. Teacher: No.
7. Eunjin: but there's no shape.
8. Teacher: No. Ribbons doesn't make shape, ribbon
9. Eunjin: Ok, ok. That's long ribbon. And (cxxx) goes to the left and my daughter doesn't have hair a lot

<sup>3</sup> Describing a Korean *Ion*, during an impromptu speech.

10. Teacher: Uhh.  
 11. Eunjin: So she must wear that one. If I put, take off, that *Ion* and everyone will say why didn't you put (xxxxx) if she wears *Ion* then she looks like woman.

[Ten turns, 49 seconds]

Eunjin is attempting to describe a Korean type of hat, but she is stuck on the word "ribbon," which in Korean codified English (cf., Shim, 1999) usually refers to a bow. In Turn 3, she rejects the teacher's assistance and makes the covert error visible. Turn 4 is teacher provided error feedback and Turn 6 is the teacher's rejection of the student's misunderstanding. Turn 5 and 7, however, expresses the student's challenge to the teacher's credibility. She refuses to believe that the teacher understands what she intends. At Turn 9, she becomes impatient with the teacher and partially accepts the error feedback, but still marginalizes or discredits it. A student challenging the teacher's credibility probably does not surprise many instructors, but error feedback researchers have not addressed the issue and its implications for feedback. Should the student's rejection of the feedback be called "uptake"? Certainly, the student has noticed the feedback. The error feedback challenged her inner criterion of correctness and, perhaps, made an impact on her interlanguage system. She just as likely diminished her respect for the teacher and refused to accept his correction.

In sum, these four oral error feedback episodes demonstrate (a) that errors are not all equal in terms of their visibility, (b) that labeling an utterance an error itself could be controversial, (c) that error feedback sometimes may be inextricable from larger contexts, and (d) that the impact, or efficacy, of feedback may depend on characteristics of the error, such as whether students have previously received reinforcement for an erroneous form, as much as, or more so, than the category of feedback type. Thus, it is important to recognize that different error types may demand different degrees of attention and require a different combination of feedback attributes. For example, if a teacher meets resistance to feedback, it may require gathering additional evidentiary support to convince the learner about the correct form. This support could come from the internet, peers, or a fellow teacher. These oral error feedback episodes also suggest that error feedback can be more than an interaction between a teacher and one student. In short, classroom-situated oral error feedback can be a lot messier than the recent research literature suggests. If so, then teachers need guidance from other quarters about how to address learner errors.

## FEEDBACK DECISIONS

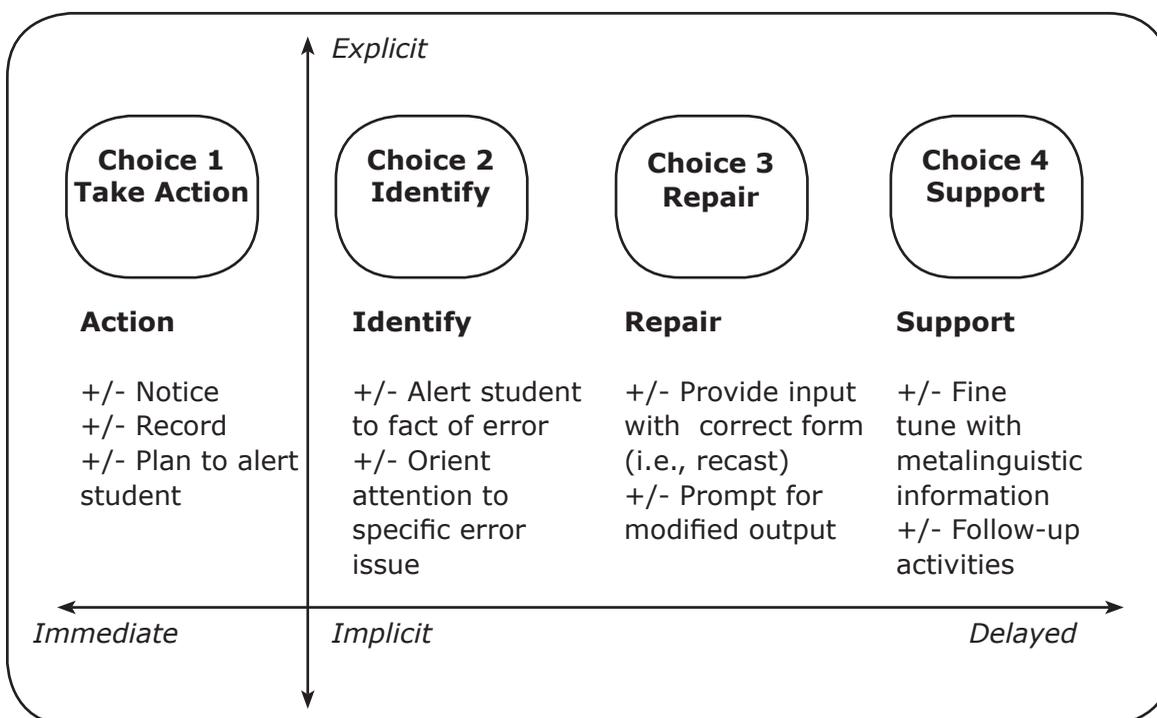
Reading the error feedback research literature, the decisions that teachers must make regarding provision of oral feedback appear quite simple: (a) do it or not, and (b) choose a type of feedback: recast, prompt, meta-linguistic, or the like. Unfortunately, as most teachers realize, the process is much more complicated. The interaction transcripts above demonstrate that teachers need to consider a number of factors, including the nature of the error, the student, and the potential objectives for providing feedback. Timing of feedback is another critical consideration. Should teachers interrupt the student to correct the error in the most immediately adjacent turn possible, even if this makes the feedback obtrusive and possibly annoying? Or should teachers withhold feedback until the student has finished the utterance, risking the student forgetting factors contributing to the error? The answers to these questions remain for future researchers to determine. However, the answers will depend upon the objectives the teacher holds when deciding to give feedback. For example, within a behaviorist framework, errors must be avoided or else students might develop

bad habits that could be fossilized. This perspective motivated teachers of the Audiolingual Method to limit student talk and strive to correct every error. Teachers influenced by a Communicative Approach, however, in order to promote student talk and reduce anxiety, emphasize that mistakes are OK and limit error correction. Still, there are many possible objectives one might have when providing feedback. Some teachers aim for the student to master the correct form, and may repeatedly require a student to produce the form until perfect, or the teacher wearies from the effort. Alternatively, teachers may set a more modest objective, such as noticing the correct form, or noticing the gap between the correct form and the student's interlanguage (Schmidt, 1986). Other teachers might aim to provide scaffolding or develop the learner's internal criterion of correctness. To each of these potential objectives a different set of feedback behaviors might be appropriate. Moreover, each objective requires its own unique ways for evaluating the effectiveness of the feedback. One size does not fit all.

Admitting that feedback efficacy is dependent on the nature of the error and instructor objectives, means that researchers and teachers need to think about and analyze oral error feedback, not as one-move feedback types, such as recasts and prompts. Rather, a more sophisticated approach is needed that considers the various attributes that the feedback should possess to achieve one's objectives (cf., Allwright, 1975; Chaudron, 1988). Figure 1, below, attempts to move beyond the feedback type discourse and imagines the feedback interaction as a series of decisions that taken together infuse feedback with a variety of attributes. These decisions occur on a time continuum, allowing feedback to occur immediately in the turn following the error or at some delayed time period. There is also an attribute continuum regarding the implicit versus explicitness of the feedback: the more teachers choose to include in the feedback interaction, the more explicit the feedback. Once the decision to provide feedback is made, the remaining decisions are not dependent on one another. That is, if teachers choose not to identify the error, or the fact that an error has been made, a repair is still possible, but it would be implicit, such as a recast, or a comprehension check. It is even conceivable that a teacher forgo identifying and repairing the error, and yet in a later class follows-up with discussion of the form, or gives an assignment that requires students to use the form. Thus, a recast could be more or less explicit depending on whether: (a) the error is identified, (b) the repair process is noticed as such, and (c) the feedback interaction is supported with a follow-up activity. Depending on a teacher's decision at each of these points, oral error feedback interactions could vary in at least six attributes or more.

The decision to identify the error, for example, yields at least two important attributes to an error feedback interaction. One is the identity of the error, which may be specifically pinpointed or left for the students to determine on their own. A second attribute is whether or not the feedback interaction explicitly identifies the fact that an error was made. Recasts, for instance, typically provide students a model of the correct form in a turn adjacent to their ill-formed utterance, and yet may offer no evidence that an error was committed. In fact, the usual complaints about recasts, that they are ambiguous or difficult for learners to recognize as feedback (i.e., Lyster, 1998; Lyster and Ranta, 1997) arise because the identification of the error may not be an attribute of the interaction. Doughty and Varela (1998), considering this attribute important, designed recasts in their study that clearly identified the errors. There are two factors to consider regarding error identity: (a) alerting students that an error was made, and (b) drawing their attention to the exact nature of the error. The more that teachers focus on doing this identification, the more students will notice the error feedback, and the more explicit the feedback becomes. Explicit versus implicit feedback is an area that has attracted much research interest (for an overview, see Ellis, et al, 2006). The

typical feedback type approach, however, has unfortunately obscured inquiry in this area. For example, researchers tend to interpret recasts as implicit feedback and take prompts or elicitations for explicit, regardless of how teachers handle the error identification attribute, not to mention the support issues. Consequently, the recasts of Lyster and Ranta's (1997) study and those of Doughty and Varela's (1998) research are not the same thing at all. As a result, one must be very careful when reading the error feedback literature because it is difficult to know the true characteristics of error feedback categorized into convenient, but untrustworthy, types. Regardless of the research issue, the important takeaway is that teachers can increase and decrease explicitness via the identification attribute in feedback interactions, and by the other choices they make.



**Figure 1.** Error Feedback Attributes Model

The main benefit of this attributes model is that it highlights choices available to teachers that allow them to customize feedback for the specific needs of the learner. For students who demonstrate a great degree of anxiety and discomfort about oral error feedback, for instance, teachers might provide recasts or prompts with little or no identification of the error. While for students who possess confidence, teachers might more boldly identify the fact an error was committed and, possibly, the specific nature of the error.

The power of considering feedback from an attributes model rather than a feedback type approach comes in the recognition of more decision points for tailoring oral error feedback to individual learner needs. After dispensing with the identification issue, teachers can focus on repair. Repairs, like the identification attribute, include at least two options: (a) providing input, or a correct model, and (b) requiring student modified output, or production. As with the identification attribute, the teacher could use neither, one, or both. If repair is undertaken, the goal is to fix the form, which students may or may not explicitly notice. Recasts are the quintessential example of how teacher provide repair with input. Prompting students to modify their utterance, with confirmation checks, comprehension questions, or via repeti-

tion is an alternative to recasts. Teachers sometimes use both techniques in the same error feedback interaction (Margolis, 2007).

The final decision points in this Error Feedback Attributes Model regard providing support for the learning that potentially occurred during the feedback interaction. This support could be seen as schema building, that is, helping learners connect the new information to what they already know. One way is through fine-tuning (Doughty, 1993; Han, 2001), explaining, for example, that modals never take tense and do not act like other verbs. Follow-up activities, such as error feedback logs or revisiting an error at a later time might also support student learning.

These three decision points offer opportunities to teachers, opening error feedback interactions to a variety of unique attributes, avoiding the one size fits all limitations of feedback type models. The model also recognizes that time itself is an important attribute to consider. Feedback can be immediate or delayed. It can also be a brief interaction or a lengthy one. Adding these attributes and three sets of decisions to the error feedback repertoire expands the ability of teachers to provide meaningful feedback to oral errors.

### **EVALUATING FEEDBACK EFFECTIVENESS**

Researchers use post-tests or counts of learner uptake to measure the effectiveness of error feedback. These techniques, however, may be of only little use to teachers, given that curriculum goals and the moment-to-moment lesson management constraints may draw attention away from specific errors. Yet, if teachers cannot determine the efficacy of their own error feedback strategies, how can they be certain that time devoted to error feedback is not wasted?

One way to address error feedback is to discuss it with students. For higher levels, having students write or talk about good and bad language learning experiences might raise the issue. For lower levels, a checklist or survey might help discover learner attitudes toward oral error feedback. Another tried and true approach is to videotape or audiotape the class. Then, the teacher can (a) listen to it alone and make her own assessments about the feedback interactions, (b) ask a colleague to listen and discuss the feedback interactions together, and / or (c) have the students listen and comment about the interactions. Any of these approaches will help identify attributes of stronger and weaker error feedback interactions. Alternatively, keeping a record of oral error feedback interactions and the forms they addressed allows the teacher to create follow-up activities that will provide information about the feedback's efficacy. These techniques can identify qualities that make a teacher's error feedback have greater impact, but whether the error feedback in fact advances second language acquisition remains difficult to ascertain. Studies that find evidence for error feedback efficacy generally focus their feedback on a limited set of select forms, repeat the attention to these forms often, and engage students in practice that requires use of these forms.

If teachers consider ways to evaluate their own oral error feedback interactions, this attention alone is bound to lead to improvement. Keeping in mind, moreover, that feedback choices are not limited to a type, such as prompt or recast, opens many choices for teachers, including identification of the error, repair options, and support, as discussed above. The critical issue for consistent effective oral error feedback is to recognize the individual student needs at the time of the error and carefully select the feedback attributes most appropriate to the moment.

## AUTHOR

Douglas Paul Margolis received his doctorate in second language acquisition from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He has taught classes in language analysis, teaching methods, assessment, error feedback, and second language acquisition. He is currently interested in pronunciation curriculum development and assessment. Email: dougmargolis@gmail.com.

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## WHO ARE MINNESOTA'S ADULT ESL PRACTITIONERS?

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### ABSTRACT

Adult Basic Education (ABE) at the Minnesota Department of Education and the ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System (ATLAS) at Hamline University are collaborating to implement a data-driven professional development process that involves collecting and analyzing data, identifying needs and priorities, developing appropriate activities, and evaluating outcomes. Because there existed little data on the over 1200 teachers and administrators who are part of the state ABE system, a statewide survey of ABE instructors and administrators was administered to collect data necessary to inform the design and delivery of relevant and meaningful professional development. Nearly 700 practitioners responded to the survey, providing information on the working conditions, classroom challenges and professional development needs of the adult ESL practitioners in Minnesota. Analysis of the data has yielded valuable insights to inform professional development planning and establish priorities to meet the needs of practitioners working with literacy-level through advanced-level ESL instruction.

### INTRODUCTION

The mission of Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Minnesota is to provide adults with educational opportunities to acquire and improve their literacy skills necessary to become self-sufficient and to participate effectively as productive workers, family members, and citizens. To be eligible for ABE, an individual must be at least 16, not enrolled in secondary school, and functioning below the 12th grade level in any of the basic academic areas including reading, math, writing and speaking English. ABE is delivered statewide at over 500 sites located in public schools, workforce centers, community/technical colleges, prisons/jails, libraries, learning centers, tribal centers, and non-profit organizations. Programs offered include GED (General Educational Development Diploma) preparation, adult diploma, basic skills enhancement, workforce education, transition to post-secondary education and employment, citizenship education and family literacy. However, the largest single program area in ABE is English as a Second Language (ESL). In 2008-2009, 32,025 adult learners, or 47% of total enrollees in Minnesota ABE programs, were enrolled in ESL programming (Shaffer, 2009). In addition, many of the learners enrolled in one of the other program areas are also English language learners who continue to need English language support.

In 2008, Minnesota was selected as one of 12 states to receive a technical assistance grant from the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Network, a two-year initiative designed to help states increase capacity providing relevant and effective professional development to those who teach adult English language learners. ABE at the Minnesota Department of Education and the ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System (ATLAS) at Hamline University are collaborating to lead the CAELA initiative in Minnesota, focused on implementing a data-driven professional development process that involves collecting and analyzing data, identifying needs and priorities, developing appropriate activities, and evaluating outcomes. Guided by the *Framework for Quality Professional Development* (CAELA, 2008), CAELA provided a technical assistance team to help facilitate and expand the data-driven professional development process in Minnesota.

Specifically, the *Framework for Quality Professional Development* (Schaetzel, Peyton & Burt, 2007; Young & Peyton, 2008) outlines the following seven-step planning process:

1. Review planned and actual professional development activities from previous planning cycle.
2. Examine and analyze new and existing teacher and student data, and related information.
3. Prioritize professional development topics and activities based on the data and the feasibility of implementation.
4. Identify measurable outcomes of the professional development activity.
5. Select appropriate material and staff for the professional development.
6. Write a comprehensive, systematic plan to address practitioner needs that includes appropriate follow-up activities.
7. Establish a sustainable process for carrying these steps out on a regular basis.

Work on the CAELA initiative began in summer 2008 as ABE and ATLAS staff began collecting and reviewing data outlined for steps one and two of the framework. This included the collection of 1) data on past and planned professional development activities, 2) new and existing data on practitioners, and 3) new and existing data on students. Assembling data about past professional development, including the evaluations of past activities and our ideas for future professional development proved straightforward. We were also able to gather a fair amount of data about our ESL learners from reports required of ABE programs, including information on student demographics, attendance, educational levels, performance and employment status.

It was not so easy to find data about practitioners, however, and it was immediately obvious that this represented a significant gap if our goal was to plan professional development for ABE/ESL teachers. Although we knew, for example, that most teaching positions were part-time and that most programs required a teaching license or a college degree in ESL, we had no specific information on teachers' levels of education, years of teaching adult learners, or past teaching experiences.

Thus, a data-driven process of professional development planning clearly required data on the over 1200 teachers and administrators who are part of the state ABE system. This report will share what we have learned from our first action step as part of the CAELA initiative: a statewide survey of ABE instructors and administrators to collect data necessary to inform the design and delivery of relevant and meaningful professional development for adult ESL practitioners in Minnesota. We will briefly outline the survey process, then highlight specific findings relevant to adult ESL teachers and teaching, and share the implications of these results on professional development priorities to date.

## **SURVEY OF ABE PRACTITIONERS**

In fall of 2008, a team of ABE professionals, including the state ABE Professional Development Specialist, ATLAS/Hamline University adult ESL teacher educators, and current ABE/ESL practitioners, met to outline and design a survey to collect information on ABE professionals' work and

training experience, work environments, classroom challenges, and professional development activities and needs. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions, and also asked respondents to identify challenges or particular areas of interest for their own professional development. Specific questions were included that focused on ESL teachers, such as questions about completed coursework in different areas of second language teaching and learning, years of experience teaching ELLs in several contexts, and ESL courses taught within the last five years.

A survey pilot and request for feedback went to CAELA facilitators and ABE professional development coordinators from every region of the state in January 2009. After revisions were made, the online survey (also available in a paper format) was sent to practitioners through local, regional and statewide networks in February 2009. A total of 680 responses were received, representing over 50% of the practitioners in Minnesota. Because of the overwhelming number of responses, a consultant was brought in to help with the analysis of the data. It is important to note that although the survey was created to collect data on all ABE practitioners, this article will highlight only those findings relevant to the professional development needs of adult ESL practitioners (to view the complete survey, see the ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System, 2009; to view the complete report, see Marchwick, 2010).

## **FINDINGS**

### **The Adult ESL Workforce**

Of the 680 practitioners who completed the survey, approximately 80% (544) were classroom instructors while 21% (143) described themselves as program administrators. The majority of respondents, or 58.4%, indicated that they were part-time employees as defined by their programs. About 80% have current teaching licenses, and 95.4% have bachelor's degrees. Nearly 33% (219) plan to retire or leave the field of ABE within the next five years.

Although the analysis is ongoing, the data have already yielded findings critical to a better understanding of the ABE professional workforce in Minnesota. This section will highlight findings from specific survey sections: educational background, teaching experiences, classroom challenges, and professional development (PD) needs, before moving to a discussion of the implications of these data for professional development for teachers of adult ELLs.

### **Professional Background: Education**

#### *Licensure*

By state law, public school ABE programs in Minnesota are required to use K-12 licensed teachers or teachers with a college degree in ESL or related field. It is important to note, however, that the law does not specify the content of that K-12 license. Since the majority of ABE programs in Minnesota are run by school districts, it is not surprising that such a high percentage of ABE practitioners have a teaching license.

In terms of professional background, Minnesota's ABE practitioners come from various sectors within the field of education. Of those who have or are working toward teaching licenses, many have specialized in working with different ages, grades, and content areas. Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents (66%) have training working with children or adolescents but not adults. Only 20% of those with or working toward a license have specialized in adult basic education. An additional 11% have or are working toward a license in teaching ESL.

The remaining 14% of respondents selected the "other" category to best describe the license that they hold or are working toward. Respondents who selected "other" to describe their license were asked to specify what license they held, which resulted in 249 individual responses. These responses were assigned into two groups by: 1) age/grade and 2) content area. As with every part of the survey, any responses labeled non-responsive, or not answering the questions asked, were eliminated. Of the 110 responses assigned to the age/grade grouping, only 9 out of the 110 responses, or 8%, indicated training in working with adults, in this case, parents. The remaining 92% had or were working toward licenses in the pre-K-12 system. A breakdown of the remaining 109 "other" responses focused on a specific area of instruction. The four most frequently named areas were: reading, fine arts, guidance counseling and psychology, and family and consumer science.

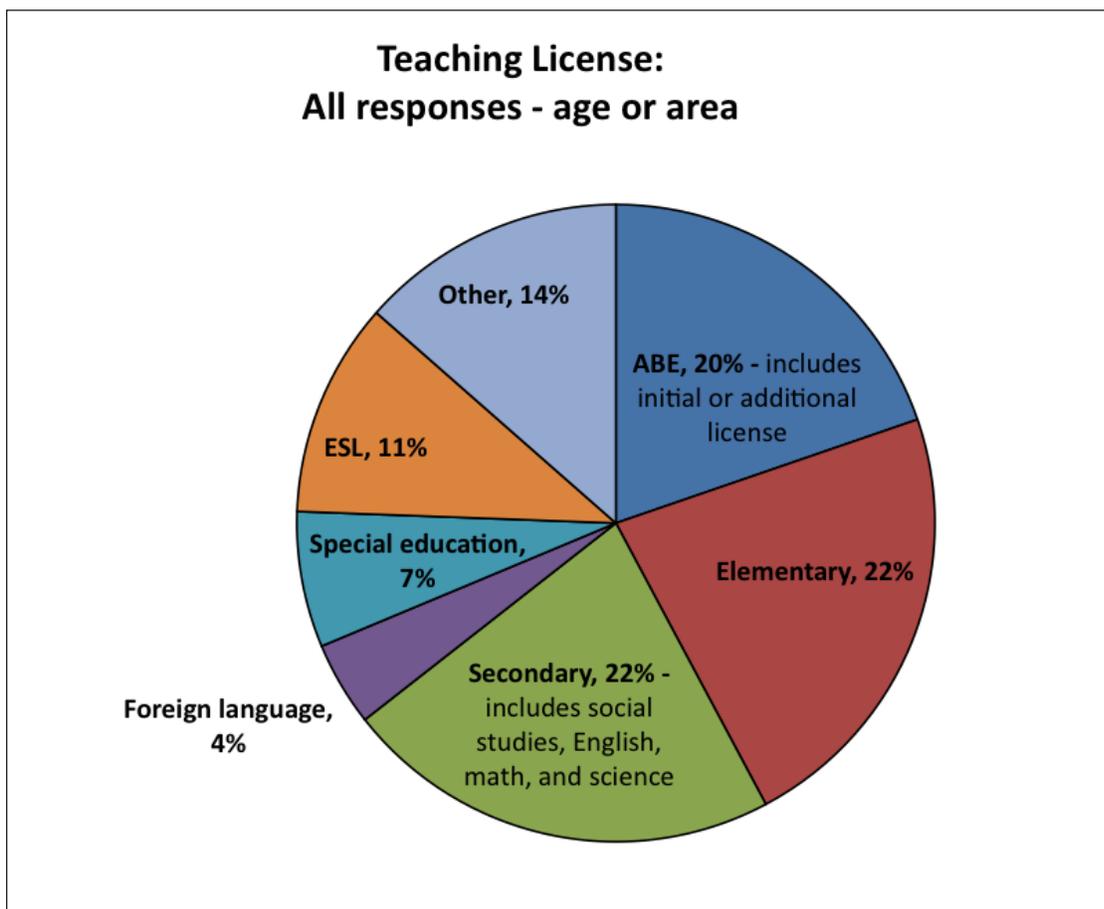


Figure 1. Breakdown of teaching licenses; 725 total responses.

### *Master's Degrees*

The field of ABE professionals in Minnesota are evenly split between those that have or are working toward a Master's degree (50.5%) and those who do not have a Master's degree (49.5%). Figure 2 illustrates that while the largest group of respondents indicated that they have or are working toward a Master's degree in Education, it is unclear if these degrees focused on classroom instruction or another aspect of education (such as administration).

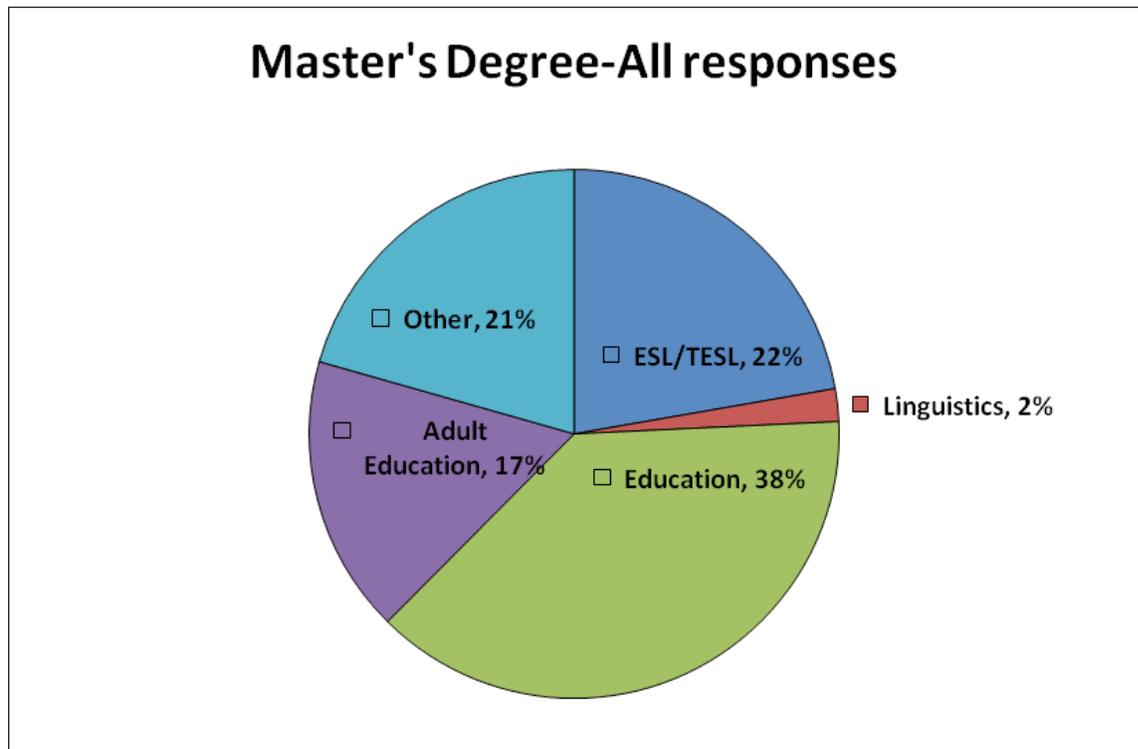


Figure 2. Master's degrees; 602 total responses.

A total of 104 individual comments from the "other" category were also analyzed. The four categories with the highest frequency counts are all in educational fields; however, not all four categories have an instructional focus. See Appendix A for a breakdown of these categories.

### Professional Background: Teaching Experience

Respondents were also surveyed about the types of courses that they had taught during the past five years. The question generated 2,885 individual responses from 549 individuals. On average, each individual respondent has taught approximately five different courses in the past five years. The five most frequently taught courses are listed in Table 1. These frequently taught courses included three ESL courses and two traditional ABE courses (GED/Diploma and Pre-GED).

**Table 1.** Five Most Frequently Taught Courses (1416 of 2,885 individual responses)

Course	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
Intermediate ESL	322	58.7%
Beginning ESL	295	53.7%
GED/Diploma	280	51%
Pre-GED	276	50.3%
Advanced/Transitions ESL	243	44.3%

### **Years of experience with ESL learners**

When looking at responses of those who work with ESL learners, the lack of experience in some settings provides data as interesting as teachers' actual experience. Table 2 provides a view of the highest response categories for the settings: ESL in an Intensive English Program (IEP), adult ESL/EFL in other contexts, and adult ESL in an ABE context.

The data show that respondents seem to have very little experience with ESL learners outside the setting of an adult ESL classroom. Almost 50% of respondents stated that they had between 1-10 years teaching experience working with ESL learners in an ABE context. Sixty-eight percent had no experience teaching ESL in an academic context or IEP, which have traditionally been college preparation programs for ESL learners. In addition, around 53% have no experience teaching ESL or EFL in any other context.

**Table 2.** Highest Response Categories for Years of Teaching Experience with ESL Learners

<b>Academic Setting</b>	<b>Highest response category</b>	<b>Response percentage</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Total respondents</b>
ESL in an IEP	No experience	68%	349	513
ESL/EFL in other contexts	No experience	53.4%	265	496
ESL in ABE context	1-5 years	26.9%	145	539
	6-10 years	22.3%	120	

### **Classroom Challenges**

To help identify professional development needs, instructors were asked to describe the three primary challenges that they face in their classrooms. This was an open-ended question; no preselected categories were given to respondents. This question generated 1,423 individual responses from 454 individuals. Responses were analyzed and placed into 21 categories and 70 subcategories. Twenty of these categories were directly related to classroom instruction.

Figure 3 shows the 20 categories that directly affect classroom instruction and their response counts. The five primary classroom challenges identified by instructors were: 1) lack of program resources, 2) multilevel/need classrooms, 3) irregular student attendance, 4) time, and 5) lack of professional confidence. These are valuable data to identify professional development needs, so these five challenges will be briefly analyzed in the following sections.

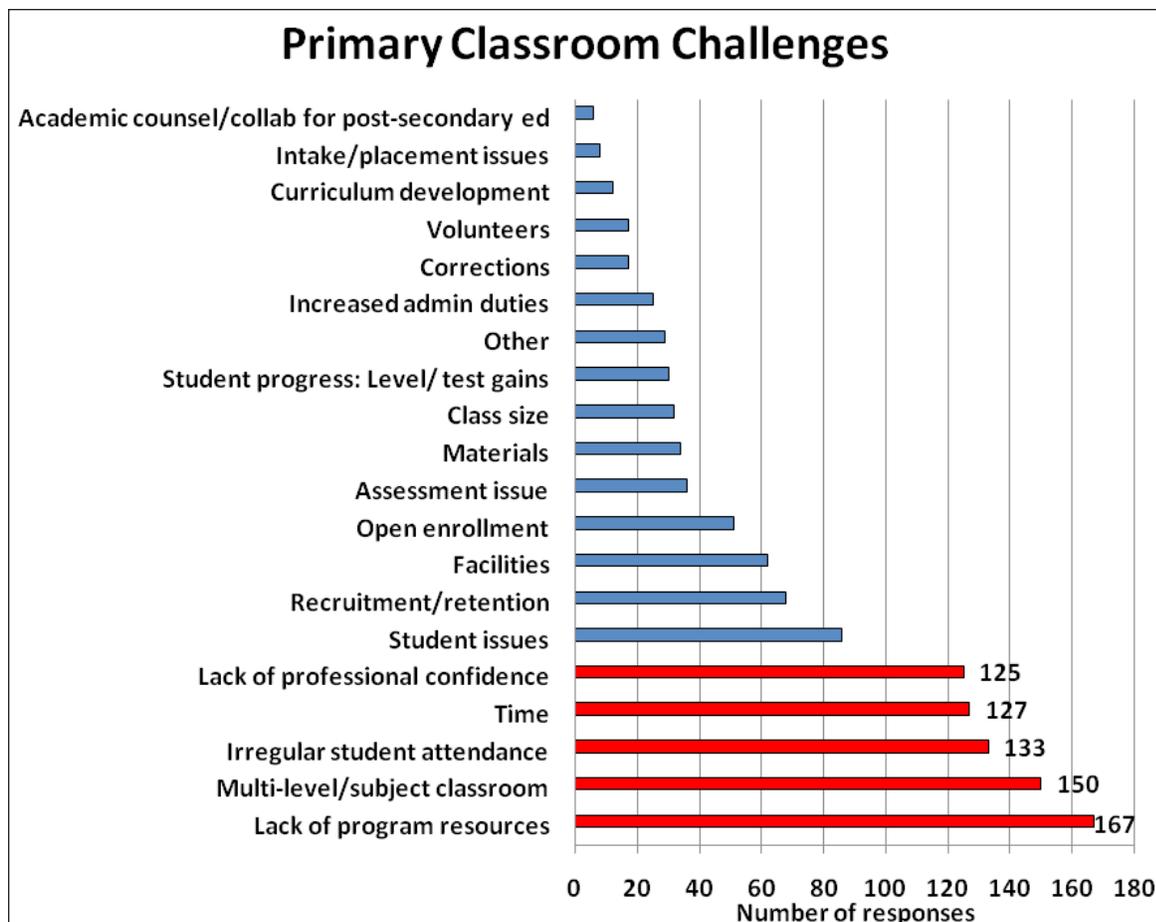


Figure 3. Primary classroom challenges identified in open-ended responses; 1,215 total responses.

### ***Lack of program resources***

When citing a lack of resources as a classroom challenge, instructors wrote primarily about two things: 1) materials, equipment and supplies, and 2) technology. First, respondents cited the need for more textbooks for both students and teachers. For example, one respondent said, "books—our book budget is non-existent every year and we are forced to glean free samples and make copies for all of our classes. It would be nice to have multiple texts of essential materials." A few respondents also referred to a lack of AV equipment such as TV/VCR, overhead projectors, and document cameras.

The other resource reported lacking was technology (computer hardware, software, internet). Twenty-nine percent of those concerned by a program's lack of resources cited technology as their challenge. Comments were primarily focused on the lack of reliable, up-to-date hardware. For example, one respondent said "VERY limited technology!!!! Just now (in FEB) I'll be hauling laptops to our classroom twice a month to use for one day." Survey respondents also expressed a need for more software, as well as increased access to technology at their worksites. Most comments about access were related to a lack of internet access, such as the following, "No Internet access at one of my sites. Not able to tap in to the school's Internet and satellite Internet is too expensive."

### ***Multilevel/need classrooms***

While the vast majority of ABE instructors expressed a general frustration about teaching in multilevel/need classrooms, among these general comments a few themes emerged. When asked to describe their challenge, most wrote simply, "multilevel class" or "wide range of levels within a level." However, many expressed the particular challenge of having pre-literate learners in a class with literate learners. For example, one teacher wrote, "Multilevel classroom, specifically, not having a separate class for Pre-literate." Another said, "I often have pre-lit students mixed in with my Level 1 (low beginning) students. The range is too broad to do either justice." Another theme present among the people who offered general comments was the challenge of students with split skills in the same classroom. One respondent noted, "Teaching ELL students whose speaking and reading abilities are at very different levels, but the students are placed in the same class."

Another theme in the data was the challenge of planning for a multilevel/need class. For example, one person wrote, "Curriculum development for multilevel class." Others wrote about the challenge of creating lessons for multilevel/need classes and finding or differentiating activities that would work for the whole class. An undercurrent of comments about planning was the lack of paid prep-time available to plan for such classes. One teacher wrote, "Lesson planning for all levels, spend too much unpaid time to do a good job."

### ***Irregular student attendance***

Irregular student attendance seems to be the stickiest problem for ABE practitioners to address as this particular challenge, more than any other, is fed by forces outside the classroom. Most comments were very general in nature such as "inconsistent attendance" or "poor attendance" but many comments reflected a belief that two main sources were the cause of this challenge.

One of these was the lack of life stability experienced by many students. For example, one person wrote, "Attendance is not consistent - many of the students are operating in crisis mode most of the time."

The other issue was open enrollment. Open enrollment policies allow students to enroll and drop out of ABE programs at any time, and are the norm in most ABE programs in Minnesota and throughout the country. One of the results of open enrollment and the absence of attendance requirements is that an ABE teacher may have a very different group of students in class each day. Respondents who wrote about open enrollment, along with irregular attendance, seemed to see them as the same problem. For example, one person wrote, "Poor learner's attendance caused by open enrollment." Another wrote, "attendance issues: open enrollment, irregular attendance, tardiness."

Regardless of the source to which respondents attributed irregular attendance, all were frustrated by the effects these issues had on student progress. One instructor put it this way, "Open enrollment as well as students coming and leaving during the class due to job or child care schedules. If I had the same students together for even 6 weeks, we could make so much progress!"

### ***Time***

While multilevel classrooms and irregular attendance were reported more often as challenges, the issue of enough time seems to be a particularly difficult problem for ABE teachers. The primary area of concern centered on the lack of time they have available to plan and prepare for their courses; 31% of respondents in this category listed this as the challenge. Moreover, another 11% of respondents in this category made a direct reference to lack of paid time for preparation and other duties. As one

respondent said, "We only get 12½ minutes of paid prep for every hour we teach. That is way too little time when we have to prep for class, read e-mail, listen to voice mail, call students, do paperwork, etc."

### **Lack of professional confidence**

The final category among the top five classroom challenges for instructors is a lack of professional confidence. The top subcategories for this challenge are illustrated in Figure 4. The largest subcategory in this group is the lack of professional confidence in teaching a certain subject matter or skill. For example, 33% of the 125 respondents stated that they wanted or needed help with specific content such as technology or math.

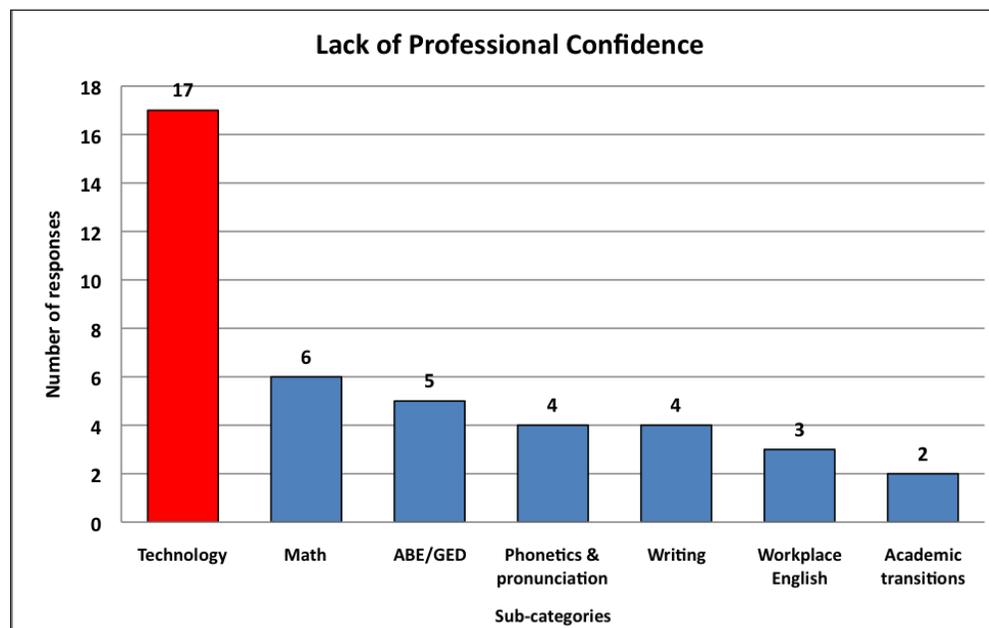


Figure 4. Lack of professional confidence as a challenge for instructors; 41 total responses.

Of those reporting a lack of professional confidence in a content area, technology tops the list. Seventeen of the 41 responses in this subcategory, almost half, refer to a need to improve the use of instructional technology or a perceived deficit in this subject. For example, one person stated, "Using technology in the classroom: It seems there's an expectation that teachers utilize technology, but I'm more comfortable not using it." Some respondents also expressed struggles with effectively integrating technology into ESL instruction, especially for lower levels.

In addition to instructors' expressed lack of confidence in certain subjects, another interesting finding was the lack of practitioners' professional confidence to work with students they knew or suspected to be learning disabled or mentally ill. A number of survey comments focused on diagnosing learning disabilities in ELLs, especially pre and low-level literacy learners. Respondents requested help in diagnosing disabilities in ESL students or in differentiating language learning issues from learning disabilities. One respondent wrote, "How to differentiate LD student from a normal ESL student." Another person went a step further by saying, "How to assess ELL students for learning disabilities and PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and getting them the help they need."

Adapting and improving instruction for students with learning disabilities was also a major theme in remarks made by respondents. Respondents sometimes seemed to label any disability that interfered with learning as a "learning disability," not just those that are traditionally thought of

as learning disabilities. For example, one respondent wrote, "mental health needs of refugees & how to take this into consideration when designing lesson plans/teaching strategies, without feeling crippled by the students' mental health needs." Several comments also dealt with the complexity of teaching ESL to students who also have disabilities that affect learning, such as this comment from a respondent about the challenge of teaching ESL to blind students, "strategies for teaching blind students in the visually-centered ELL world where nearly every text book bases the lesson on a picture or pictures."

### Professional Development Needs

Finally, survey respondents were asked to describe their professional development (PD) needs and interests in two areas: program and instructional. Each question was divided into many categories from which respondents could choose topics. Program area categories targeted the needs and interests of those teaching in specific ABE course strands such as literacy level ESL, GED, workforce education, family literacy and so on. Instructional area categories included approaches to educating adult learners, curriculum/lesson planning, and other student or teaching issues that affect learning and its outcomes. For each question, respondents were asked to select the three areas that they would most like to see addressed through PD activities, then to offer specific training topics related to those areas.

#### PD needs by program area

The responses of ABE teachers concerning specific program areas illustrate just how much ESL is taught in the ABE system. Respondents were given fourteen categories from which to select; 407 respondents provided 936 individual responses. Three of the top five highest response categories were ESL program areas: 1) low/intermediate ESL, 2) literacy-level ESL, and 3) advanced ESL (Figure 5). These three program areas combined account for 35% of all responses to this question and represent the largest percent of responses. Results for these three ESL program areas will be described in detail.

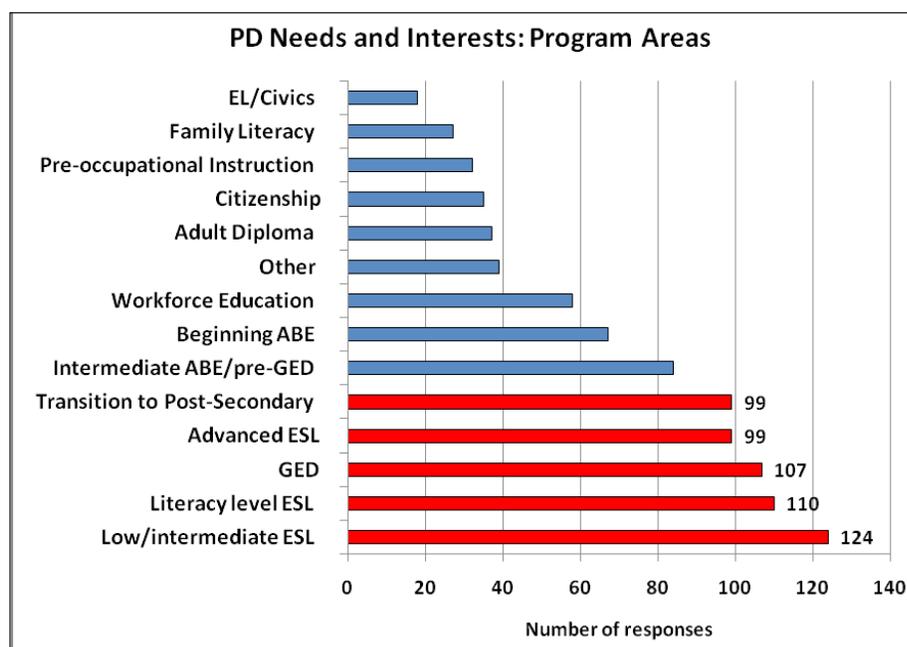


Figure 5: PD needs and interest listed by program areas; 936 total responses.

### ***Low/intermediate ESL: Needs and interests***

Perhaps because beginning and intermediate ESL are the two most commonly taught classes in the state's ABE system, low/intermediate ESL was the number one program area indicated by teachers for PD. About 30% of respondents provided 179 individual comments about their PD needs and interests for low/intermediate ESL. These comments were sorted into 14 categories and 37 sub-categories. Most categories were very small receiving fewer than 10 comments. One category received the vast majority of comments – PD for teaching a specific skill and curriculum for this program area.

### ***Low/intermediate ESL for a specific skill: Sub-categories***

The results showed an overwhelming interest in one category: PD for teaching a specific skill. Sixty two percent of all comments, or 107, referred to a specific skill. These responses were divided into eleven sub-categories. The breakdown of this category into sub-categories indicates respondents have a strong interest in PD activities related to reading and writing (see Appendix B for details and sub-categories).

A third of comments (35) cited the desire for training in teaching reading to low or intermediate level ESL students. Most comments referred to a general desire for "reading strategies." Other comments requested help teaching learners how to make meaning out of what they read. For example, one person wrote, "How to help students actually read and understand" while another stated, "attaching literacy to meaning."

The other major skill requested for low/intermediate ESL was writing and its sub-skill, spelling. Twenty-six percent of comments (28) focused on writing or spelling. Most comments reflected a general desire for "writing strategies" or "writing activities." However, some requests were more targeted. For example, one person wrote, "teaching sentence-level and paragraph-level writing skills." Another wrote, "sentence structure, mechanics of writing."

### ***Literacy-level ESL needs and interests***

The program area with the next highest response count was literacy-level ESL. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents to this question, or 110, indicated a desire for PD in this area. These 110 individuals provided 144 individual comments on the PD topics they would like to see addressed. These comments were sorted into 13 categories and 29 sub-categories. Three comments that fell into the non-responsive category were eliminated. Of the 12 remaining categories only two received 10% or more of all comments. They were PD for a specific skill and curriculum for literacy-level ESL.

### ***Literacy-level ESL: A specific skill and its sub-categories***

Once again, ABE practitioners wanted more PD on teaching a specific language or academic skill to literacy-level ESL students. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of comments in this category were a call for PD in reading and some of its sub-skills – phonics and high-frequency/sight words. As Figure 6 illustrates, thirty-six comments, or 61% of all comments in this category, expressed an interest in this group of skills. Most comments were general requests for "reading" or "making use of both phonics and sight words." However, several people expressed a desire to know how to teach these reading skills specifically to adults. For example, one respondent wrote, "I have never taken a class that teaches me how to

provide decoding instruction for adults.” Comments expressed a similar frustration of those requesting an overview of resources for literacy -level ESL (11) – i.e. the finding and availability of “adult appropriate” materials.

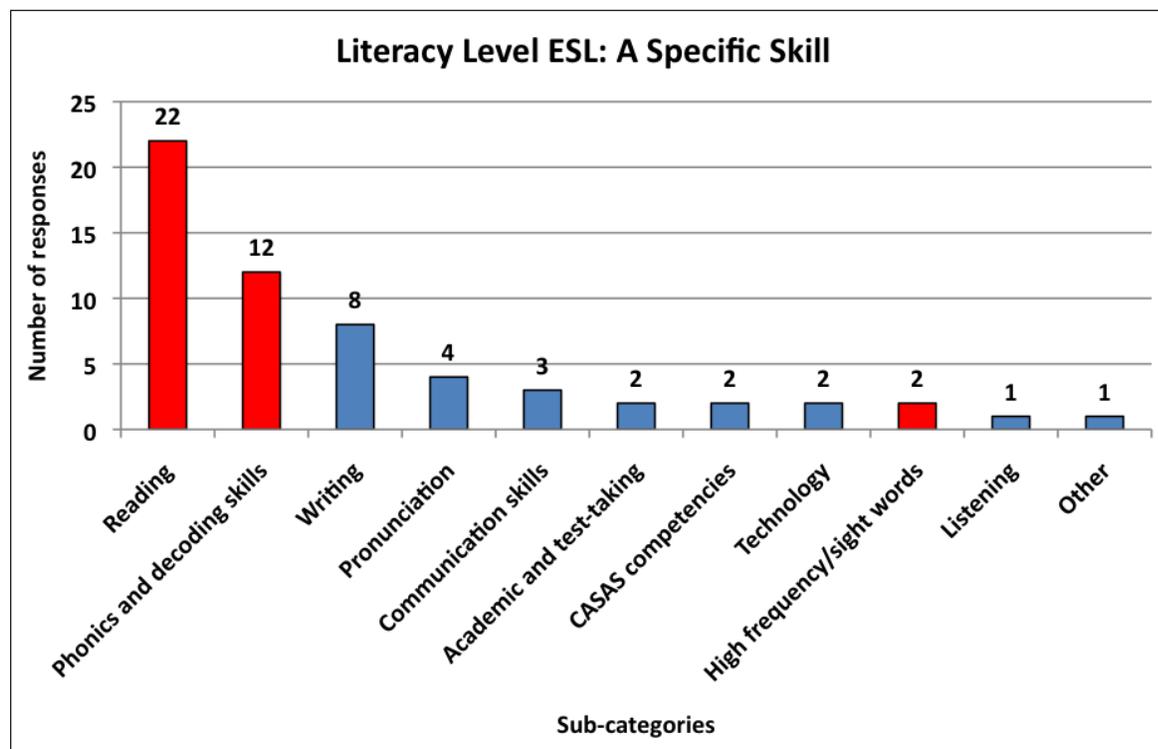


Figure 6: Requested PD needs for specific skills for literacy level ESL.

### ***Literacy level ESL: Curriculum and its sub-categories***

In addition to PD on teaching specific skills more effectively, respondents who selected literacy-level ESL also wanted help with curriculum. Nineteen, or 13% of comments, were about curriculum needs. The number one sub-category under curriculum was program or course design. Most comments reflected a need for first steps when working with literacy-level ESL students. For example, one respondent wrote, “A guide to where to start, what’s most important. A curriculum, I guess.” Another wrote, “How to start with these students. Appropriate goals.”

### ***Advanced ESL: Needs and interests***

The needs of the advanced ESL classroom were also a PD priority for ABE practitioners. Of the 407 people who responded to this question, 99 or roughly 24% indicated that advanced ESL was among their top three PD priorities, and 140 individual comments were generated by this group. Comments were placed in 14 categories and 39 sub-categories.

### ***Advanced ESL: A specific skill and its sub-categories***

Like the other ESL program areas, the PD needs and interests of advanced ESL instructors focused on teaching a specific skill. Almost 50% of comments were requests for PD as it related to a specific language or academic skill, primarily for writing (see Figure 7).

Almost all comments related to writing were very general so it was not completely clear what practitioners want or need from writing-focused PD activities. There were a few specific requests. For example, one person wrote, "writing difficulties on the sentence level (below reading level)." Another wrote, "Writing strategies based on student interests." Finally, a third person commented, "Improving academic skills, teaching writing w/an integrated approach, teaching reading fluency & strategies."

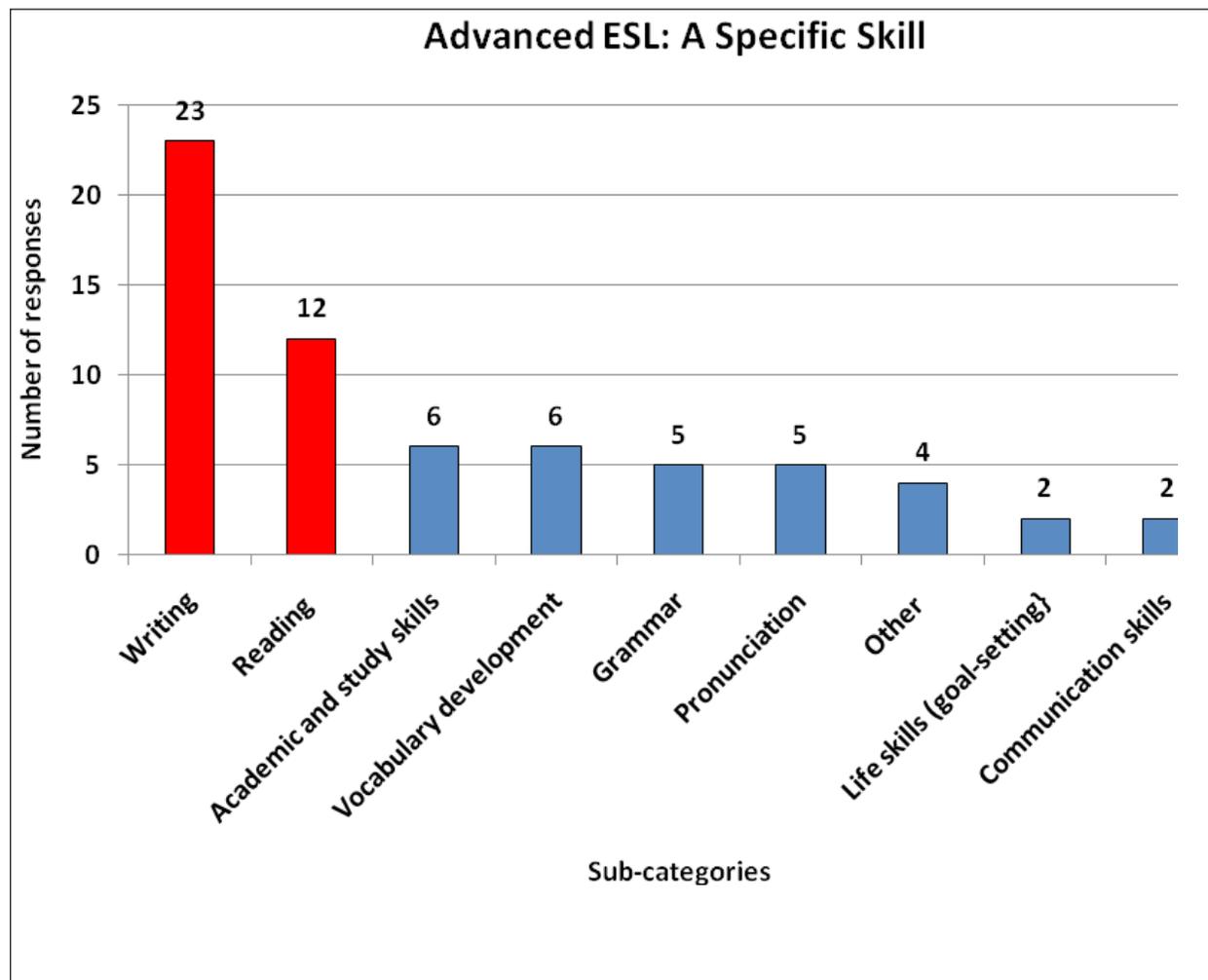


Figure 7: Requested PD needs for specific skills for advanced ESL; 65 total responses.

### ***PD needs by instructional area***

In looking at the instructional areas suggested by respondents, the ABE practitioners' PD needs and interests range from quite basic to quite complex. Sixty-eight percent of all respondents (465 total), provided 1,402 individual responses to this question. Respondents were given 21 categories from which to select. Figure 8 shows a breakdown of the response counts for each category. Curriculum received the largest number of responses with nearly 33% of respondents indicating a need or interest in receiving training on curriculum related issues.

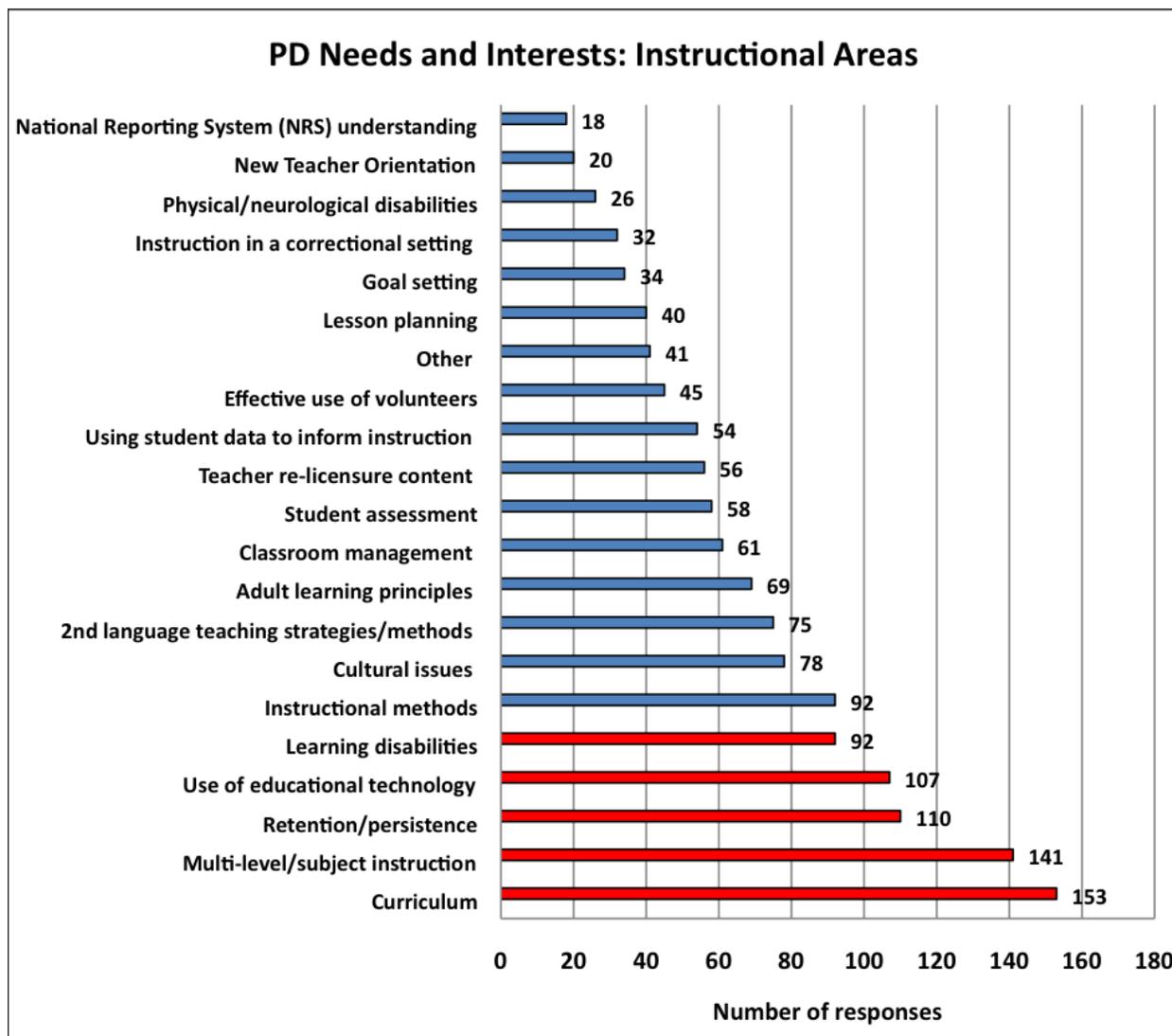


Figure 8: PD Needs and interests listed by instructional areas; 1,402 total responses.

### ***Curriculum needs and interests***

The vast majority of comments regarding curriculum focused on the need for a curriculum to teach a specific subject or for a review of curriculum development basics. There were 178 relevant comments that were classified into 14 categories, 46 sub-categories, and seven super sub-categories. As Figure 9 illustrates, 33% (58) were related to the need for curriculum for a specific subject (see Appendix C for a detailed breakdown of sub-categories) and another 25% (44) were focused on the need to review curriculum development basics.

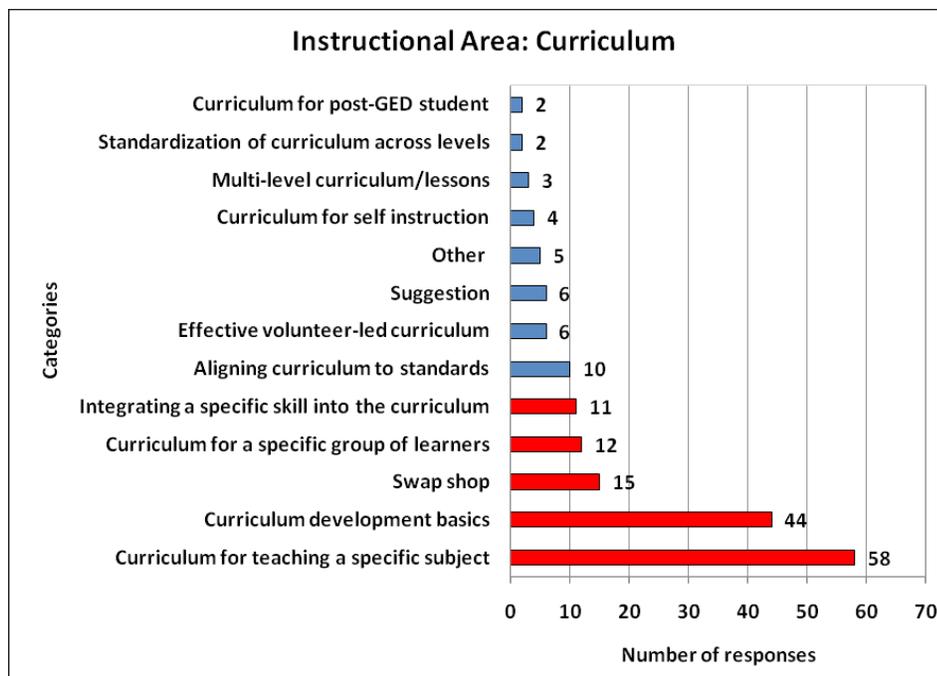


Figure 9: PD needs and interests for the instructional area of curriculum; 178 total responses.

### **Multilevel classroom**

After curriculum, the most requested instructional area for PD was the multilevel classroom. Thirty percent, or 141, of respondents indicated this was an area in which they wanted more PD. These 141 individuals provided 140 relevant responses, which were sorted into 10 categories and 23 sub-categories. Figure 10 shows a breakdown of those responses.

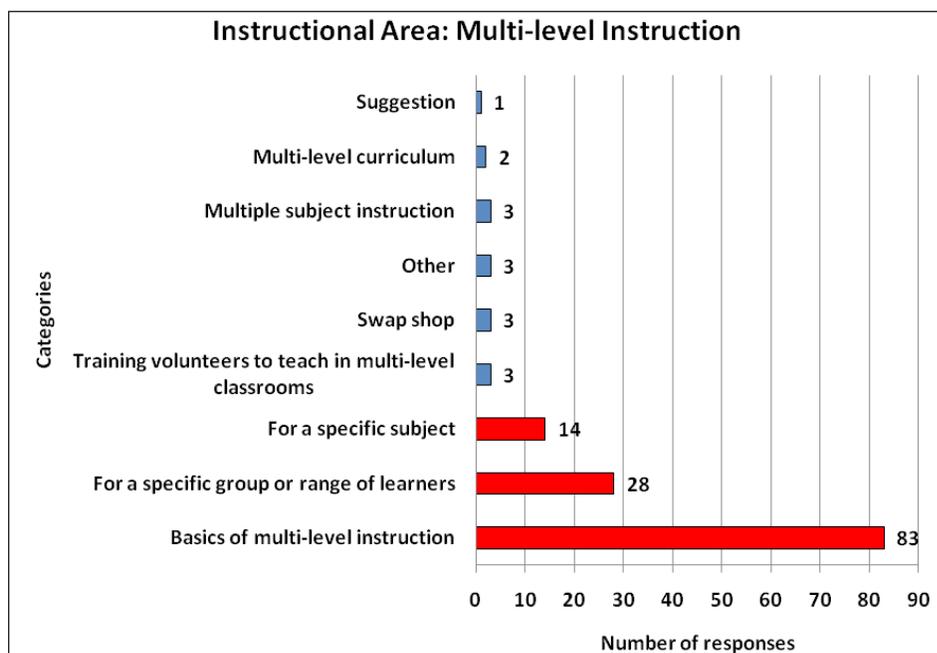


Figure 10: A breakdown of responses for the instructional area multilevel instruction; 148 total responses.

Respondents in this category overwhelming expressed a need for the basics of multilevel instruction. Of the relevant 140 comments, 83, or 61% were about the basics of multilevel instruction, including many focused on instruction for specific learners. A breakdown of responses for multilevel instruction for a specific group or range of learners can be found in Appendix D.

### *Retention and persistence*

The instructional area with the third highest level of interest was retention and persistence. This area dealt primarily with issues related to drop-out, enrollment, attendance, and student responsibility. One hundred and ten people selected retention and persistence as a PD priority and they provided 114 individual comments. Comments from this category were divided into 18 different categories and 15 sub-categories. Figure 11 breaks down the relevant 104 comments into 14 categories.

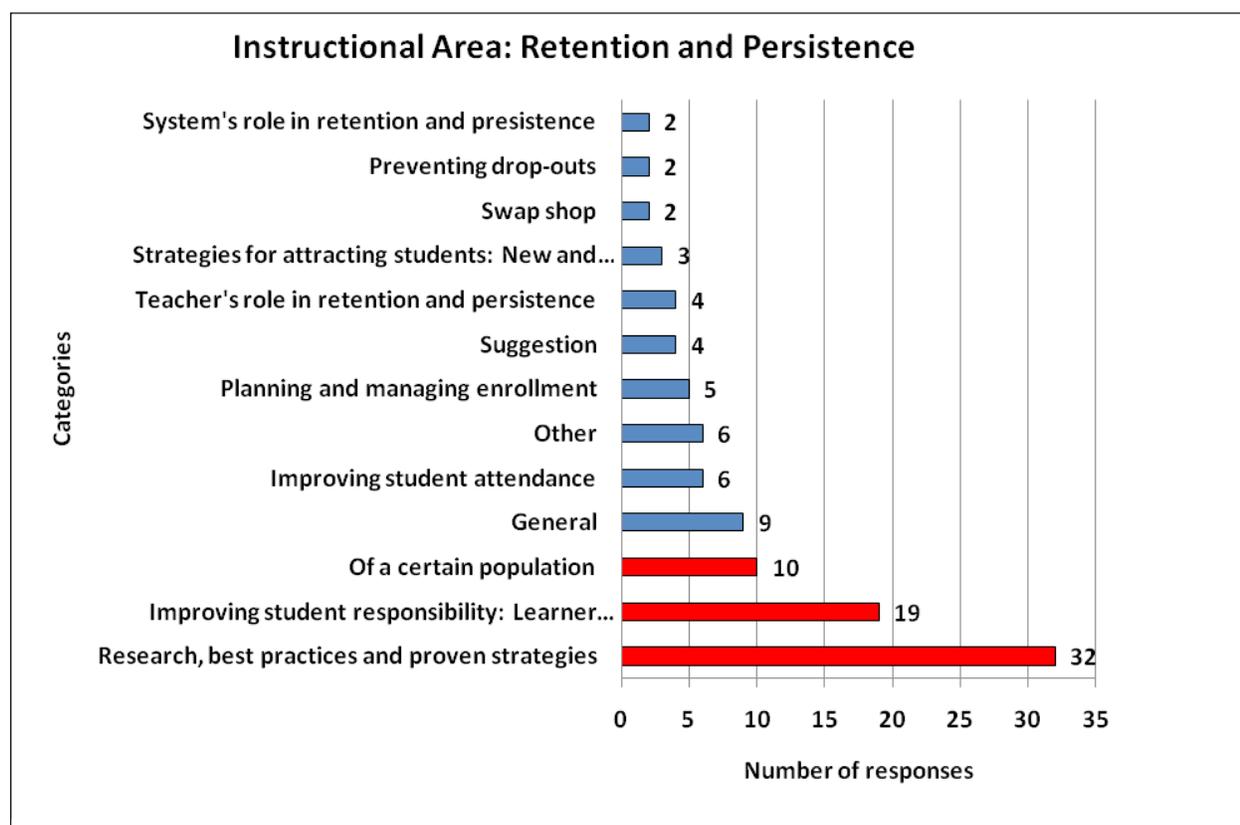


Figure 11: A breakdown of responses for the instructional area retention and persistence; 104 total responses.

### *Retention and persistence: Research, best practices, strategies and learner responsibility*

Comments point to two areas of interest: one focused on institutional response, and the other focused on student behavior. Thirty-one percent of the comments expressed a desire to receive PD on research, best practices and proven strategies currently used to improve student retention and persistence. One individual stated the general theme of PD requested, "How to retain students and stop the revolving door." Another was more specific in his/her request for PD, "Trainings on research, tools and proven practices that lead to retention; NOT a discussion about why we have trouble retaining students."

Respondents in this category also wanted PD on improving student responsibility. A total of 19 comments reflected a desire to know how to improve aspects of student behavior such as motivation, goal-setting and students' taking ownership of their learning.

### *Use of educational technology*

The use of educational technology was also an instructional area of high interest among respondents. Nearly 24% of respondents to this question (110 total) ranked it as a high priority for PD. These individuals provided 124 responses that were divided into 14 categories and 29 sub-categories. Figure 12 displays the breakdown of the relevant 115 comments into 13 categories. Many comments focused on a desire for a specific computer program or tool. As one person said, "I don't use the technology I have access to well...it just seems like one more thing to figure out and I need help!" Second, many comments dealt with a desire to see what was new in this area. For example, one person wrote, "The latest and greatest: websites, online learning, using different kinds of technology in the classroom, etc." For a breakdown of these sub-categories, see Appendix E.

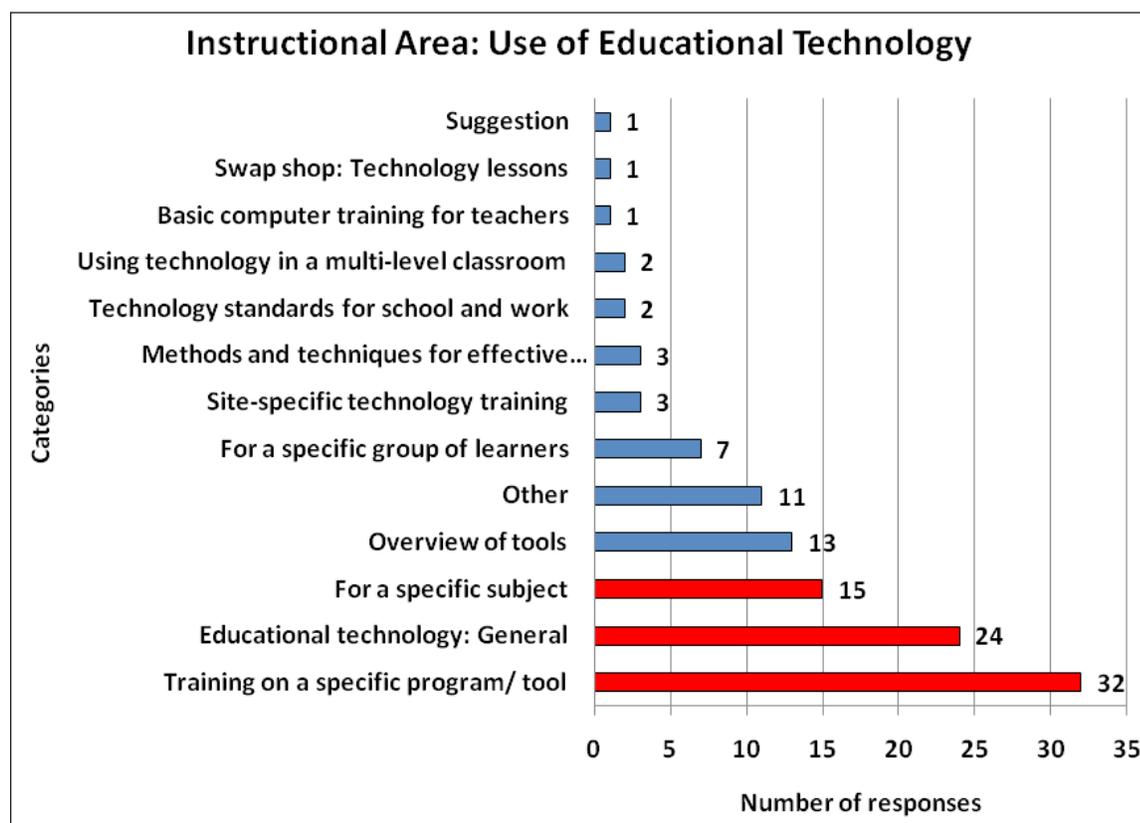


Figure 12: A breakdown of responses for the instructional area educational technology; 115 total responses.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **The ABE Workforce**

The findings from the survey provide many insights into the ABE/ESL workforce and their

professional development needs. To start, and keeping in mind that nearly half of ABE learners enroll in ESL and that beginning, intermediate and advanced/transitions ESL were among the top five most frequently taught courses, it was somewhat surprising to see the breakdown of licenses, Master's Degrees and Certificates related to teaching ESL. Specifically, of the 680 respondents, 12% of respondents (79 people) reported having or working toward a K-12 license in ESL, 10% of respondents (67 people) reported having or working toward a Master's Degree in ESL, and 14% report holding a TESL, TEFL, or Adult ESL certificate.

This means that even though nearly 60% of respondents have taught ESL in the past five years, at best 22% of those that responded to this question have or are working toward either a license or a Master's degree in ESL. Thus, many ESL students are likely being taught by practitioners lacking education and training in second language teaching and learning.

It is also important to note that while about 80% of respondents have current teaching licenses, the majority of those are licenses that focus on working with children or adolescents, not adults. Practitioners holding these licenses may lack training in a number of areas, including adult learning theory or creating and using adult-appropriate learning materials.

Another key finding for our purposes concerns the lack of experience teaching academic English. In the survey, 68% had no experience teaching ESL in an academic context or IEPs. This is meaningful given the state (and national) priority on the preparation of ABE learners to transition into post-secondary education. Increasing research demonstrates the value and need for ABE to shift focus from attainment of a GED to post-secondary education and training for ABE students, including adult ELLs (Prince & Jenkins, 2005; Strawn, 2007). Minnesota continues to move in this direction, with new initiatives and funding for programs to expand transitions work, statewide collaborations between workforce, ABE and the Minnesota College and University system, and the creation of a statewide ABE Transitions Specialist position. To facilitate the transition of students from ABE to post-secondary, it is vital that we have a teaching force prepared to teach higher-level, academic skills. The fact that more than 2/3 of our current practitioners lack experience teaching academic ESL points to an important professional development need.

### **Working Conditions in ABE**

The primary classroom challenges identified by instructors paint a striking picture of the working conditions facing adult ESL practitioners working in the ABE system. A lack of program resources is one key issue – ABE programs are operating on tight budgets and may have limited funds for materials and technology. Program policies and structures can also result in very difficult teaching environments. Often due to limited funding or space, programs may be forced to place students in multilevel classes. Other programs may not have enough students at each level to create leveled classes. Furthermore, because of open enrollment policies and irregular student attendance, many, if not most, ABE practitioners must plan for instruction without knowing which students are going to be in their classes from day-to-day or month-to-month. Finally, a lack of time emerges as a major challenge to planning for and delivering quality instruction. The majority of ABE practitioners are part-time and some may be juggling the responsibilities of their ABE job with another job. Whether it is a lack of paid prep time or a lack of time due to the part-time nature of their ABE positions, practitioners are clearly struggling. It is within this context that we must plan for and deliver professional development to meet the needs of adult ESL practitioners.

## **Adult ESL: PD Priorities and Responses**

The survey results indicate a number of cross-program PD needs and have provided guidance for PD leaders on the needs of adult ESL practitioners. Given the working conditions described above, it is not surprising that multilevel instruction, curriculum, and technology emerge as high priority PD needs in all program areas. Instructors are looking for effective ways to plan for and deliver instruction to groups of learners who may have a wide range of skills, languages, and educational backgrounds. Some of these groups may have a mix of American-born students and ELLs, each with their own needs. Some classes of ELLs may have a wide range of oral and written skills. Classes may also include learners with limited first-language literacy or formal schooling backgrounds, and teachers struggle to help them develop literacy while also meeting the needs of their more literate classmates. To address this, ATLAS and state PD providers continue to increase options for practitioners working with multilevel and multi-subject classrooms. During 2009, working groups convened in several regions of Minnesota to provide a facilitated opportunity for practitioners to explore and share best practices related to the topic of multilevel instruction. This was well-received and similar work is planned for the future.

Curriculum is another key area for professional development. Many practitioners are feeling challenged by limited program resources and are looking for curriculum and materials to teach a specific subject. They are also seeking guidance on how to develop curriculum. It may be that some of the requests for PD on curriculum are due to a lack of direction on curricular content at the statewide or program-level. At this time there are no content standards for ABE in Minnesota, but a statewide committee of ABE practitioners is currently exploring the possibility of a statewide curricular framework. The adoption of ABE content standards in the future may provide some much needed support to practitioners, while creating new professional development challenges of its own.

Another priority area that spans all program areas is technology. The survey results indicate that practitioners lack confidence in using educational technology and want training in a variety of programs and tools. While some are challenged by a lack of technology in their classrooms, others indicate that they do not know how to use the technology that is available to them. The area of technology is of the growing importance because ABE students also need to build their own skills and comfort with technology in order to be successful in today's workplace and in post-secondary education. In order to take full advantage of technology as a planning and instructional tool, and to adequately prepare their learners for transitions to work or further education, practitioners will need ongoing PD opportunities and support. ABE professional development providers, including ATLAS, the Minnesota Literacy Council and the St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium Distance Learning Project, are currently collaborating to coordinate PD for technology. This includes better integration of technology in all PD delivery, focused expansion of PD offerings on the subject of technology, and potential partnership with Project IDEAL (Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners), based at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and focused on distance education for adult learners, to facilitate a year-long project to deliver PD for effective online teaching and learning.

In addition to these overarching PD needs, a number of needs specific to ESL programming emerge from the survey data. It is not surprising that literacy-level ESL instruction is key concern among practitioners. Minnesota's immigrant/refugee population is unique in that two of the largest groups, Somali and Hmong, include many adults who have limited literacy skills in their home languages and in English. In addition, ABE classrooms also include other foreign-born adults from a variety of language backgrounds and countries who have had limited

formal schooling in their home countries and have not had the opportunity to develop strong literacy skills. Many practitioners are not sure how to approach instruction for low-literate adults. They are looking for guidance in a number of areas, including instructional strategies for literacy skills as well as level-appropriate curriculum and materials. Again, ATLAS and leaders at the state level have commenced multiple initiatives to meet these needs, drawing on local experts in working with literacy-level and students with limited formal education. The PD options include workshops, extended learning opportunities through the annual Adult ESL Institute at Hamline University, and study circles for teachers of literacy-level learners.

At the other end of the spectrum, advanced ESL instructors are also seeking training on literacy instruction, with the majority of their requests focused on teaching writing. With increasing pressure to prepare students for transitions to postsecondary and most ABE practitioners' lack of experience teaching in academic settings, significant PD targeted at advanced ESL will be needed in the coming years. This is being addressed in multiple ways, including targeted advanced-level/transitions focused workshops at the annual Adult ESL Institute and the ABE Transitions to Work and Postsecondary conference held each year in the fall. Also, ABE PD leaders have begun to increase communication and coordination with ESL and developmental education colleagues working within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system to: 1) raise awareness of the skills needed for ABE students to succeed in post-secondary education and 2) provide ABE teachers with tools and instructional strategies to improve the academic readiness of all ESL students. With the growing emphasis on preparing learners to transition into post-secondary education, this collaboration is likely to grow in the future.

Probably because most ESL students in Minnesota ABE programs fall into beginning or intermediate levels, there were many requests for PD in the low/intermediate ESL program area. They, too, are most interested in learning more about teaching reading and writing. It is notable that at all levels of ESL, practitioners feel that they need more training in literacy instruction. This may be a result of a variety of factors, including gaps in teacher training and an understanding that students moving on to GED and post-secondary will need strong reading and writing skills to succeed.

For each of these priority areas, state ABE and ATLAS staff are developing plans for professional development that will outline desired outcomes and corresponding PD activities to be conducted over the next two years. Professional development activities in these areas will be carried out at the statewide, regional, and local levels by professional development providers and practitioners in the field.

### **Systemic Change**

In addition to the development of statewide plans to address the priority areas, other findings from the study may have an impact on ABE in the state. Although our focus has been on the collection of data needed to inform our professional development work with teachers and administrators, other larger systems issues have been identified through this analysis. For example, open enrollment and corresponding unpredictable student attendance are huge challenges for programs and practitioners. Open enrollment, which emerged historically to meet the needs of a working population of English-speaking adult learners seeking to earn a GED, continues to be the most common program model in ABE. Research supports the survey respondents' concerns about open enrollment as a contributor to "attendance turbulence" (Sticht, McDonald, & Erickson, 1998) that undermines classroom commitment and instruction. Because students are allowed to come and go, they do not feel a sense of obligation to the teacher or commu-

nity with other students. For teachers, it is difficult or impossible to plan and present lessons sequentially and systematically. For anyone familiar with ESL teaching, it is clear to see how open enrollment policies can become an impediment to ELLs and the successful acquisition of English. A result of this survey finding, combined with emerging research that argues for the replacement of open enrollment in ABE with regularly scheduled entry points (known as managed enrollment) to increase student attendance and retention, has led to state encouragement and assistance for programs considering the transition to managed enrollment.

One of the key current professional development initiatives in ABE has also contributed to a recent shift toward managed enrollment. This very successful reading initiative – Student Achievement in Reading, or STAR – targeted at native-English speaking intermediate level readers, has had a profound impact on the structure of ABE programs throughout Minnesota. As a required component of the STAR reading reform initiative, programs have created managed enrollment for STAR classes, for periods as short as 4 weeks. The success of STAR, including the progress made by students in this more stable learning environment, has prompted multiple ABE programs to move toward instituting some type of managed enrollment for classes, including ESL. We expect this trend to continue.

## **CONCLUSION**

Clearly, the overall lesson from the survey is the value of using current data to inform our PD efforts and meet the needs of practitioners. The survey results of ABE practitioners have yielded valuable information that will focus our work designing and delivering relevant and meaningful PD across the state. The development, implementation and analysis of the survey has been a labor-intensive but extremely valuable process that has led to new insights and a much more complete picture of our ABE workforce. It is a critical component of our PD planning cycle, and future plans include: 1) smaller-scale, focused follow-up surveys to provide more insight on specific challenges and needs, such as the specific writing challenges that teachers face, 2) a similar statewide survey to be conducted on a regular 5-year cycle, and 3) improving our PD evaluation methods to collect data about the effectiveness of PD and to cycle this information back into our PD planning in a meaningful way. Finally, we are currently analyzing the data collected from ABE program administrators, and those results will then be used to inform the development of relevant PD for managers and supervisors working with ESL teachers in the field.

## **AUTHORS**

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Astrid Liden, the ABE Professional Development Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education, has worked as an ESL instructor, teacher educator, and ABE program manager. Her interests include effective instruction for low-literate adult second language learners and the development of strategies to strengthen and evaluate the impact of professional development.

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## APPENDIX A

*Master's degrees: Other Responses (of 97 individual responses)*

Categories	Number of responses
Counseling/psychology	17
Special education	14
Other educational field	13
Educational administration or leadership	9
Other non-educational field	9
Second languages and cultures	8
International field	4
Public policy	4
Curriculum and instruction	3
Human and workforce development	3
MBA	3
Religious studies	3
STEM field	3
Applied linguistics	2
Social work	2

## APPENDIX B

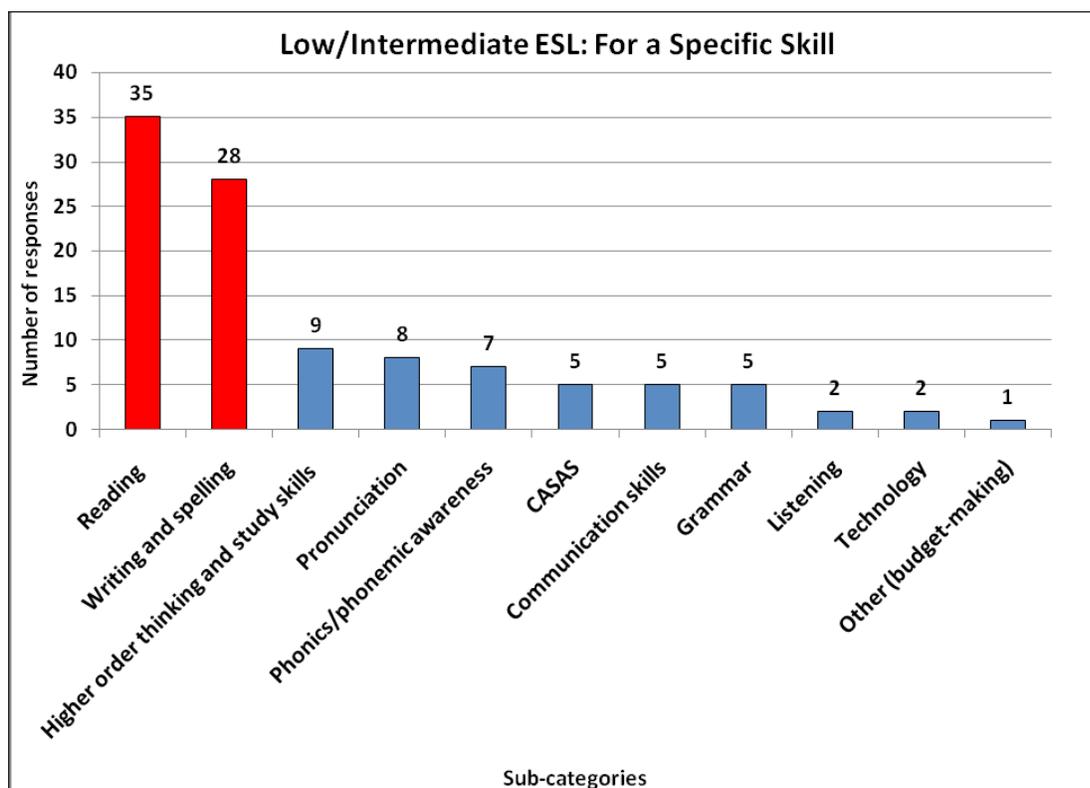


Figure B1: Requested PD needs for specific skills for low/intermediate ESL; 59 total responses.

## APPENDIX C

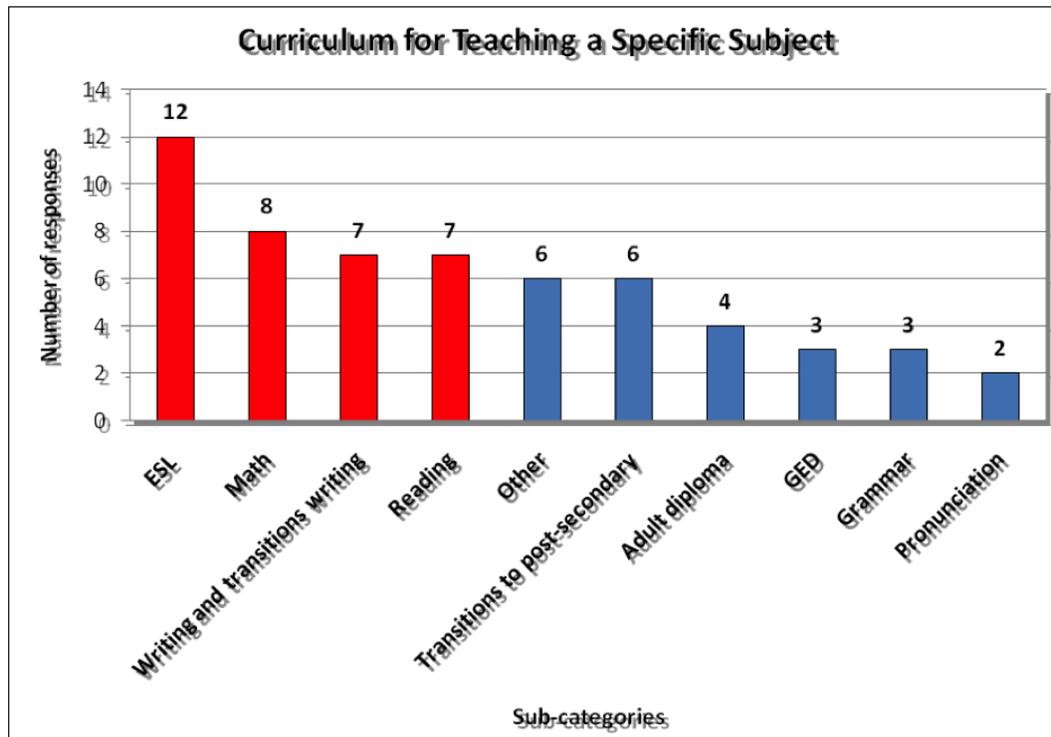


Figure C1: Subcategories of requests for curriculum for a specific subject; 58 total responses.

Note: High-response categories related to ESL included swap shops and curricula for specific groups of learners. In the category of swap shop, providers want to see a swap shop for effective curriculum (10), some specifically indicating a desire for the sharing of effective curriculum for ESL (2). Practitioners also requested curriculum for specific groups of learners (12) with most indicating a need for an effective curriculum with which to work with pre-/low literate learners (6 of 12).

## APPENDIX D

### *Subcategories of Responses for Multilevel Instruction for a Specific Group of Learners*

Sub-category	Count
ESL general	6
Pre-lit to beginning ESL learners	6
Other	5
ESL students with native speakers	4
Low- to mid-level learners	3
Low to advanced learners	2
Advanced to transitional level learners	2

## APPENDIX E

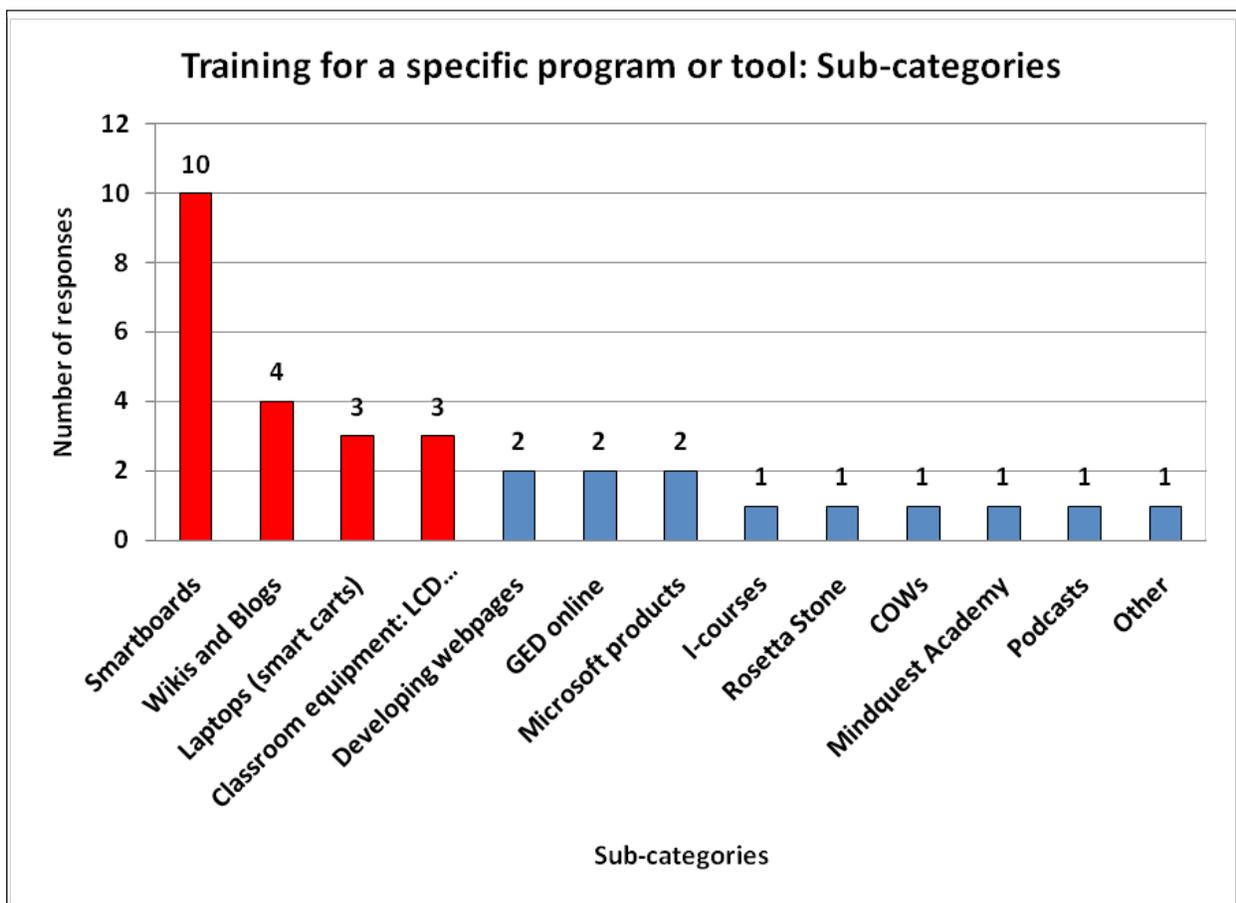


Figure E1: Breakdown of the category of a specific program or tool into its subcategories; 32 total responses.

## **RELATING LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES TO BLOOM'S TAXONOMY: HOW TO TALK TO YOUR MAINSTREAM COLLEAGUES ABOUT LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES**

Deirdre Bird Kramer  
Cynthia Lundgren  
Ann Sax Mabbott

### **ABSTRACT**

In response to *No Child Left Behind* (2001) pressures on schools to show that ELLs are making academic progress, many school districts are embracing sheltered instruction. Among other best practices, sheltered instruction requires that mainstream instruction include language objectives that support the content curriculum. Increasingly, ESL teachers are put in the role of coaching their colleagues on how to write language objectives that are linked to content. This article shows ESL professionals how to use Bloom's taxonomy, familiar to most teachers, to help them open the door to collaborative discussion about academic language function and language objectives.

### **ANECDOTAL INTRODUCTION**

*Mariam Salehi has been an English as a second language (ESL) teacher for fifteen years. She has always appreciated her mainstream colleagues' concerns about the performance of the English language learners (ELLs) in their classes, and she has consulted with them on a regular basis. Although the requirement only came when her students were not meeting annual yearly progress standards, she was thrilled when her district started to require professional development in sheltered instruction for ELLs of all teachers.*

*The mainstream teachers in her building learned a lot about working with ELLs during the professional development sessions, but they continued to feel a real unease related to including language objectives in their instruction. Some had gotten the idea that language objectives simply meant making sure that students read, write, speak and listen. Others interpreted language objectives to mean teaching vocabulary, which they felt that they had already been doing for years anyway.*

*Through her own ESL teacher education program as well as years of experience, Mariam had a strong background in linguistics, English grammar and ESL teaching methodology. She wondered how she could help her hesitant colleagues with their attempts to create appropriate language objectives that would support the content objectives in the mainstream curriculum.*

*Most of her colleagues do not have much education in the areas of linguistics or applied linguistics. Most only have a minimal knowledge of a foreign language and have a rudimentary and sometimes flawed idea of how proficiency in a language develops. Mariam wonders how she can help her colleagues craft appropriate language objectives that support the academic language development that ELLs need to master academic content.*

### **MAINSTREAM TEACHERS AND SHELTERED INSTRUCTION**

The above scenario is taking place in schools across the United States. With the pressures that come in conjunction with the No Child Left Behind Act's (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) sanctions for a lack of adequate progress among ELLs, districts are hiring educational consultants to help all teachers learn better practices in working with language minority students (Mabbott, Kramer, &

Lundgren, 2009). Often referred to as SIOP (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008) training, the professional development attempts to impart best practices in working with ELLs. For the purposes of this paper, we will use the more generic, and appropriate term sheltered instruction, as SIOP, coined by Echevarria et al. (2008) refers to sheltered instruction observation protocol, a teaching protocol that is idiosyncratic to their approach and not inclusive of the work by others in the field (see, for example: Herrera & Murry, 2005; Hill & Flynn, 2006; Smiley & Salsberry, 2007).

Professional development in the area of sheltered instruction has undoubtedly been helpful in educating teachers about the needs of ELLs. However, our years of practice as teacher educators and our extensive observations in K-12 schools indicate that most teachers still struggle to meet the language development needs of ELLs. As Mariam Salehi in our introductory scenario realized, we are not likely to be able to give all teachers the background in linguistics and applied linguistics that they would ideally need to work with ELLs. Therefore we need to find other ways to make the principles of academic language development accessible to conscientious teachers.

As ESL professionals, it is our challenge to make a bridge between what competent, well-intentioned mainstream teachers already know to what they need to know about academic language. Our approach builds on what teachers know about content standards, higher order thinking skills (Bloom, 1956) and teaching vocabulary. Through a series of exercises with K-12 texts, we lead them to a point where they recognize that learning English requires more than memorizing words that are easily defined or illustrated. We help them to see the role of sentence and text structure in creating meaning, and how the familiar Bloom's taxonomy represents academic language function. It is our hope that other ESL professionals can build on these examples to help their mainstream colleagues write and teach appropriate language objectives for their content instruction.

### **EXERCISE 1: THE NATURE OF ACADEMIC LANGUAGE**

The following passage is excerpted from a sample passage from the Minnesota Comprehensive Exam reading test, grade 4 (Minnesota Department of Education, n. d.).

#### Bats

Even though they fly, bats do not have feathers. Instead they have fur like many other mammals. Bats do not have actual wings, either... Most bats come out only at night, although some may fly at sunset.

*What essential vocabulary words would you teach students to help them comprehend this passage?*

We have shown this passage to hundreds of teachers, and depending on the teacher's knowledge base, we get very different answers to the question: *What essential vocabulary words would you teach ELLs to help them comprehend this passage?*

Typical responses include: *feathers, mammals, wings, fly, actual* and *sunset*. Typical types of words represented include nouns (*feathers, mammals, wings, sunset*), verbs (*fly*) and adjectives (*actual*).

Teachers with a more sophisticated knowledge of language and how it functions identify *even though, instead, and although* as much more challenging than the nouns, verbs and adjectives identified by their more typical colleagues. However, after some guided thought, the typical teacher also begins to recognize that *even though, instead, and although* are much more diffi-

cult for students to understand than the word *mammal*. *Even though, instead, and although* are not easily defined, and they all indicate some kind of exception. In this passage, the words are used to differentiate bats from other creatures that fly. Through this discussion, teachers begin to understand that such expressions are not easily visualized, and that they are best taught through student interaction with multiple examples of their use. They begin to understand that *even though, instead, and although* are essential to comprehend the passage.

After engaging in this conversation, we introduce the metaphorical terms 'bricks and mortar' (Dutro & Moran, 2003) to our conversation about language. Bricks are the nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives that are relatively easy to explain to language learners. They convey most of the meaning of a text, we can usually show pictures or actions that illustrate them, and they are the most easily learned. However, a text cannot be comprehended without mastery of the mortar, the language that holds the brick together and conveys the function of the language and the relationship of the bricks to each other. To help teachers understand the bricks and mortar metaphor better, we do the following exercise.

### EXERCISE 2: CONTENT AND FUNCTION WORDS

Content Words (Mortar)	Function (signal) Words (Bricks)

In this exercise we ask teachers to go back to Exercise 1, the passage about the bats, and then to place the discussed words in the proper column. *Feathers, mammals, wings, fly, actual* and *sunset* should all end up in the bricks column, and *even though, instead and although* should end up in the mortar column. The exercise can be repeated with other passages until teachers become comfortable with distinguishing the two.

### EXERCISE 3: REMEMBERING BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Learning is most easily accomplished if we can connect new ideas to ones that we already know well. Teacher education programs typically include discussion of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of higher order thinking skills necessary to become an educated person, and it is safe to assume that just about every teacher is familiar with them. This familiarity makes Bloom's taxonomy a wonderful vehicle to get teachers to think more about the academic language needs of ELLs. In the exercise below, we ask teachers to match the thinking skills, which are listed in increasing order of difficulty, to the language functions typically needed to accomplish the skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking Skills	Language Function
___ 1. Knowledge ___ 2. Comprehension ___ 3. Application ___ 4. Analysis ___ 5. Synthesis ___ 6. Evaluation	A. <i>interpret, generalize</i> B. <i>compare, contrast, differentiate</i> C. <i>synthesize information</i> D. <i>evaluate, decide, predict</i> E. <i>define, list, label</i> F. <i>describe, report, paraphrase, explain</i>

The correct answers are indicated below.

Bloom's Taxonomy Paired with Typical Language Functions

1. Knowledge – define, list, label
2. Comprehension – describe, report, paraphrase, explain
3. Application – interpret, generalize
4. Analysis – compare, contract, differentiate
5. Synthesis – synthesize information
6. Evaluation – evaluate, decide, predict

Going back to the sample reading about bats, we recall that it requires the reader to differentiate bats from other animals that fly. The text above reminds us that differentiating requires the thinking skill of analysis. And, we can also recall that the language used to convey this analysis were the words *even though*, *instead* and *although*.

#### EXERCISE 4: LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

So far, we have tied the notion of the mortar of language to topics familiar to teachers, Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking skills and language function as described by words such as compare, contrast, and differentiate. But, we still need to help teachers formulate their language objectives. The following should help.

<b>Content Objective</b>	<b>Bloom's Skill and Language Function</b>	<b>Mortar words</b>	<b>Bricks</b>
How bats differ from other animals that fly.	Analysis- <i>compare</i> <i>contrast</i> , <i>differentiate</i>	<i>Even though</i> , <i>instead</i> , <i>although</i>	<i>feathers</i> , <i>mammals</i> , <i>wings</i> , <i>fly</i> , <i>actual</i> , <i>sunset</i>
<b>What do you want the students to be able to say/write?</b> <i>Even though they are mammals and don't have feathers, bats can fly.</i>			

If we were to write out the content and language objectives for this lesson, they could read as follows: Students will be able to analyze how bats differ from other animals that fly by using the structures *even though*, *instead* and *although*, and the words *feathers*, *mammals*, *wings*, *fly*, *actual*, *sunset*.

Once teachers understand that vocabulary and language structure are important to teach, they need help figuring out what vocabulary and which language structures to include. The possible choices can seem overwhelming. To help, we encourage teachers to think about what they expect their students to be able to say and write about a particular concept. If the teacher hopes that students will be able to say, *Even though they are mammals, bats can fly*, then they have know how to use the phrase *even though* as well as the word *mammal*. *Instead*, *actual* and *sunset* may not be so important for this lesson.

Mastering the thinking process required to craft appropriate language objectives to support content objectives takes practice. The appendix provides a list of content and corresponding language objectives for math, science and social studies at all levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

The exercises can be used to provide teachers with practice to help them identify the necessary language objectives for their lessons. Once teachers are comfortable with the exercises that we have provided, they should bring their own curriculum materials in and practice with those. It is important to point out to teachers that language objectives are unique to each teaching environment as they are contingent upon the knowledge students bring to the table both in terms of prior knowledge of the content and language proficiency. The appendix provides examples of how language is embedded into the content, but these are not grade specific suggestions. If we look at the first math example, money identification is often a primary grade standard. However, students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) may need these same basic bricks and mortar structures initially. Because SIFE students are usually older, they may move rapidly into more complex thinking. Language objectives would need to be adjusted so students could learn structures that reflect deeper comprehension and application of content concepts.

The appendix is not meant to read as an absolute statement regarding language objectives; rather it serves as a form of guided practice as ESL teachers engage in discussions about language and how it develops through content teaching. It is essential that mainstream colleagues identify the language objectives most appropriate for their particular content and grade level as well as the linguistic needs of their specific students. It is our experience that collaborative conversations between ESL professionals and their mainstream peers can result in a better understanding of the academic language and content demands on ELLs, and that such understanding promises to improve overall instruction for ELLs.

## **AUTHORS**

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**APPENDIX**

Identifying language structures in math at different levels in Bloom's taxonomy

<b>Content Objective</b>	<b>Bloom's Skill and Language Function</b>	<b>Mortar words are <u>underlined</u>.</b> What do you expect students to be able to say and write?	<b>Bricks</b>
Students will be able to talk about and write about the different units of money and how much they are worth.	Knowledge <i>define, list, label</i>	<i>A dime <u>is</u> 10 cents.</i>  <i>Two dimes <u>are</u> 20 cents.</i>	dime, penny, nickel, quarter, dollar, cent
	Comprehension <i>describe, report, paraphrase, explain</i>	<i>A dime <u>is equal to</u> ten pennies.</i> <i>A nickel <u>is equal to</u> five pennies.</i>	
	Application <i>interpret, generalize</i>	<i>Ten pennies and one dime <u>are the same amount of</u> money.</i>  <i>Two nickels and one dime <u>are the same amount of</u> money.</i>	
Students will be able to differentiate geometric shapes	Analysis <i>compare, contrast, differentiate</i>	<i>A pentagon has five sides, <u>but</u> a triangle has three.</i> <i>A pentagon has five sides, <u>whereas</u> a triangle has three.</i>	pentagon, triangle
Students will understand and be able to apply the property of transitivity.	Synthesis <i>synthesize information</i>	<i><u>If</u> Tomas is taller than Mohamed, and Mohamed is taller than Joey, <u>then</u> Tomas is taller than Joey.</i>  <i><u>If</u> <math>a=b</math>, and <math>b=c</math>, <u>then</u> <math>a=c</math>.</i>	transitivity
Students will be able to make mathematical prediction.	Evaluation <i>evaluate, decide, predict</i>	<i><u>If</u> I combine rod A with rod B, they <u>will equal</u> rod C.</i>  <i><u>If</u> the addition of two odd numbers always results in an even number, then 27 plus 43 <u>will equal</u> an even number.</i>	odd number, even number

## Identifying language structures in science at different levels in Bloom's taxonomy

<b>Content Objective</b>	<b>Bloom's Skill and Language Function</b>	<b>Mortar words are <u>underlined</u>.</b> What do you expect students to be able to say and write?	<b>Bricks</b>
Students will be to describe the appearance and behavior of bears.	Knowledge <i>define, list, label</i>	<i><u>This is a bear.</u></i> <i><u>These are bears.</u></i>	bear, claws, teeth
	Comprehension <i>describe, report, paraphrase, explain</i>	<i>Bears <u>have</u> sharp claws and teeth.</i> <i>A bear <u>has</u> sharp claws and teeth.</i>	
	Application <i>interpret, generalize</i>	<i>Bears' sharp teeth and claws <u>help</u> them eat meat.</i>  <i>Bears' sharp teeth and claws <u>help</u> them dig for food in the ground.</i>  <i>Bears' sharp teeth and claws <u>help</u> them eat meat and dig for food in the ground.</i>	
Students will be able to discuss how bears interact with each other, humans, and their habitat.	Analysis <i>compare, contrast, differentiate</i>	<i><u>Although</u> all bears are similar, grizzlies are <u>more</u> aggressive <u>than</u> black bears.</i>	grizzlies, black bears, aggressive
	Synthesis <i>synthesize information</i>	<i><u>Because</u> polar bears and grizzly bears have the same DNA, they can mate.</i>  <i>Polar bears and grizzly bears can mate <u>because</u> they have the same DNA.</i>	DNA, polar bear
	Evaluation <i>evaluate, decide, predict</i>	<i>People and bears are threatened <u>when</u> their habitats overlap.</i>  <i><u>When</u> their habitats overlap, people and bears are threatened.</i>	habitat, overlap, threatened

## Identifying language structures in social studies at different levels in Bloom's taxonomy

<b>Content Objective</b>	<b>Bloom's Skill and Language Function</b>	<b>Mortar words are underlined.</b> What do you expect students to be able to say and write?	<b>Bricks</b>
Students will be to identify, describe, and compare the continents.	Knowledge <i>define, list, label</i>	<i>The continents <u>are</u> North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Antarctica <u>and</u> Australia.</i>	<i>North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Antarctica, Australia</i>
	Comprehension <i>describe, report, paraphrase, explain</i>	<i>Most continents <u>are made up of</u> several different countries.</i>	
	Application <i>interpret, generalize</i>	<i>The <u>smallest</u> continent is Australia.</i>	
Students will be able to compare the size states and countries.	Analysis <i>compare, contrast, differentiate</i>	<i>Turkey is <u>as big as</u> Texas.</i>	Names of states and countries.
Students will be able to explain how government policies influenced settlement in the U.S.	Synthesis <i>synthesize information</i>	<i>The U.S. government had <u>a policy of moving</u> Native Americans from areas <u>where</u> European settlers wanted to live.</i>	policy, Native Americans, European settlers
Students will be able to evaluate the relative merits/weaknesses of capitalism and communism.	Evaluation <i>evaluate, decide, predict</i>	<i>Capitalism <u>is better than</u> communism because it meets people's individual needs better.</i>	capitalism, communism, individual needs

**FOUR POINT: LISTENING AND SPEAKING 2, ADVANCED BY B. PARRISH**

Parrish, Betsy. (2009). *Four point: Listening and Speaking 2, advanced*. K. Folse, (Ed.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. List price \$28.50.

**Reviewed by  
Kristin Kline Liu**

Teachers of advanced college preparatory English courses at the high school and post-secondary levels will want to take a look at the latest book in the Four Point series. Minnesota author, Betsy Parrish, has written an academic listening and speaking text that is designed to help English learners transition from a sheltered language classroom into mainstream American academic lecture classes at the college and university level. In addition to listening and speaking skills, it also seamlessly integrates vocabulary study, academic reading, writing, note-taking, presentation, and learning strategies information.

Each of the six units in the book contains two related lectures on topics chosen from different academic fields. Each six to nine minute lecture, contained on accompanying CDs, is preceded by a pre-listening activity. This warm up activity elicits students' background knowledge on the topic, and engages them in using some of the vocabulary and concepts from the lecture. The lectures are based on genuine academic content that students might hear in a classroom, although the speech is not entirely authentic. The language appears to have been adapted somewhat for ESL audiences. The lecturers all speak with a Midwestern accent, enunciate clearly, and use good presentation techniques such as defining terms and slowing down their speech to emphasize key concepts. Speakers stay on topic, and there are no interruptions by students, or other background noise, that might be present in actual lecture situations. Even with the adapted language, English learners have plenty of opportunities to develop communicative competence. One way that students can develop practice at comprehending overlapping speech from multiple speakers is to view the additional video clips on the publisher website. These clips show small student groups interacting during study sessions. Listeners get a chance to observe speaking strategies that students use to interrupt, respond to interruptions, and add thoughts to others' speech during conversation.

In each chapter, students engage in focused top-down and bottom-up listening activities as they hear the lectures multiple times. After the lecture, other skills are introduced and practiced using language and ideas that students have just heard. For example, a common core of approximately 125 general academic vocabulary words and phrases is practiced throughout the lessons. Each chapter also introduces one feature of English speech, such as syllable stress, intonation, or pitch, and it relates these features to academic language from the lectures. The chapters finish with extended speaking activities that allow students to synthesize information they have learned.

One of the strengths of this book is the way that activities are scaffolded to allow students to be successful at comprehending challenging academic material. Students have a chance to repeat listening activities that build on each other, compare their results with partners, and incorporate new information. The result is a high quality, interesting book that would make an excellent addition to a professional library. Teachers can use the book to teach a 10-12 week class on academic oral skills, or integrate a few chapters into an existing English class.

**REVIEWER**

Kristin Kline Liu is an ESL teacher who is currently a Ph.D. student in Second Languages and Cultures Education at the University of Minnesota. She teaches a listening and speaking methods course for language teachers.

**INSIDE: LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND, CONTENT BY D. MOORE, D. SHORT, A. TATUM,  
J. TINAJERO, & G. BERNEBEI**

Moore, D., Short, D., Tatum, A., Tinajero, J., & Bernebei, G. (2009). *Inside: Language, literacy, and content*. Carmel, CA: Hampton-Brown / National Geographic. Student book list price \$42.10.

**Reviewed by  
Anneliese Cannon**

The idea of depending on a single curriculum to teach literacy raises doubts for some teachers. In today's educational climate of accountability, educators can feel that the creative, autonomous act of teaching is increasingly supplanted with standardized curricula that take the teacher out of teaching. An initial glance at National Geographic's extensive new series for grades 4-8 titled *Inside: Language, Literacy, and Content*—with its all inclusive approach to literacy (offering reading fluency software, assessments, workbooks phonics kits, leveled readers and a writing book) raises questions of 'teacher proofing'. However, a closer look through the series reveals that it offers valuable tools and resources that can be particularly helpful to teachers of English language learners, particularly if the teacher is given the freedom to choose from and use the resources he/she finds appropriate.

The series is co-authored by notable literacy experts like Alfred Tatum (author of *Reading for their Life* and *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males*), best known for his work on literacy for African American youth. Consequently, the emphasis on culturally relevant fiction is evident from the selection of stories—from the novel *Monster* by Walter Dean Meyers to poems by acclaimed Latino author Gary Soto. Deborah Short, co-developer of the SIOP method, is also an author. Fans of the SIOP method will note the integration of content with language goals that emphasize language function and grammar. The teacher's editions also offer a section titled 'Language Transfer Issues' that highlights syntactic and grammatical differences in other languages (including Hmong, Khmer, and African American Vernacular English) that can cause students confusion when learning English.

The program assesses and places students in a level, from pre-literate/newcomer to a 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level/advanced proficiency. The assessment software that accompanies the program gives teachers a table that features the student score and "prescriptions" or activities that can help the student either in language or reading. Starting at Level C (roughly a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading level), the program emphasizes writing, particularly the mechanical aspects such as how to structure a paragraph or revise.

For this program, the teacher most likely works with small, guided reading, writing and language groups, using multiple books depending on the group's level. The implicit challenge would be to manage students' progress across reading, writing and language and ensure that other students are engaged in meaningful work while the teacher is managing many small groups.

The strength of this program is its abundance of carefully crafted resources, which bring best practices in literacy (like guided reading, leveled readers, and a balance of phonics-based, decoding and meaning-based language activities) and language learning (setting language goals, teaching language in meaningful context) to middle school-aged students. However, the teacher would need to supplement the program to provide students authentic, process-based writing activities that give middle-grades students the creative freedom they need.

Because of its comprehensive and well-organized approach, *Inside: Language, Literacy and Content*, when combined with responsive, creative teaching, offers a great deal to educators and students alike.

#### **REVIEWER**

Anneliese Cannon is a former elementary and middle school teacher who has taught in Japan, the U.S. and Mexico. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in the department of Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in ESL and bilingual education.

**LITERACY AND SECOND LANGUAGE ORACY BY E. TARONE, M. BIGELOW, &  
K. HANSEN**

Tarone, E., Bigelow, M. & Hansen, K. (2009). *Literacy and second language oracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. List price: \$32.75.

**Reviewed by  
Miranda Schornack**

The authors of *Literacy and Second Language Oracy* examine the connection between alphabetic print literacy and second language (L2) oral proficiency, specifically phonological awareness, of adult second language learners. Their findings suggest that literate populations use their literacy skills in recognizing oral language (of alphabetic script languages).

Chapter 1 chronicles research of both literate and illiterate adult learners in their acquisition of L2 oracy and suggests that decoding skills precede the skills necessary to identify linguistic segments. Next, the authors discuss the importance for (and the absence of) SLA research that carefully examines learners' educational experiences and literacy level(s), urging linguists to consider how "Our own literacy may bias our perception as researchers" (p. 31).

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this three-part study, followed by chapters 4-6 which explain each of the three analyses: recast, elicited-imitation, and narrative, respectively. In this study, literacy affects a learner's performance on certain phonological tasks more than others. Tasks that involve individual phonemes, syllables or words, matching, deletion and reversal of phonemes, phonological fluency, semantic fluency, and pseudo-word recognition seem to be easier for literate adults. The performance of tasks that involve rhyming and general phonetic discrimination seem to be unaffected by literacy.

The ultimate chapter, 7, discusses several implications for future research in SLA and the instruction of second language learners. Here the authors impart a list of potential research questions to encourage readers to examine issues involving literacy and oracy whilst reminding researchers of the importance of including participants of traditionally more-excluded populations in their studies.

There are many possible implications for second language literacy instruction. First, second language learners process oral language differently, in part due to their literacy level, and will require differentiated instruction. Second, phonemic awareness and word analysis should be taught to adult learners in a systematic way and should be part of a balanced literacy approach. Third, strong oral skills might lead to strong literacy skills if instructors can bridge the two.

In a presentation at the 2009 MinneTESOL Conference, the authors shared PET scan images of brain activity of literate versus illiterate adults, during linguistic-segment analysis, that revealed much higher brain activity of individuals who are literate. This may suggest that literate individuals have more neurological "resources" to employ during phonological awareness activities. The researchers note these results are also specific to alphabetic scripts for which there is grapheme-phoneme correspondence.

This information may be particularly useful to teachers of middle school, high school, and adult second language learners who have low literacy skills. The book may also represent a turning point in the field of SLA in which researchers will begin to include a broader repre-

sentation of second language learners in their studies. If this is the case, then *Literacy and Second Language Oracy* will become a must-read for all language professionals.

This book is one of the first of its kind to suggest and explain the connection between oral language and literacy. The findings are useful because they address the exact scenario many second language literacy instructors face in their classroom: how to teach adults who are illiterate in their first language. Another mentionable point of this research is that the authors solicited participation from their local community. It serves as a reminder of the potential research waiting for us in our own community, school, and classroom. The bottom line: Literacy matters in some oral language processing and this book is a foundation for further research on the topic.

### **REVIEWER**

Miranda Schornack is an ESL teacher at Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Middle School. She has taught in Chile, at St. Cloud State University, and for St. Paul and Owatonna Public Schools in Minnesota. She has a M.A. in TESL from St. Cloud State University.

**MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH LIMITED OR INTERRUPTED SCHOOLING:  
A GUIDEBOOK FOR EDUCATORS BY A. DECAPUA, W. SMATHERS & L. TANG**

DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. F. (2009). *Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling: A guidebook for educators*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 108 pages. List price: \$25.95.

**Reviewed by  
Marta Ljungkull and Sadaf Rauf**

In the world of ESL teaching there has been increasing understanding through the teaching of English and content courses to successive waves of immigrants and refugees, that all English learners are not coming to the learning table with even roughly equal educational background to serve their learning in a new context. With few teacher resources available that concentrate on this population, the new offering of DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang's *Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling: A guidebook for teachers* is a welcome addition.

Pioneer researchers on the topic of diversity of needs in English learners, Freeman & Freeman, in *Closing the achievement gap* (2002) examined the circumstances of long-term English learners (LTELs), which they differentiated from older, struggling English learners, and further, from the English language learners (ELLs) who have had adequate formal schooling. DeCapua et al. make use of Freeman & Freeman's 'Four Keys to Closing the Gap' (p.139), but they focus on a slightly different population. They have expanded on another acronym, 'SIFE,' indicating students with interrupted/inadequate formal education, to incorporate students with regular but *limited* schooling into this group, thus students with limited or interrupted formal education: SLIFE.

Focused on an audience of educators with limited experience working with this varied population of newcomers in their ESL classrooms, DeCapua provides an easy-to-read step-by-step format that is orderly, intuitively organized, compact and practical. Published in 2009, it includes many up to date web resources and references listed as their topics are addressed in chapters. Numerous charts and checklists offer suggested scripts for such things as initial assessment of incoming students, interviews for students and parents or guardians, or program outlines.

Chapter organization is as easily approachable as an instruction manual and includes tables, charts, and interview suggestions. Beginning with the need to identify SLIFE, students with limited or interrupted formal schooling, and with some lists of possible characteristics of these students, the authors attempt to differentiate them from ELLs who have more continuous formal education. A clear definition is not easy, perhaps pointing out the difficulty in clear-cut identification of students who fit the category. Chapters also offer descriptions of different program models, approaches, and practices, as well as 'Best Classroom Techniques' (chapter 6) and 'Key Elements of Successful SLIFE Programs' (chapter 7).

We encountered this text among many offered for exploration in a graduate level class on teaching migrant and immigrant students with limited schooling. We found that it leans heavily on the previous excellent work of Freeman and Freeman (2002), and Mace-Matluck, B., Alexander-Kasparik, R., and Queen, R.M. (1998), works that are more theoretically grounded and contribute a stronger recognition of insider perspective. For instance, Mace-Matluck et al. (chapter 2) delve more deeply than DeCapua et al. into socio-political context as well

as offering related vignettes of individual students of varying language backgrounds. The narratives of student experiences in DeCapua et al. list some student experiences, and while these introduce the reader to engaging learners, they seem lacking in analysis; in contrast, the student profiles in Mace-Matluck et al. (ch.2) and Freeman & Freeman (pp. 40-44) seem to be both more thorough and relevant to the discussion of specific student language issues. Although in their preface the authors state «[t]his book is not theoretically grounded» (p. v), a bit more theory could help elucidate what reads as a somewhat cursory overview of literacy skills in chapter 2. Barbara Birch's excellent *English L2 reading: Getting to the bottom* (2008) would offer backing to their short coverage of phonology and print. Because DeCapua et al. choose to steer away from a theoretical point of view, they should **have concentrated** their presentation of practical tools for teachers, such as lesson suggestions, in a more comprehensive fashion.

An area lacking in the older books and perhaps becoming obligatory is the inclusion of the many web resources offered in the DeCapua text. This comes with the caveat that as soon as internet-based sources are committed to print, they seem headed toward obsolescence. We feel this aspect of the book will necessitate continuous update and editing. For example, the first site attempted had a minor error in the URL. It was possible to locate the site, but those links will need to be screened frequently.

On the whole we find DeCapua et al.'s book to be a **well-organized, up to date, practical** reference for those K-12 teachers finding their way with students who may fit the category of SLIFE. It might also be a useful college classroom text in the company of more theoretically grounded books and articles.

## REVIEWERS

Marta Ljungkull has recently completed Second Languages and Cultures M.A. coursework and has worked with immigrant English learners with interrupted schooling and incoming ESL students at the University of Minnesota.

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### **ENGLISH L2 READING: GETTING TO THE BOTTOM (2ND ED.) BY B. BIRCH**

Birch, B. (2007). *English L2 Reading: Getting to the Bottom (2nd Ed.)* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. List price: \$31.95.

#### **Reviewed by Amy Frederick and Paul Kroshus**

In *English L2 Reading: Getting to the Bottom*, Barbara Birch makes the case that a "truly whole" language view of second language reading includes bottom-up as well as top-down approaches. "...(G)ood readers," she says, "effectively use their high- and low-level knowledge and processing strategies to assign meaning to letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, and so on by making informed decisions at strategic points" (p.9). Yet some ESL students have not had the opportunity to develop low-level processing strategies and therefore may not be able to read English in the most efficient way. According to Birch, these skills have been essentially ignored in the fields of ESL and EFL in favor of a more "whole language" approach. Therefore, teachers' lack of expertise in teaching bottom-up reading may result in students not being instructed systematically in how to encode and decode English.

Birch explicates the subcomponents of bottom-up processing, such as writing systems, listening skills, and even the dreaded phonics, providing specific classroom-based applications for each. Birch includes many supports for the reader as she delves into complex linguistic concepts. Each chapter begins with *pre-reading questions* to think about and discuss, *study guide questions* to answer while reading, and *discussion questions* at the end. Birch also makes liberal use of diagrams and schematics to support the readers' understanding of the material.

Chapter 1 sets up two introductory topics as a basis for understanding the reading process. A reader, to Birch, is like a computer program that uses "symbolic processing strategies and a large number of facts and hundreds of rules stored in its knowledge base to make quick decisions about something that is perceived" (p. 9). To that effect, Birch provides what she calls the Expert Decision Maker Metaphor as a framework on which to arrange the linguistic information readers use. In chapter two, Birch methodically describes several types of writing systems and explains how they are similar and different from English. The most interesting aspect of this chapter is how different logographic writing systems (i.e., Korean and Chinese) are from English and that these differences can have a negative impact on L1 to L2 transfer for ESL students from these language backgrounds. This foundation and focus on written forms is frequently left out of the in-service and pre-service curriculum for ESL teachers.

Chapter nine questions the common ESL strategy of skipping words to get general meaning of text in order to avoid getting "stuck" on the words. Birch debunks this common practice saying that each word in a text is necessary for comprehension and skipping may only be beneficial for low-level text. By giving students explicit vocabulary strategies to use while reading, they will form the habit of using contextual knowledge, pictures, and vocabulary resources to work at breaking down meaning from text.

Birch's theories may lead one to believe that this book should be used as a curriculum guide; however, we would argue that it is more effectively used as a resource in combination with a strong, authentic literacy curriculum. Writing language objectives for lesson plans is a common practice that is often difficult for teachers. Birch helps teachers incorporate these bottom-up skills into curriculum that they have already developed.

The book targets a general ESL environment, but we believe that it speaks most urgently to the secondary and adult levels. The content classroom and curriculum have proven to be particularly difficult to ESL learners. Also, at the adult level, there are frequent examples of students who suffer from lack of print knowledge, and bottom-up strategies benefit learners with low print literacy and interrupted schooling. Birch's instructional strategies will be very helpful in breaking down difficult texts and making content teachers more aware of the specific needs that their second language learners bring to content-area reading.

This book could be overwhelming to an audience that lacks background knowledge in linguistics. It is recommended that readers have a working knowledge of basic linguistic terminology and concepts. Besides information overload, another concern is that Birch's main message could be misconstrued. She makes a case for "balanced" instruction, yet she doesn't consider any top-down approaches in this volume. A reader could easily pass over that essential message and walk away with the notion that the right way to teach L2 reading is to use *only* bottom-up approaches. The results could be a decontextualized, boring, and ineffective curriculum.

Though not an easy read, *English L2 Reading* is well worth the effort. It is an important contribution to the field and is recommended for all who are teaching English L2 reading and writing.

## **REVIEWERS**

Amy Frederick earned an M.Ed. from the University of Minnesota in Second Languages and Cultures and has been an ELL teacher in St. Paul Public Schools for 15 years. She is currently a doctoral student in Literacy Education at the University of Minnesota.

Paul Kroshus graduated with an MA from New York University in TESOL and Spanish education and has been an ESL instructor from 2004-2008 in Brooklyn, New York. He is currently a doctoral student in Second Languages and Cultures at the University of Minnesota.

**ACADEMIC LANGUAGE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND STRUGGLING READERS BY Y. FREEMAN AND D. FREEMAN, AND BUILDING ACADEMIC LANGUAGE BY J. ZWIERS**

Freeman, Y. & Freeman, D. (2009). *Academic language for English language learners and struggling readers: How to help students succeed across content areas*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann. List price: \$28.75

Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms, grades 5-12*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. List price: \$24.95

**Reviewed by  
Susan Ranney**

At the MinneTESOL conference in November 2009, there was a lot of buzz about "academic English" and in particular about a new book by Jeff Zwiers on teaching academic English. The concept of academic English is familiar to most ESL teachers through the work of Jim Cummins and his BICS/CALP distinction, yet the notion of academic English remains largely unanalyzed and instruction often relies more on intuition than research. That situation may soon change as more resources are becoming available to help teachers analyze and teach academic English.

Two of the recent books on this topic are *Building Academic Language: Essential Practices for Content Classrooms* by Jeff Zwiers, and *Academic Language for English Language Learners and Struggling Readers: How to Help Students Succeed Across Content Areas* by Yvonne Freeman and David Freeman. Given the shared goals of these two books, it is perhaps surprising that they are more complementary than overlapping in their content.

*Academic Language for English Language Learners and Struggling Readers* approaches the topic from the point of view of ESL research. As in much of the Freemans' work, the purpose of the book is to distill scholarly research and make it accessible to practicing teachers. They review a broad range of research, from Cummins' work to the research and theories of John Ogbu, David Brown, M.A.K. Halliday, James Gee, Robin Scarcella, Mary Schleppegrell, and many others. They start in chapter 1 by identifying types of learners who need academic language instruction, and include the familiar categories of long term English learners and limited formal schooling students, but they add the non-ESL category of Standard English learners, who have English as a native language but do not speak the Standard English required in school. Then in chapter 2, they review Cummins' work and the differences between academic and conversational language. Chapter 3 goes into a detailed description of academic registers and cultural influences on discourse. The next three chapters get to the practical issues of how to guide students to read academic textbooks, write for academic purposes, and learn academic vocabulary. The final chapter goes back to the broad, school-wide challenges of supporting ELLs for academic success through the integration of language and content instruction, while also giving a detailed description of a unit developed by an ESL teacher on the novel *The Circuit* that addressed the students' need for identity, engagement, and motivation. Throughout the book, the authors bring in examples of individual students to illustrate the challenges, present summaries of relevant research, and suggest practical applications to teaching.

Zwiers' book *Building Academic Language: Essential Practices for Content Classrooms* covers some of the same topics, but comes at them from more of a classroom practice perspective.

He cites many of the same researchers as Freeman & Freeman, but gives just a brief overview of research. As he notes in the introduction, the book derives much of the content from his own classroom research and teaching as well as his ongoing work with content teachers in the U.S. as well as Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The book goes into great detail on specific activities and practices that teachers can follow in their classrooms, with many tables showing specific types of academic language and descriptions of activities that teachers can use to develop their students' academic language proficiency. Overall, reading his book is like listening to a gifted teacher share stories and tips for teaching.

The book starts with a chapter that focuses on the types of students who need help with academic language and encourages teachers to honor what they bring to the classroom and learn more about their interests. Chapter two describes features of academic language and links it to the higher order thinking required in schools. In chapter three, he describes processes of language acquisition and suggests ways to scaffold academic language development. This chapter contains a useful discussion of the balance between over-scaffolding and under-supporting students as they struggle with academic language. Chapter four addresses the variations in the language used in various content areas. Then both chapters five and six deal with oral academic language - in promoting development through whole class lectures and discussions, and in small group activities. Chapters seven and eight address academic reading and writing. Finally, in chapter nine, he guides teachers to design assessment with academic language in mind, and to link assessment closely with instruction. The last chapter is a short summary of the book and call to action. The book also includes four appendices: recommended resources, frequently used academic terms, suggestions for before, during, and after mini-lectures, and an example of how to borrow from academic content standards to design academic language instruction.

With these books and others that are coming out, the knowledge base in the area of academic English is expanding greatly and teachers can find much useful guidance in how to apply what we know to actual classroom teaching. Both of these books would be useful for teacher book clubs or personal reading for professional growth. They are very readable and contain end of chapter exercises that give useful extensions to apply in exploring the applications of concepts. Given the importance of this area, I would recommend that teachers read both books as well as exploring other books, articles, and internet resources on academic language. We simply cannot continue to explain to people outside the ESL field that academic language (CALP) takes 5-7 years to develop; we need to be on the forefront in helping ELLs develop those language skills quickly and effectively. As Zwiers says in the last page of his book, "Each hour in class is one more hour that builds up the language, thinking, content, and character of each student. Let's make the most of each minute."

## **REVIEWER**

Susan Ranney is a Senior Lecturer in the Program in Second Languages and Cultures Education at the University of Minnesota. She offers a graduate course on teaching academic English to ESL students at the K-12 level.

**EXPLORING LEARNER LANGUAGE BY E. TARONE AND B. SWIERZBIN**

Tarone, E., & Swierzbin, B. (2009). *Exploring learner language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. List price: \$34.95.

**Reviewed by  
Peter I. De Costa**

Unlike most introductory Second Language Acquisition (SLA) books which generally cover core SLA theories and summarize research findings, this book by Elaine Tarone and Bonnie Swierzbin provides its readers with much hands-on practice in analyzing learner language. Guided by Dick Allwright's (2005) Exploratory Practice framework, the book adopts a case study approach to SLA by focusing on how six ESL adult learners from China, Mexico, and Central Africa use English as they engage in a range of elicitation tasks.

The book is organized into an introduction and eight chapters. While Chapters 1 and 2 examine individual differences in L2 learning and survey key SLA theories respectively, the next five chapters (Chapters 3-7) explore how learner language can be analyzed from five different theoretical perspectives: error and target-like use (TLU) analysis, developmental sequence, interactional analysis, referential effectiveness, and complexity of language needed for academic purposes. The last chapter (Chapter 8) provides teachers with advice on how to analyze the language of learners in their own classrooms.

Particularly striking is how the authors successfully manage to merge theory and practice throughout the book. Each chapter begins with the introduction of key SLA concepts which are subsequently applied to learner language data. For example, readers are introduced to the concepts of negotiation of meaning, interactional modification, and corrective feedback in Chapter 5, which focuses on learning in interaction. These concepts are then illustrated with sample data of actual language use by the six focal learners drawn from video samples. Following this, readers are then led to an exercise which requires them to put into application the newly introduced concepts. After this initial exercise, the notion of corrective feedback is further developed by the authors who go on to discuss and illustrate the different types of corrective feedback such as explicit correction, recasts, and prompts that are commonly used by teachers and learners. For concept reinforcement, readers are then led to another exercise which allows them to see how the different forms of corrective feedback emerge in the learner data. In short, the carefully engineered movement between theory and practice provides readers with the valuable hands-on and exploratory practice that frames the book.

In addition to the video samples of learner language in the DVD which accompanies the book, readers will appreciate the transcripts of the learner language located at the end of the book as well as the list of recommended further readings for each chapter. Also noteworthy are the possible responses to the chapter exercises found in the answer discussion section at the back of the book. This makes this book a valuable resource not only for teacher educators, but also teacher-learners who intend to engage in self-study. The book culminates in a useful guide (Chapter 8) on how to embark on an independent research project with one's own language learners. Especially helpful in this last chapter are pointers on how to protect learners' rights and salient advice on how to collect learner language data.

Another strength of this book is how the authors provide a critique of the different approaches to exploring learner language in each chapter. For example in Chapter 3, the authors identify some of the limitations of error analysis as a tool for looking at learner language, before

introducing the interlanguage (IL) analysis tool called target-like use (TLU). Such an evaluation, coupled with the probing questions that invite readers to reflect on the efficacy of each approach and the difficulties encountered by them, ensures a balanced treatment of the various language analysis approaches covered in the book.

However, as well-organized and coherent as the materials in this book are, I feel that readers would have further benefited if the authors had moved beyond mainstream SLA theories to engage in socially-oriented perspectives in SLA. Except for the notable discussion of scaffolding and the Vygotskian concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the social turn in SLA was not addressed in this book. In other words, it would have been helpful if the authors had considered other socially-oriented perspectives such as learning as changing participation in situated practices and critical approaches to language learning which takes into account issues of power (cf. Zuengler & Miller, 2006).

Overall, this book is a sterling addition to the pool of SLA textbooks currently available. I foresee that it will be an integral part of introductory classes on SLA, in particular one which seeks to provide with much needed practice in analyzing learner language. After all, it is vitally important that practitioners not only become familiar with core SLA theories, but also comfortable when applying these theories to actual language used in their classrooms.

## **REVIEWER**

Peter I. De Costa is a doctoral candidate in the Second Language Acquisition Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has been an English teacher in a Singapore high school and worked as a teacher educator at the National Institute of Education (Singapore). He has also taught academic writing to international students enrolled in the ESL program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In the fall of 2010, he will be a Visiting Professor (in TESOL) at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

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