Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition

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Patsy Vinogradov and Martha Bigelow,
Editors

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

Message from the Editors
Patsy Vinogradov & Martha Bigelow 1

VISION FOR LESLLA RESEARCH

A Research Agenda for Second Language Acquisition of Pre-literate and Low-literate Adult and Adolescent Learners
Elaine Tarone & Martha Bigelow 5

UNIQUE CONTEXTS

Adult Literacy and Empowerment: Description and Evaluation of a Program in Turkey
Aydin Yűcesan Durgunoğlu & iYOP Team.................... 27

Supporting Digital Literacy Development in LESLLA Learners
Stephen Reder, Jenifer Vanek,
& Heide Spruck Wrigley... 47

Ways of Teaching Reading and Writing: Instructional Practices in Adult Literacy Classes in East Timor
Danielle Boon & Jeanne Kurvers 67

SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS OF LESLLA LEARNING

"We Want to Depend On Us:" Yemeni Women Name Success
Lisa M. Gonzalves 92

The Role of Classroom Talk in the Creation of "Safe Spaces" in Adult ESL Classrooms
Maricel G. Santos & April Shandor 110

Understanding Adult Learners as Multilingual/Multicultural Individuals: Practical and Research Implications
Joy Kreeft Peyton 135

IN THE CLASSROOM

Acquiring English and Literacy while Learning to do School: Resistance and Accommodation
Kendall A. King & Martha Bigelow 157

Low-Level Learners: Prioritizing Teaching Topics
Allegra B. Elson & Nancy Krygowski 183

Cautionary Tales of LESLLA Students in the High School Classroom
Jill A. Watson 203

Pragmatics-based Lessons for Low-level Adult ELLs
Rhonda Petree 235

EXAMINING LESLLA LEARNER LANGUAGE

Phonological Awareness Across Languages
Howard Nicholas.. 251

Conveying Meaning: Oral Skills Development of the LESLLA Learner
Susanna Strube, Ineke van de Craats,
& Roeland van Hout 279

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Patsy Vinogradov
University of Minnesota & Hamline University

Martha Bigelow
University of Minnesota

From September 28 to October 1, 2011, a very exciting gathering took place at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, USA. Nearly 250 educators from over 10 countries gathered for the 7th Annual LESLLA Symposium, a conference on the education of learners who have low literacy in their first languages.

In Minnesota and around the world, many refugee and immigrant students in secondary and adult education classrooms arrive not only without speaking the dominant language of the community, but also with little or no print literacy. Such newcomers are faced with a double-challenge; they must learn the local language while learning to read for the first time. This conference brought together teachers, researchers, teacher educators, materials developers, and program supervisors to find ways to better serve these unique learners in a wide variety of contexts, learning many different languages. Unlike some conferences and professional organizations, the central focus of this conference is not a particular subject matter taught, but a specific kind of learner, one who has been largely ignored by linguists and educators.

The Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) annual symposium began in 2005 in the Netherlands, and since then has been held in England, Belgium, Canada, Germany, and the U.S, alternating between an English speaking country and a non-English speaking country. The scholarship around teaching low-literacy adolescent and adult learners is small but growing, and it is imperative that LESLLA educators embrace these questions with an international lens. Migration is a global phenomenon, and the answers we seek are not language-specific.

All told, over 50 concurrent sessions took place over three days of the 2011 symposium, with time for many conversations and connections in between. In this proceedings volume, we are delighted to present articles from many of our 2011 presenters. Authors present their research findings and practical insights from several corners of the globe where LESLLA teaching and learning take place, including the Netherlands, East Timor, the USA, and Canada. We know you will enjoy reading about the authors' important work with LESLLA learners as we continue to grow as a unique field of language and literacy scholarship.

Patsy Vinogradov and Martha Bigelow, Editors
August 2012

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A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF PRE-LITERATE AND LOW-LITERATE ADULT AND ADOLESCENT LEARNERS

Elaine Tarone & Martha Bigelow
University of Minnesota

It is essential to have a healthy ecology of second language acquisition (SLA) research. Teachers, policy makers, and researchers are needed to move SLA research forward in thoughtful and productive ways which are not marked by needless polemics between cognitive and sociocultural work. A healthy ecology of SLA research should be grounded in theory and at the same time account for the instructional context and the diversity among the learners themselves. SLA theory building cannot occur when only a narrowly defined type of language learner is included in our research corpus; namely, we cannot make universal claims about SLA when our corpus does not include adolescents and adults with limited print literacy or formal schooling (LESLLAA).[1]

This paper focuses on SLA research, as distinct from other important topics such as teacher education, educational policy, curriculum and other areas that directly impact LESLLAA lives. In this paper we identify a number of research areas that we feel are ripe for continued SLA research. Among the goals of current SLA research agendas are the following:

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[1] We are temporarily modifying the LESLLA acronym for this paper in order to explicitly include adolescents.

- Describe and explain cognitive processes – how second languages (L2s) are processed – often in terms of input, output and interaction. Studies of working memory in language processing fall in this category.
- Document development of L2 learner language over time; however, not enough longitudinal case studies have been done. It is challenging to sustain access to a learner, but it is vital for the field to have more longitudinal studies.
- Document what L2 learners produce and how they process language. Some strands of SLA research are challenged with the inclusion of contextual factors such as tasks, student grouping, various uses of language and language varieties, use of oral and written language, and interlocutors such as teachers and peers.
- Focus primarily on oral interlanguage, which is, we argue, best revealed in unrehearsed communication. Unrehearsed communication can show aspects of learners' interlanguage that has become internalized/ automated and reveal how they solve communication tasks with the language resources they possess. Written communication, on the other hand, allows more time for learners to focus on form and edit using consciously learned rules.

We are fortunate to have our community of teachers and researchers focusing on LESLLAA learners. However there is still very little about our learners in our mainstream SLA research journals, conferences and books. Many mainstream SLA textbooks do not include any acknowledgement that LESLLAA learners exist. To claim that we understand the way *the* human mind acquires L2s, based on data from *some* humans (the literate ones) is also a problem. What if LESLLAA acquire L2s differently than literate learners? We believe they do learn L2s differently and that we have evidence of this (Tarone, Bigelow & Hansen, 2009).

Omission of learners with limited formal schooling and limited literacy in their native language(s) is risky for SLA researchers as well as those of us who prepare teachers and for those who teach LESLLAA. Recommendations for LESLLAA pedagogy by SLA researchers aren't based on research on LESLLAA learners. This is a serious problem for teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators that plays out every day as exceptions are raised, materials are (mis)adapted, and opportunities for students to gain the most basic print concepts are missed.

Why have LESLLAA learners been omitted from the SLA research enterprise? Is it because they are the same as other learners? Is it because literacy doesn't matter in L2 teaching and learning? Is it because they don't tend to learn other languages? Is it because their numbers are few? LESLLAA learners do exist. According to the Human Development Index (see UNDP.org), the adult illiterate population around the world, which includes people age 15+, is 793.1 million and 64% are female. Some of the lowest literacy rates are observed in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia. Countries where adult literacy rates in 2011 were below 50% include Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are found in Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan. The region of South and West Asia is home to more than one-half of the global illiterate population (51.8%). However, rates can vary widely across countries in a region. In Mali, for example, merely 26% of the population is literate in contrast to Equatorial Guinea where 93% of the population can read and write.

The National Reporting System in the U.S. collects information from federally funded adult education programs in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. In 2008-2009, there were 111,552 women and 73,437 men in beginning English literacy classes.[2] According to the Minnesota Department of Education, there are about 30,000 adults who are enrolled in publicly funded English as a Second Language classes, many of whom are becoming literate for the first time in English (Shaffer, 2011).

Interesting, and perhaps ironic to some, is the fact that very high levels of low print literacy frequently co-occur with very high levels of multilingualism.

Take the case of Burkina Faso where only 21% of the adult population can read and write. School life expectancy is 6 years for girls and 7 years for boys. However, Burkina Faso has 68 living languages, many which have fewer than 1000 speakers. While exact numbers of languages and speakers is disputable, we can assume that many people in Burkina Faso who are illiterate frequently learn each other's languages. Afghanistan is similar. Adult literacy is only 28% and there are 49 languages spoken in Afghanistan, many with fewer than 1000 speakers. Many Afghani people who are illiterate must be multilingual. Literacy stats come from the CIA Factbook and language stats come from ethologue.com. Clearly, multilingualism does not depend upon literacy or formal schooling, as many may believe in more monolingual contexts.

In addition we live in a world where transnationalism is becoming normal, and where political strife continues to cause massive migrations. There is a wide range of conditions that precipitate large scale migrations; however, the one thing we can count on is that it is common in times of crisis for children to not attend school. Upon resettlement in neighboring countries and throughout the world, (im)migrants and refugees enroll themselves and their children in school, and join language programs (English, Dutch, German,

Finnish, French, etc.) for perhaps their very first experience in a classroom. In our profession, we have the opportunity to encounter individuals from multilingual societies, who perhaps for the first time are feeling an urgent need to attend school and acquire print literacy. We need to know how they learn and how to teach them.

Although SLA research with LESLLAA is in its early stages, we focus on the need for more research on the SLA processes of this population. We begin with a review of the fundamental assumptions and possibly relevant findings of SLA research on more literate populations. We then consider ways in which those findings may or may not apply to low-literate learners and ask, How can research shed light on their processes of acquiring a second language? and How does this research help us teach them more effectively?

Fundamental assumptions and findings of SLA research

Although we know our readers are familiar with the core assumptions of the field of SLA research, we believe it would be useful to review them again, keeping in mind the particular characteristics of LESLLAA. The field began in the mid-60's as applied linguists considered the implications of Chomsky's revolutionary claim that humans have an innate capacity to learn and use language in ways that are both universal and creative. Up to that point, the field of foreign language teaching had been dominated by a behaviorist theory that viewed SLA as a process of habit formation: The learner needed to replace L1 grammar rules (the old habits) with L2 rules (new habits). Teaching an L2 was a matter of drill and habit formation; creativity in formulation of grammar rules was not in the picture. However, in 1967 at Edinburgh University, S.P. Corder proposed that adult learners come into the language classroom with an innate, implicit 'built-in syllabus' to guide their acquisition of L2 grammar and phonology (Corder, 1967). With that built-in syllabus, they could create and try out L2 grammar rules and produce original and creative utterances. Also in Edinburgh at that time, Larry Selinker was writing a paper called "interlanguage[3]," saying that interlanguage is the implicit system of rules that L2 learners create and use to generate utterances in L2. The interlanguage grammar is a hybrid mix of transfer from native language rules, generalized target language rules, strategies of learning, and communication patterns. Importantly, Selinker stressed that interlanguage was implicit L2 knowledge, not accessible to explicit analysis or introspection. In the 1980's, Krashen (1981, 1982) argued that L2 learners in fact have two kinds of knowledge about L2 grammar: an implicit (acquired) knowledge base that underlies and generates utterances, and an explicit (learned) knowledge base that allows one to analyze and talk about grammar rules. Explicit knowledge is conscious, analytical, and controlled, while implicit knowledge is used to unconsciously and automatically generate L2 utterances.

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[2] These data from program years 2004-05 through 2008-09 can be found here: http://www.nrsweb.org/docs/ESL_Fastfacts_CEL_Tagged.pdf

Though Krashen's theory is no longer in vogue, most SLA theorists still concede that there is an essential difference between explicit and implicit knowledge of L2 grammar forms. Explicit knowledge derives from linguistic analysis usually carried out in formal classroom settings: classifications of types of language forms that include nouns, verbs, and adjectives; and memorization of grammar rules that tell the learner how to assemble word classes into sequences, much as a brick layer builds a wall. Language learners can assemble these words into sentences in a highly conscious, analytical and slow puzzle-solving process. Implicit linguistic knowledge is unconscious, perhaps automated after being learned explicitly, and is the product of the built-in syllabus. It grows organically as the learner uses it to generate meaningful utterances in oral interaction.

This assumption leads to another tenet of SLA, that

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[3] Later published in Selinker (1972).

explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar are independent. An anecdote illustrates this: A teacher of English as a second language (ESL) was teaching a grammar lesson focused on the form of past counterfactuals in English such as "I wish I had known …" In the midst of a highly explicit discussion focused on this grammar rule, she was giving examples, and without thinking said, "I wish I would have known …" She was totally unaware that this implicitly generated utterance violated the explicit rule she was teaching. This is normal. Speakers of a language can simultaneously know the formal rules of the language(s) they speak while they routinely use alternative rules.

Most SLA researchers agree that a learner can acquire implicit L2 knowledge independently of explicit L2 knowledge. A native speaker may have a full implicit grammar of a language but no ability to explicitly talk about those rules. LESLLAA often fall into this category. On the other hand, an L2 learner can develop detailed explicit knowledge of the grammar of a foreign language but not be able to use those very same rules implicitly to generate an utterance, as to ask for (and understand) directions from the airport to the hotel.

Current mainstream theories of SLA and formal classroom learning contexts privilege explicit L2 knowledge. Input and interaction theories (Gass & Madden, 1987; Gass & Varonis, 1994), as well as sociocultural theories, posit that successful learners must be explicitly aware of linguistic units like phonemes, morphemes, and words. They must be able to notice the way such linguistic units are organized, in their own speech and in that of others.

Consider the research on corrective feedback in SLA (e.g., Lyster & Mori, 2006), which asserts that L2 learners must be able to focus not just on the meaning of the utterance, but also on its linguistic forms. Consider what the learner has to do when she says "What she is doing?" and the teacher responds "What is she doing?" Assuming that the meaning of the question has been established, the learner must notice that formal units (words) of the utterance are in different orders. The meaning doesn't seem to be affected; this is just a formal difference. In other words, making use of corrective feedback requires that the learner engage explicit knowledge about words, their boundaries, and their orders. The literate, educated learners studied in mainstream SLA research have the training to benefit from this kind of corrective feedback.

In the same way, sociocultural theory (e.g., Lantolf, 2000; Swain, 2000) stresses the cognitive processes of scaffolding and co-construction in the Zone of Proximal Development. These processes often require that the learner and interlocutor share explicit metalinguistic knowledge to modify L2 utterances and make them "more grammatical" or "more complex." For example, the learners in Swain and Lapkin (1998) discuss whether the verbs they are using are reflexive or not. These terms and explicit analytical processes are assumed by sociocultural researchers to have been learned in formal classroom settings. The literate, educated learners studied in mainstream SLA research apparently have learned these terms and analytical processes.

Research with low-literate adults

The research carried out by scholars focused on pre-literate and low-literate L2 adults, in their native languages, indicates that adults and adolescents who are preliterate and without formal schooling do not have explicit, conscious awareness of linguistic units like phonemes, morphemes, and words. Such phonemic awareness derives from alphabetic literacy. Abundant research with monolingual adults has shown this to be the case. For example, Scholes (1998) showed that preliterate adults could not segment English speech into single word units. They could not tell where one word ended and another began; where the word boundaries were. Scholes concluded that the knowledge of words and word boundaries in one's native language(s) is something one gains only from alphabetic literacy, learning to see language represented on the page as discrete words. Similarly, Ong (1988) and Olson (2002) have both concluded that phonemic awareness and explicit awareness that there are linguistic units called 'words' are a result of alphabetic literacy.

Selected SLA research with low literate L2 learners

SLA research with low-literate adult L2 learners has found similar results. Kurvers, Hout and Vallen (2006, 2007) found in research with non-literate and low-literate adults learning Dutch as an L2 that alphabetic literacy correlated with awareness of the word as a unit as well as awareness of the phoneme. Before they had alphabetic literacy, these adults viewed language simply as a referential system and a means of communication, but not as a string of elements that could be divided into linguistic units. This work offers a fascinating window into how language is processed among individuals just beginning to develop alphabetic print literacy.

Onderlinden, Craats, and Kurvers (2009) also found that L2 learners' relative ability to identify word boundaries in speech correlated with their relative levels of alphabetic literacy. Young-Scholten and Strom (2006) found that adult L2 learners developed awareness of phonemes and words only after learning to read an alphabetic script, but their research went further. They found that preliterate adults' awareness of syllable, syllable onset and rhyme was not dependent on alphabetic literacy, but awareness of, for example word initial phonemes, what we call metaphonological abilities, was dependent on literacy.

Several studies have focused on ways that oral language may be different for someone without print literacy (e.g., Strube 2007, 2009, 2010). In this research, a great deal of time is spent observing oral language learning in a classroom setting. These data produced naturalistically in classroom settings are very special because of their potential to generate implications for both SLA and teaching.

Deficit or difference?

It is tempting to view lack of phonological awareness accruing from lack of alphabetic literacy as a deficit. However, Bassetti (2005) describes literacy relativism: Different writing systems teach us to segment oral language in different ways. For example, the English writing system represents words as discrete, while the Chinese writing system represents monosyllabic morphemes as discrete (*Hanzi*). Bassetti shows that English speakers acquiring Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) consistently segmented Chinese oral language into words, while Chinese native speakers segmented it according to Hanzi. For example, English CFL learners treated Chinese function words as separate words, while Chinese speakers affixed them to adjoining content words. English CFL learners treated compound nouns as several words, while Chinese speakers treated them as single words.

Linguistic units used by pre-literate learners to process L2 input

How do LESLLAA, who apparently do not have awareness of words and phonemes, segment oral L2 input? It may help us imagine what is going on if we revisit data from one of our adolescent Somali participants, Abukar, with emergent literacy skills but strong English L2 proficiency. (For a detailed description of Abukar, see Tarone and Bigelow, 2007.)

At the time of our study, Abukar was 15 years old, attending 9th grade classes. He had begun formal schooling in the United States four and a half years earlier, after spending four years in a refugee camp. Abukar's test scores showed that he had a relatively low literacy level, but he was making good progress developing oral proficiency in English. On our scale, his English literacy score was 6 out of a possible 9, and his Somali literacy score was 4 out of 9. He scored 50 out of 60 possible on his English speaking assessment. Based on these data and his English question formation, we placed him at Stage 5 (out of 6 possible) on Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann's (1981) developmental scale of L2 question formation. What these scores may obscure is the fact that Abukar espoused a hip hop aesthetic and was a very engaging, stylish young man, with fluent English and extraordinary pragmatics skills.

Nevertheless, Abukar frequently made errors of the following type in framing questions in English:

> … what, what he is looking?
> Why he is mad?
> … why he come this room?

His questions at times lacked subject/auxiliary inversion, "do" support and third person singular verb marking.

As reported in Tarone and Bigelow (2007), Abukar seemed to have difficulty processing corrective feedback provided to him by MB on these errors.

01 Abukar: What he sit on, what he SIT on, or whatever?
02 MB: What is he sitting on?
03 Abukar: Mhm.
04 MB: What is he sitting on? Again. Repeat.
05 Abukar: What he sitting on?
06 MB: What IS he sitting on?
07 Abukar: Oh. What he sitting on?
08 MB: What IS he sitting on?
09 Abukar: What IS he sitting on?

In this example, we see that even though Abukar was trying to focus on accurate form, he had difficulty processing MB's (the researcher) corrective feedback. It took him three tries to correctly include the "is" auxiliary.

The next example gives us insight into what Abukar notices in processing MB's corrective feedback:

01 Abukar: Why he is mad? Why [he], he is mad?
02 MB: [yeah]
03 MB: Why IS he mad?
04 Abukar: Why HE is mad? Why
05 MB: Why IS he mad?
06 Abukar: Why IS he mad? Why is, [is he]…

When we compare MB's feedback in line 3 with Abukar's uptake in line 4, we see that Abukar noticed her placement of stress on the second syllable BEFORE he finally took up her change in word order in line 6. In other words, stress, and its cousin rhythm, appear to have been more salient to Abukar than word order.

Abukar also was good at noticing, rehearsing, and later using new vocabulary words. In the following example, he learns a new word: "jar".

01 Abukar: OK (pause) what is barrel, what is, what is the thing in it?
02 What is there? Is it, is there pennies in it?
03 MB: Yeah. Um, again. Are pennies in the jar?
04 Abukar: Is, are the penny in the jar?
05 MB: Yes. And, um,
06 Abukar: (whispers) jar
07 MB: you know she's a waitress, so she gets tips,
08 Abukar: O K
09 MB: at the diner,
10 Abukar: mhm
11 MB: and every day she puts her tips in a jar
12 Abukar: oh. (pause) (xxx xxx)
13 MB: Here's the jar.
14 Abukar: A jar?

Twenty-two turns later as shown below, Abukar spontaneously uses the new term in a new question, suggesting that there has been uptake:

Abukar: Oh. Oh. Is this jar have, this jar, is this jar full of money?

To sum up, Abukar notices new vocabulary and second syllable stress, before he notices word order of *he* and *is*. Maybe he's using his awareness of syllable and syllable stress patterns to try to process this corrective feedback on form.

SLA theory tells us that in order to acquire a new linguistic form, L2 learners must "notice the gap" between linguistic forms in their own interlanguage and those provided in the input. But data like those reviewed above make us wonder whether Abukar is "noticing the gap" in terms of linguistic segments at all. The data above cause us to wonder whether he is noticing the gap in terms of his awareness of units like syllables and syllable stress patterns, rather than in terms of linguistic segments like "words" and "word order."

Empirical SLA research is needed to answer the following questions::

- Do all L2 forms have to be noticed explicitly to be acquired?
- Can pre-literate or low-literate adult learners acquire some L2 forms implicitly, without explicit analysis of linguistic segments?
- Do such learners structure their explicit working memory for language in some way other than visualization of linguistic segments?
- Can we capitalize on what pre-literate and low-literate adult learners do notice in oral input and use this to improve their acquisition of L2 grammar?

LESLLAA SLA research strands

After this discussion of mainstream SLA research and emerging LESLLAA SLA research, we would like to draw your attention to five promising strands of an SLA research agenda for LESLLAA.

- The metalinguistic awareness that emergent readers use in oral SLA;

- The longitudinal development of LESLLAA interlanguage, including the linguistic forms they acquire before, during and after becoming literate;
- The impact of different forms of corrective feedback on noticing of different linguistic forms by learners with different degrees of print literacy;
- Social contexts for SLA
- Classroom SLA research

We propose some testable hypotheses, research questions, and promising lines of research to guide the research agenda within these five strands.

Metalinguistic awareness: some testable hypotheses

- Hypothesis: LESLLAA are not metalinguistically aware of any linguistic forms in L2 input; all processing is semantic.
- Hypothesis: LESLLAA acquire some L2 linguistic forms without metalinguistic awareness and through semantic processing only, but other L2 linguistic forms require metalinguistic processing.
- Hypothesis: LESLLAA have metalinguistic awareness of forms in oral L2 input, but this awareness is not framed in terms of phonemes, words, or morphemes. Awareness may be framed in terms of other formal units like syllables, syllable stress pattern (or rhythm), intonation, or rhyme (vowel similarity). Awareness may be framed in terms of more global units and organizations, which may be detectable in memorization and recitation of long oral narratives.

Longitudinal development of interlanguage

Longitudinal ethnographic case studies have provided tremendous insight into the way L2 learners develop their interlanguages. Howard Nicholas has directed several doctoral dissertations, longitudinal case studies of child L2 learners, including Liu (1991)'s insightful 2.5 year study of Bob as he moved through preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. Among other things, this study showed how different Bob's L2 use was when he interacted at home, in desk work at school with his peers, and in school with the teacher, and how this affected the emergence of each new stage of English questions. Longitudinal case studies could discover previously unknown developmental sequences used by LESLLAA, as well as the social factors (interlocutor, contextual cues, language use patterns) that influence this variation and patterns of spread from one social context to another.

Other longitudinal case studies with LESLLAA could include bounded units beyond the individual (see Yin, 2003), as in the case of Bob above. For example, a class could be a case, or a small group could be a case (Chapter 3, Bigelow, 2010) and followed ethnographically and longitudinally.

Corrective feedback

A number of hypotheses relate to the way that LESLLAA process corrective feedback on the accuracy of their utterances. We've seen an example of how we tried to test one such hypothesis in the study that included Abukar, and we've hinted at some of these hypotheses already. Some hypotheses in this area include the following:

- When corrective feedback is structured in terms of phonemes, morphemes, and words, only some linguistic units are noticed by preliterate adult L2 learners.
- More noticing will occur when corrective feedback is structured in terms of other formal units (e.g., syllables, syllable stress patterns, or intonation), when units like words are represented with symbols that are not script-based (e.g., colored blocks), or when corrective feedback is framed in sociocultural terms at the discourse level (e.g., Asking the learner to speak with the "voice" of a person who speaks English, perhaps a teacher.).

Social contexts for SLA

We assume that LESLLAA have different purposes for language use in different social contexts (e.g., formal vs. naturalistic, classrooms vs. communities), and this affects their patterns of interlanguage use and acquisition. Classroom teachers, and researchers, typically have no information on what those purposes are and how learners use their L2 outside of class. A variationist or ethnographic study could observe single individuals across social contexts and identify influential social variables and how these affect the L2 forms the learners use.

We hypothesize that LESLLAA bring unstudied assets to the process of oral SLA that derive from cultural practices such as recitation of long oral narratives, improvisation of oral poetry including hip hop, or memorization and recitation of the Koran. An ethnographic or variationist case study could identify those assets and cultural practices and the ways that these learners process first and second languages to accomplish those practices, and begin the journey to understanding how those processes might be engaged in classrooms to improve SLA outcomes.

Classroom contexts for research

There are many contexts for research with LESLLAA. All of our research requires bridging the great abyss between cultural and linguistic assumptions about human interaction (Watson, 2010). In the research reviewed at the beginning of this paper, and certainly including our own work, researchers typically sit with individuals in school and community settings and give them language learning tasks. Many of the tasks we ask them to do are grounded in formal schooling. We advocate for more classroom-based LESLLAA research, because we hypothesize that SLA processes shift as learners move from informal contexts to classroom contexts. Specifically, we need to capture learning in classrooms as it occurs in whole-class, small-group, and individual learning moments. Primarily, we need to ask SLA questions that contribute to

greater pedagogical relevance and also lead to support for SLA generalizations or potentially challenge generalizations that have been consecrated in our field.

Researcher access, ethics, and politics

We know that theory building to include LESLLAA requires the work and collaboration of many. There is an urgent need for more researchers who have the skills to move between school, community, and homes. This sort of work has tremendous potential to produce new knowledge about LESLLAA strengths, skills, and needs. Multilingual researchers with high levels of ethics, cultural competence, and investment in communities are sorely needed for this sort of inquiry. Those trained to do SLA research are often under great pressure to complete studies and get them published quickly. However, as we know, LESLLAA populations are often hard to reach. The process of gaining informed consent is not as easy when studying these learners as it is, for example, when doing an SLA study with an undergraduate Spanish class at a university.

As researchers build greater intercultural competence, we need to understand ourselves as outsiders by the mere fact that we have high levels of print literacy and formal schooling. We are not, nor have we ever been, illiterate members of an illiterate community. For an outsider researcher, arriving at a fair representation of learners who are so different from us is a formidable challenge. Self-reflexivity and acknowledgement of our own positionality and its influence on data collection and analysis are essential in the research process. Positionality refers to characteristics that encompass one's identity, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background. Rosaldo (1989) writes, "All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others" (p. 8). Reflexive journaling during the research process can aid researchers as they engage in the research process, identify how they are perceived by the participants in their studies, and determine what lenses to use to interpret their data.

We hope that we have made a strong case that the field of SLA must not ignore LESLLAA. Newcomers to our countries will weave their stories together with our own, and we must understand them and how they learn language as part of their adaptation process. In addition, the recognition of difference in the process of acquiring a new language is vital for SLA theory building. We hope that SLA researchers will make efforts to include LESLLAA in their research programs, which will inform instructed classroom language learning. These steps will lead to a more ecological, coherent, and intentional path to a robust SLA research agenda that improves life in the classroom and the hopes for future opportunities for LESLLAA.

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ADULT LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT: DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF A PROGRAM IN TURKEY

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Higher educational levels in individuals are associated with multiple positive outcomes such as better health, better earning potential, higher achievement of children, stronger civic participation (Kabeer, 1999, 2005; Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy, 2007; National Research Council, 2011; Wagner, 1986; Education for All, 2006). Given these positive outcomes, it is especially important to reduce the achievement gaps in education that are mostly due to cultural and socioeconomic factors (Kutner, et al., 2007; Rogers, 2008; Sirin, 2005) and to reach those who have remained at the fringes of the formal educational systems. In many places around the world, women are overrepresented among those for whom education remains inaccessible, as indicated by the persistent gender gap in educational attainment and literacy levels (Sabri, 2004). Gender disparities are especially exacerbated by poverty (Education for All, 2009).

Despite the multitude of adult education initiatives around the globe, it is challenging to teach individuals with very little formal schooling, because in a vicious circle, one of the predictors of success in adult literacy classes is previous educational experiences (Condelli, Wrigley & Yoon, 2009; Durgunoğlu, 2000; Fitzgerald & Young, 1997). In addition as the LESLLA community have been discussing, learners with limited schooling in their first language (L1) who are developing literacy in their second language (L2) face even more challenges (e.g., Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). In general, adult education initiatives, especially programs focused on learners with limited formal education, suffer from scarcity of evaluation data and a clear understanding of the factors that make a program effective. In this paper, we discuss a program that we have developed in Turkey for adults with no or very limited levels of formal schooling and very low levels of literacy, some with Turkish as their L2.

Although the literacy rate is increasing rapidly in Turkey, there are still major gaps between genders as well as between regions. Literacy needs are especially acute for people migrating from rural areas to the cities. Faced with this challenge, since 1995, Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) has been offering an intensive program to develop the basic literacy proficiencies of individuals, mostly women. Using the practices that have been shown to be effective by recent educational research (Öney & Durgunoğlu, 2005), we wrote three textbooks for the program: Participant Textbook, Instructors' Annotated Edition and the Theoretical Guide to Literacy (Durgunoğlu et al., 1995) and revised it several times (Durgunoğlu, Öney, Dağıdır, & Kuşcul, 2000; Durgunoğlu, Öney, Kuşcul, Dağıdır, Aslan, Cantűrk, & Yasa, 2003). We have also developed a more advanced course for the graduates of this basic level course. (Durgunoğlu, Öney, Dağıdır, & Kuşcul, 2000) and revised it (Durgunoğlu, Gençay, Yasa & Ural, 2010). The program has now reached over 120,000 participants in 17 provinces and won a UNESCO literacy award in 2005. The philosophy and the curriculum are described in detail in Durgunoğlu, Öney, Kuşcul (2003) and in Öney and Durgunoğlu (2005). Here we will provide a brief overview of the program components and some evaluation data.

One of the major goals of our program is to create a learning community that involves mutual respect and support. We emphasize that although the adults who come into the program may not know how to read and write, they still have extensive and valuable world experiences and their interactions with other learners and their teacher are the foundation for a supportive and effective learning environment (Prins, 2006; Prins, Toso, & Schafft, 2009). Informal observations and interview data indicate that we succeeded in creating an atmosphere that not only encouraged learning but also provided a social support system for the participants.

We have developed a structured program focusing on the facilitators of literacy that have been identified in the past three decades of educational research. Given the systematic orthography of Turkish, the program includes explicit training in spelling–sound correspondences and syllabification. In addition, there is a strong focus on critical thinking and analysis of what is read or heard by including activities such as discussion of texts, reactions to newspaper articles, and prediction of story endings. We emphasized that reading is not only word recognition. It requires comprehension, thinking, reasoning, inferencing as well as activating prior knowledge on a topic. There are also numeracy activities, which started with the second cohort when it became obvious that literacy cannot develop without some numeracy. Contrary to the recommendations by some adult educators to develop a learner-led, flexible program, in a clearly non-school-like atmosphere, we have discovered that our learners want an atmosphere that is school-like, one that includes a formal teacher, books, assignments. This perspective, which may seem surprising, has been reported by other observers of adult education programs around the world (Mitchell, 1994; Papen, 2005). It was easy to understand this perspective once we heard the longing to go to school reported by the majority of learners in our program across the years (Durgunoğlu, 2000).

Teachers are the life force of any program. Our teachers are volunteers who join the program after an intensive three-week seminar. This seminar covers not only the curriculum but also sociocultural and cognitive bases of literacy as well as communication skills and strategies. Once the volunteers start teaching, the quality of the program is monitored through a continuous observation and feedback system. Instead of providing some training and then leaving the teachers on their own, we start with a relatively short training period but provide constant support. This also helps to create a community of teachers who keep in touch with each other with the help of their team leader. Having a well-structured program and the continuous support system in place enables us to work with volunteers. In addition to reducing the cost of the program, the volunteer system also provides a creative outlet for those individuals who are looking for a way to contribute to the development of their society.

A typical class starts with putting the date on the board, and reading the newspaper headlines and discussing the news of the day. If an historical event had taken place on that day, it is discussed. Teachers use this occasion to model reading a newspaper, as well as to encourage the participants to decode certain new words such as names of the days and months. After this discussion, the teacher checks any homework that had been assigned. The next component is discussing the reading passage. With the help of the picture above the passage in their textbooks, the participants discuss what the passage might be about and volunteer any relevant experiences of their own. Then the teacher reads the passage aloud and asks listening comprehension questions. Next are the decoding exercises in which letters, syllables and words are decoded and spelled. There is explicit teaching of spelling-sound correspondences to exploit the transparent orthography of Turkish. After the decoding exercises, the participants read the passage several times to each other in pairs, or as a whole class, depending on the level of the class. After reading the passage, they answer more comprehension questions about it, writing their answers during the later stages of the course. Afterwards, they either complete functional exercises, such as filling out forms, or read a poem, short story or an expository text. They are encouraged to keep a journal and do free writing on their own, and to share those with the teacher and the class if they wish.

The interconnectedness of the functional, cognitive and affective aspects of literacy is important to note. As literacy skills develop and are used in everyday functioning (e.g. taking a bus without someone's help), they empower and enhance the self-confidence of the participants. Therefore, we assume that an effective program not only improves certain literacy and numeracy proficiencies, but also builds self-efficacy, confidence and a joy of learning. The effectiveness of our program in developing both cognitive and affective aspects has been evaluated in several studies (Durgunoğlu, 2000; Durgunoğlu, et al., 2003; Kağıtçıbaşı, Gőkşen & Gűlgőz, 2005). After the first few cohorts, it became obvious that the program would be even more effective with an additional change: explicitly discussing empowerment topics related to health, legal rights, citizenship and to prepare and encourage the learners to join the formal education system.

One of the underlying assumptions of adult literacy programs is that they can empower individuals to function on their own, access information and participate more fully in the practices of their community. Our previous research has shown that independent functioning and self-confidence do indeed develop in participants who have completed the course (Durgunoğlu et al., 2003). However, access to information and participating more fully in the practices of the community may require more explicit knowledge about one's rights and available resources. Therefore, we decided to augment our adult literacy curriculum by including reading and discussion materials on legal rights, community resources, as well as preventive and reproductive health issues. The topics for empowerment were selected after extensive interviews with potential participants, educators, NGO members, doctors and other stakeholders in the region. We have asked these stakeholders to list the possible topics that they thought would be useful to include in our curriculum. We also had several focus groups in which the same question was discussed in more detail. The topics that were suggested by a wide group of stakeholders were integrated into the curriculum.

As articulated by Freire (1998), literacy is not a set of skills but also a way to build an awareness of the societal forces, and to question systemic inequalities that hinder everyone's equal entitlement to the resources in the society. This relatively abstract empowerment and liberation view has been criticized for not considering the realities of learners' (especially women's) everyday lives, or in Unterhalter's (2005) words "the 'patriarchal bargain' that women need to strike in order to survive and flourish." In other words, the attempts to advance women's rights also has to address the complex power imbalances in their cultural milieu and the debilitating effects of poverty (Durgunoğlu, 2000; Kabeer, 2005; Moller Okin, 1999). It is clear that literacy by itself cannot alleviate poverty, inequality and marginalization. However as Sabri has expressed eloquently (2004, p. 83) "On the other hand, poverty and the dynamics of poverty and marginalisation will not be alleviated without a literate population. The dynamics that sustain poverty and impoverishment will not be effectively impacted unless those most directly affected are able to access information, communicate their aspirations and claim their entitlements effectively." In our program, our goal is to not only provide the basic information on topics of human rights, but also to facilitate the discussion of these issues among the learners in a safe and nonjudgmental environment, and to consider the realities of the learners' lives. Before any attitudes and behaviors can change, there needs to be a reliable knowledge base and an awareness. Our courses attempt to address the need for this first step.

As described above, our original curriculum included newspaper reading and discussion in every class period. We have replaced every other newspaper exercise with the empowerment readings. This way, the program could be augmented with minimal impact on the overall curriculum. In addition, the established habits of discussing and voicing opinions on news items could be carried into the empowerment component seamlessly. The empowerment topics included importance of a civil wedding—which is the only legal one giving the wife certain rights—women's right to work, prevention of domestic violence, child labor laws, preventive health practices (such as immunization, hygiene), among others. When implementing this component in the classroom, the teachers start by first posing a question and asking the learners to give examples from their lives and express their thoughts and feelings. For example, before discussing the legal right to inherit property, teachers ask, "How is inheritance distributed? Describe what has happened in your own or in others' families." (To give some context, according to the Turkish civil law, all siblings are equally entitled to inheritance regardless of their gender. However, because of cultural and religious constraints, women usually report that the men get the inheritance and it would be shameful for women to ask for their share when they have brothers.) The class then has a reading selection on how, in the eyes of civil law, men and women have equal rights to their families' inheritance. Following this reading, there is more discussion with participants generating ideas about how to handle this situation in a family, as well as frankly discussing the cultural barriers that can hamper their efforts. To summarize, during this component, learners get informed of their legal rights, but they also discuss their own experiences and constraints. They listen and support each other, provide suggestions for striking the "patriarchal bargain" and express their thoughts and concerns. Our classes now have this empowerment component fully integrated into the curriculum.

Evaluation Study

In this study, we report the data from one of the first cohorts that have implemented the empowerment activities within the standard curriculum, and evaluate both the literacy and empowerment outcomes.

Participants:

The new program was first implemented in two south-eastern provinces of Turkey: Diyarbakir (DB) and Sanliurfa (SU). These two provinces have a very high rate of illiteracy among women. In addition, many individuals speak another language (Kurdish or Arabic) at home. The program was also implemented in Istanbul (IST) which had a more homogeneous participant population, because it was important to see how the empowerment program will also work in this bigger city where women may have more access to resources. In the evaluation study, there were 109 participants from these three provinces (see Table 1). At the end of the study, there were 88 participants who had complete pre and post data and the following analyses were conducted on those 88 participants. (The comparison of the characteristics of the participants with complete and incomplete data showed no differences in the initial literacy performance, age, marital status, and attitudes of the two groups. The single exception was that the incomplete group had lower vocabulary scores).

Table 1
The number of classrooms and participants as a function of province

	Province			
	DB	IST	SU	total
Number of classrooms	5	4	2	11
Number of participants	40	41	28	109
Number of participants with complete data	27	34	27	88
Number of participants with incomplete data	13	7	1	21

DB= Diyarbakır, IST=Istanbul, SU= Şanlıurfa

Tasks:

In a short interview, data were collected on the participants' age, schooling experiences, language(s) they know and their self-ratings of linguistic proficiency, marital status, number of children, and why they were attending the literacy classes. In addition, the participants were given the same battery of tests before (pre) and after (post) they completed the course.

Cognitive battery

(1) Letter naming: The Turkish alphabet has 29 letters. The participants were asked to identify the 29 upper case and 29 lower case letters in mixed order on a single page. The number correct was the measure.

(2) Word recognition: The participants were given 12 short words, reflecting the variety of vowel and consonant combinations found in Turkish and asked to read them. If participants did not recognize more than 10 letters, this test was not given. The number correct was the measure.

(3) Spelling: The participants were asked to write 12 words, ranging from 3 to 5 letters. However, if a participant did not recognize more than 10 letters or read more than 5 words, this test was not given. The spelling was scored by giving two points for each letter in a word, including its location. So for example one item fidan (seedling) had a correct spelling score of 10 (5 letters x 2 points=10). If the spelling was fdan the score was 8, indicating the missing vowel i. The maximum possible score was 84.

(4) Listening comprehension: The participants listened to two short passages. The first passage was a narrative about a woman getting wet while going shopping in the rain. The second was an expository passage about the required tax ID number. The participants answered 4 questions about each passage, with 10 as the maximum score across the two texts.

(5) Vocabulary: The participants were given 5 words, each in a sentence and asked to define the words. The quality of the definition was scored between 0-2, with 10 as the maximum score.

(6) Number writing: The participants were read 8 numbers ranging from 1-4 digits and asked to write them. The total score reflected both the correct writing of the numeral and its location. For example 58 written correctly had a score of 4 (2 digits x 2 points) whereas 85 got 2 points only for the numerals but not the digit placement. Maximum score was 40 points.

Attitude battery

The participants were also given an attitude battery to evaluate the effects of the empowerment curriculum. This battery was a series of connected vignettes describing a problem in a person's life and asking the participants for their suggestions and to describe what they would do if they were in that person's shoes. For example, the character in the vignette wanted to work, but her husband did not give her permission. Each answer was scored on a 4-point scale. Four points meant that the following three parts are present in the answer: It is a right + some description of the right + proposed action; 3 points = 2 of these parts are present; 2 points = an awareness of the right but indication of hopelessness/passivity; 1 point = no awareness of the right. 0 = "I don't know"). The maximum score was 28. This battery had an internal reliability of .60.

Results

Table 2 presents the demographic data (means and standard deviations) on the 88 participants. Overall, the SU and DB groups were younger and they were more likely to be unmar-

Table 2
Demographic characteristics of the 88 participants with complete data

	Province			
	DB (n=27)	**IST (n=34)**	**SU (n=27)**	**Significant?**
Age (Mean and Standard Deviation)	29.85 (11.3)	39.70 (10.1)	25.52 (9.0)	DB=SU<IST
Number who attended school	6	1	4	
Percent married	56%	91%	41%	DB=SU<IST
Number of living children (Mean and sd)	3.75 (2.2)	3.19 (1.6)	5.18 (1.8)	DB=IST<SU

ried. However, the SU group had more children. Although 11 out of 88 participants had previously attended school, it must be noted that the average length of school attendance was only 1.8 years for these 11 learners.

Table 3 presents the linguistic background of the participants. The majority of the participants in DB and SU spoke a different home language (Kurdish or Arabic). However, 70-90% rated themselves as speaking and understanding Turkish at good/very good levels. The pre-test listening comprehension and vocabulary scores supported the self-ratings. Therefore, these women were able to follow the instruction in these courses delivered in Turkish.

Table 3
Percent of participants who rated themselves in each category of language proficiency.

	Self-ratings	**Province**		
		DB	IST	SU
Percent speaking another language at home		89	38	96
Proficiency in understanding Turkish	very poor/poor	0	0	0
	medium	26	3	11
	good/ very good	74	97	89
Proficiency in speaking Turkish	very poor/poor	7	0	4
	medium	22	3	15
	good/ very good	70	97	82
Proficiency in understanding Language 1 (L1) (n=63 with a different L1)	very poor/poor	0	3	4
	medium	11	0	0
	good/ very good	78	35	93
	No other language	11	62	4
Proficiency in speaking L1 (n=63 with a different L1)	very poor/poor	0	3	4
	medium	11	0	7
	good/very good	78	35	85
	No other language	11	62	4

The tasks in the cognitive battery were analyzed by 2 (time of test: pre and post) x 3 (province: DB SU and IST) Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs). Table 4 presents the mean scores (and standard deviations) on the cognitive battery as a function of time of test (Pre vs. Post) and Province. An interaction between Time of Test and Province implies that participant growth from pre- to post-tests differed among the provinces. Lack of an interaction, and only a Time of Test main effect indicates that there is a significant growth from pre- to post-testing but these changes are similar across provinces.

On Letter Recognition, Listening Comprehension, Word Recognition and Spelling tasks, there were no Province x Test interactions, all F's <2.12. However, there were main effects of Time of Test on Letter Recognition F(1,85) = 83.02; Word Recognition F(1,85)= 100.14; Spelling F(1,85) =196.04 and Listening Comprehension F(1,84) = 34.37. The means in bold in Table 4 (collapsed across all provinces) indicate that all participants in the three provinces showed similarly significant improvement. Describing the raw data in Table 4 in percentages, it is notable that after only three months of instruction word recognition improved from 42% to 79% accuracy, and spelling improved from 33% to 82%.

On the remaining two tasks, Number Writing and Vocabulary, there were interactions of Time of Test x Province: Number Writing F(2,85) = 4.19; Vocabulary F(2,85)= 4.19. Although all groups showed significant improvements from pre- to post-testing, the improvements were more pronounced when the participants had lower pre-test levels. For example, participants from all three provinces reached a similar level of number writing (approximately 80%).

However, because IST and DB groups started at significantly lower levels, their improvement was greater compared to the SU group. Likewise DB and SU groups had lower scores on the vocabulary pre-test, which is not surprising given that Turkish is not the first language for a majority of participants in those groups. However, at post-test, SU group had similarly high vocabulary scores as the IST group, but the DB group had lower vocabulary scores than both SU and IST.

Table 4
The means (and standard deviations) of the tasks across the three provinces and the two times of testing

						Post-tests			
	max	**DB**	**IST**	**SU**	**All prov–inces**	**DB**	**IST**	**SU**	**All prov–inces**
Letter recognition	58	27.37 (25.5)	41.03 (19.7)	40.00 (16.8)	**36.52** **(21.5)**	52.00 (9.8)	55.44 (4.1)	57.78 (0.7)	**55.10** **(6.4)**
Word recognition	12	3.41 (4.5)	5.68 (5.1)	6.04 (4.7)	**5.08** **(4.9)**	7.63 (5.1)	9.53 (3.5)	11.33 (2.4)	**9.5** **(4.0)**
Spelling	84	14.00 (24.6)	31.38 (31.2)	38.15 (29.7)	**28.13** **(30.2)**	55.52 (27.9)	69.32 (16.9)	81.00 (4.6)	**68.67** **(21.2)**
Listening comprehension	10	5.41 (2.3)	6.82 (1.5)	7.19 (1.6)	**6.49** **(1.9)**	6.70 (1.8)	7.79 (1.9)	8.27 (1.3)	**7.60** **(1.8)**
Vocabulary	10	3.52 (2.0)	5.59 (2.2)	4.0 (1.8)	4.47 (2.2)	4.74 (2.0)	6.35 (2.1)	6.41 (1.7)	5.88 (2.1)
Number writing	40	14.93 (14.6)	11.74 (13.6)	22.78 (11.5)	16.10 (14.0)	29.56 (12.3)	32.91 (10.2)	34.44 (4.2)	32.35 (9.7)
Attitude	28	19.37 (3.6)	21.94 (1.8)	19.00 (2.6)	20.24 (3.0)	21.03 (2.5)	22.38 (2.1)	22.03 (2.2)	21.93 (2.3)

Why DB and SU groups showed different levels of improvement in defining Turkish words is not clear. One possible explanation that has to be explored further is that the SU group self-reported stronger proficiencies in both their L1 and L2 (Table 3).

Attitude battery

The last row of Table 4 presents the mean scores (and standard deviations) in the attitude battery as a function of time of test (Pre vs. Post) and Province. On these attitude items, there was a significant improvement across all provinces, but the interaction of Province x Time of Test indicated that the groups showed differences in how much they changed, F(2,81) = 6.91. Post hoc tests indicated that at the beginning of the course, the scores of the DB and SU groups were significantly lower than that of IST group. However, on the post-tests, SU group had caught up with the IST group, and DB group was at a lower level compared to the IST group, although still showing a significant improvement.

Conclusion

In this new evaluation of the literacy program we have developed in Turkey, the learners showed significant improvement in literacy skills assessed by the cognitive battery, thus replicating previous results (Durgunoğlu et al., 2003). The learners also showed significantly higher scores on the attitude battery, indicating that the new empowerment component is also effective. The next challenge for future research is to observe how the developing knowledge and awareness levels lead to behavioral changes at both individual and community levels.

Overall, we believe several interrelated characteristics of the program working together make it successful: There is a safe and respectful environment acknowledging the rich life experiences of the learners. The teachers and the learners get to know each other well and create a community of learning through intensive discussions. There is a structured and well-designed program based on the research on literacy and numeracy development. The structure enables the volunteer teachers to understand the philosophy of the program and to use the framework to help learners of different levels and abilities. The curriculum includes not only basic skills of literacy (decoding, spelling) but also listening and reading comprehension, critical thinking, and real world applications, thus making the content relevant for the learners' lives. Finally, the empowerment component explicitly informs the learners' of their rights, but also allows them to discuss their experiences, acknowledge the cultural constraints and to share their frustrations and solutions. However, it must also be acknowledged that the learners assessed in this study were either monolinguals or had relatively good (self-reported) oral proficiencies in Turkish. Therefore, the results from this study can apply to other low literacy individuals, but with some existing oral proficiency in their L2.

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SUPPORTING DIGITAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN LESLLA LEARNERS

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Abstract

Low print literacy skills have been one of the defining characteristics of the Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) population. In our increasingly digital world, the acquisition of second languages and literacies encompasses online materials and activities that require digital literacy. This paper considers the issues of digital literacy for second language learners and the ways in which these issues broaden the LESLLA framework.

We begin with a justification for inclusion of digital literacy in the range of literacies central to academic success for LESLLA learners. Next we present a description of an innovative learning technology called Learner Web and a Learner Web project designed to support digital literacy. The Learner Web project, part of the national U.S. Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), is a large multi-state project that is exploring ways of supporting digital literacy development in LESLLA

learners through tutor-facilitated use of online content. We conclude by discussing the key features of the Learner Web project that have wider implications for the LESLLA field. The paper will highlight both programmatic and research issues that have emerged during the content development and implementation of the project. Many of these issues relate to the need to support language and print literacy development as components of digital literacy development for LESLLA learners.

Introduction

In 2010, the Obama administration released a new National Education Technology Plan calling on educators to embrace technology and innovation to transform the way students in the United States learn. Transformation is needed, according to the report, because of the rapid pace of innovation and the integration of technology in daily tasks (2010, p. xvi). The report highlights what we know to be true from our own professional and personal lives: everyone needs some digital literacy to participate fully in economic and civic life. This cultural shift is relevant for all LESLLA learners, but particularly for those defined as "Low-educated: an adult who has at most ten years of education in the country of origin" (van de Craats, Kurvers, Young-Scholten, 2005). For these learners, digital literacy is becoming increasingly important for acquisition of English as a second language, as progressively more language learning occurs in online environments.

Focusing on the multidimensional aspect of literacy is key to describing the importance of digital literacy for LESLLA learners. Literacy practices are embedded in work, school, and life and exercised differently in each context (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Reder & Green, 1983). Because many of these literacy practices now occur in digitalized environments digital literacy must be included into the scope of literacies needed by LESLLA learners and digital literacy instruction needs to be incorporated broadly into learning opportunities for LESLLA adults. In a literature review of learning technology research, Stites concurs with this assertion in suggesting that basic skills be redefined to include digital literacy, writing that they are "important basic skills for life in the 21st century," (2004, p. 110).

Helping LESLLA learners acquire digital literacy is not simply a matter of teaching learners to click and then putting them in front of computer-based learning materials that are nothing more than digital workbooks. Research suggests that all learners benefit from rich instruction that provides opportunities for learner-driven input and learner-centered activities. Those learning in web-based environments are immensely helped by different types of support including face-to-face support and on-line support (e.g., clicking on a word and seeing a translation pop up or selecting a text to speech options) (Coiro, 2003; Hicks, Reid & George, 2001).

These principles guided the development of content and initial implementation design for the Learner Web BTOP project, the digital literacy training project for LESLLA and other learners that will be described in this article. The focus of this article is on how the design criteria for the project meet the needs of LESLLA learners for digital literacy acquisition. As more field experience is gained in the project with LESLLA users, future articles will focus on their digital literacy acquisition outcomes.

The Learner Web BTOP project was funded under the U.S. Department of Commerce's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2010). The project is based on using an innovative online learning support system called the Learner Web, one of two technologies recognized in the National Educational Technology Plan for use with adult education students (2010, p. 22). Several features of the Learner Web software and the way it is used in BTOP are intended to scaffold learning material so it is accessible to the widest possible range of learners. By "accessible" we refer to Silver-Pacuilla's concept of usability threshold: flexible and different for every learner depending on an "interaction among learner's skills, the online environments they encounter, and the support available…" (2008, p. 34). As we will illustrate below, the design and implementation of Learner Web allows for flexibility on all three of Silver-Pacuilla's criteria.

What is the Learner Web?

The Learner Web is a web-based application that supports adults working independently to improve their basic skills and then prepare for the workforce or more advanced learning goals (http://www.learnerweb.org). It is not a plug-in and play distance-learning product. Rather, it is a learning support system that can be used to match learners' goals and progress to relevant on-line discrete learning experiences and community resources such as adult education programs, on-demand telephone help, and tutors. It is conceptualized to scaffold the potential for future use of online learning for ABE learners, by providing technology support and guidance afforded by the software's design. Through the use of Learner Web, learners can boost their digital literacy skills and learn how to make choices about online resources.

The Learner Web was initially funded by a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2007. Since that time, Learner Web software has been in development at Portland State University and in use in numerous piloting regions across the country. Each region has its own local domain name. Each region is responsible for configuring its local Learner Web portal to best fit local target learners. However, work done by each locality is shareable among Learner Web regions across the country.

The Learner Web BTOP project commenced in October of 2010. Project partners serving learners across the county have been using Learner Web to provide access to resources that support learning in the following areas:

- Digital Literacy (Computer and Internet Skills)
- Broadband Consumer Education
- Orientation to Career Pathways and Job Search

Both content and face-to-face support are key to learner success using the software in the BTOP project. A project team consisting of technology experts, instructional designers, and LESLLA researchers created online content that addresses a range of digital literacy skills and Internet practices for adults with diverse LESLLA backgrounds. The delivery of the learning content is provided through a tutor-facilitated model, which uses volunteers or paid staff as tutors who scaffold learners' access to and use of technology. Tutors are trained to work with these digital literacy students using the same online technology that the learners themselves use. Tutors and learners are coming together in approximately 90 public computer labs across the country - situated in schools, workforce centers, libraries, community-based organizations and other venues.

Technology and Infrastructure

Learner Web is based on the concept of a learning plan. Each learning plan is a series of steps that a learner follows to reach a learning goal (Figure 1). Within each step the learner accesses resources, which could be websites, referrals to agencies or specific individuals, books in a library, or other media resources (Figure 2). The step's content and resources are designated by learning plan authors or, alternatively, dynamically matched by the software to information in profile fields that describe the user/learner.

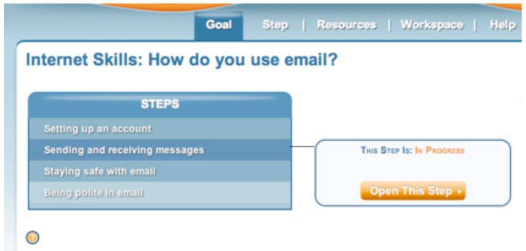
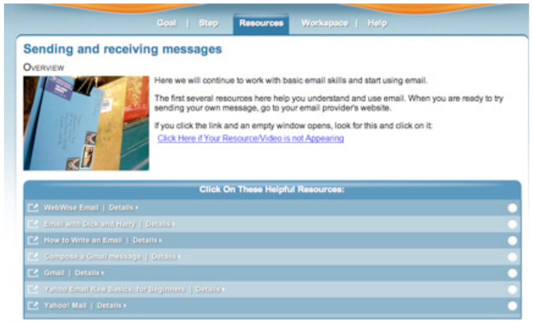

Goal
Step | Resources | Workspace | Help
Internet Skills: How do you use email?
STEPS
Setting up an account
Sending and receiving messages
Staying safe with email
Being polite in email
This Step Is: In Progress
Open This Step ›

Figure 1. Steps and Tab Structure of Learner Web Learning Plan


Goal | Step | Resources | Workspace | Help
Click On These Helpful Resources:
WebWise Email | Details ▸
Email with Dick and Harry | Details ▸
How to Write an Email | Details ▸
Compose a Gmail message | Details ▸
Gmail | Details ▸
Yahoo Email Raw Basics, for Beginners | Details ▸
Yahoo! Mail | Details ▸

Sending and receiving messages

Overview

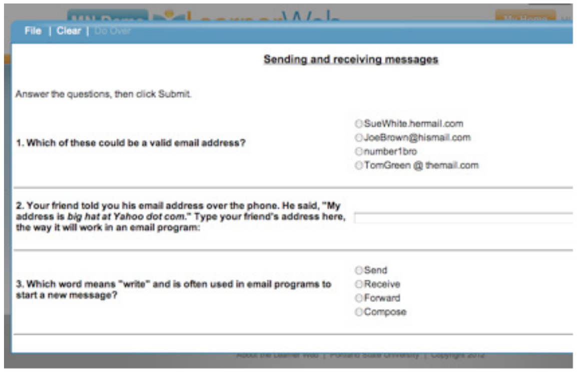
Here we will continue to work with basic email skills and start using email.

The first several resources here help you understand and use email. When you are ready to try sending your own message, go to your email provider's website.

If you click the link and an empty window opens, look for this and click on it:
Click Here if Your Resource/Video is not Appearing

Figure 2. Learning Plan Resources or Links to External Websites

After the learner explores the step's content and resources, he or she can produce synthesizing material, such as a quiz or a written or verbal response, in a portfolio section of the website called the Workspace (Figure 3). Teachers, tutors or others working with the learner can monitor the learner's progress through viewing or giving feedback asynchronously on the workspace items created by the learner. These assistants can also shape a learner's path through a learning plan or a series of learning plans as needed. By interacting fully with the step, the learner can build the skills or become familiar with the information needed to advance to the next step.



Sending and receiving messages

Answer the questions, then click Submit.

1. Which of these could be a valid email address?
○ SueWhite.hermail.com
○ JoeBrown@hismail.com
○ number1bro
○ TomGreen @ themail.com

2. Your friend told you his email address over the phone. He said, "My address is *big hat at Yahoo dot com*." Type your friend's address here, the way it will work in an email program:

3. Which word means "write" and is often used in email programs to start a new message?
○ Send
○ Receive
○ Forward
○ Compose

Figure 3. Workspace Item

Learner Web Features that Support LESLLA Learners

Research shows that the digital divide is caused as much by a dearth of learning technologies that meet the needs and interests of LESLLA learners as by the lack of physical access (Stites, 2004, p. 140). A general aim of the federal BTOP program is to bridge the digital divide by enhancing broadband access to the Internet and providing appropriate content for motivating digitally marginalized populations to use broadband connections. The Learner Web project shares these goals. To reach these vulnerable populations, both our content and implementation planning incorporated aspects of effective adult learning design as defined by Stites:

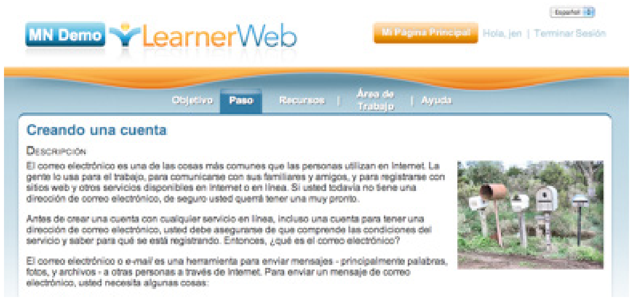
- Active engagement of learners
- Participation in groups
- Frequent interaction and feedback
- Connection to real-word contexts (2004, p. 140)

These concepts are represented by software features that support *code-switching*, *tutor- supported* learning environments, and content *customized* to learners for relevance and interest. These characteristics of the Learner Web project scaffold access to learning for a wide variety of LESLLA learners.

Code Switching

Teaching digital literacy skills to LESLLA learners with English language content complicates their acquisition of the target skills. Making parallel content available in a learner's L1 can be a highly effective way to scaffold mastery of the L2 content. To understand why, it is helpful to consider Freire's concept that reading the world must precede reading the word (Freire, 1984, p. 11). Allowing LESLLA learners to interact with the digital literacy content in their L1 supports construction of codification, attaching a definition to a skill or concept in the L1 that can then be applied to both the digital literacy and L2 skill development. Even for those learners with some emerging L2 literacy, much digital literacy training content on the Internet is text based and written at a level incomprehensible to LESLLA learners (Stites, 2004, p. 128). Enabling learners to code switch, to alternate easily between the same content in L1 and L2, can mitigate this problem.

The Learner Web allows for code switching between L1 and L2 to help learners understand both website layout and navigation and comprehend learning content. The software allows for learners to choose their preferred language for online instruction and to switch as desired between L2 and L1 (See figures 4 and 5). Thus, lack of L2 proficiency need not be a barrier to understanding the tasks or scope of skills required for digital literacy or feeling comfortable in the online environment.



Creando una cuenta

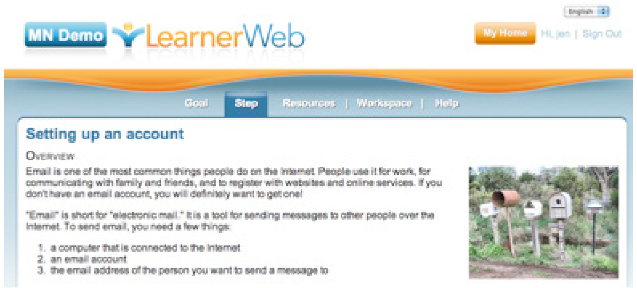
Descripción

El correo electrónico es una de las cosas más comunes que las personas utilizan en Internet. La gente lo usa para el trabajo, para comunicarse con sus familiares y amigos, y para registrarse con sitios web y otros servicios disponibles en Internet o en línea. Si usted todavía no tiene una dirección de correo electrónico, de seguro usted querrá tener una muy pronto.

Antes de crear una cuenta con cualquier servicio en línea, incluso una cuenta para tener una dirección de correo electrónico, usted debe asegurarse de que comprende las condiciones del servicio y saber para qué se está registrando. Entonces, ¿qué es el correo electrónico?

El correo electrónico o e-mail es una herramienta para enviar mensajes - principalmente palabras, fotos, y archivos - a otras personas a través de Internet. Para enviar un mensaje de correo electrónico, usted necesita algunas cosas:

Figure 4: Learning plan in Spanish



Setting up an account

Overview

Email is one of the most common things people do on the Internet. People use it for work, for communicating with family and friends, and to register with websites and online services. If you don't have an email account, you will definitely want to get one!

"Email" is short for "electronic mail." It is a tool for sending messages to other people over the Internet. To send email, you need a few things:

1. a computer that is connected to the Internet
2. an email account
3. the email address of the person you want to send a message to

Figure 5: Learning plan in English

Tutor-Supported Learning

LESLLA learners motivated to access the Learner Web BTOP content in English and low-literacy native English speakers who cannot rely on code switching need a different kind of support. The literacy level needed for instruction of many digital literacy skills likely exceeds the English literacy level necessary to practice and apply that same skill. This may be analogous to Sticht's contrast between reading to learn a job versus reading to do a job, where the literacy level needed (in training) to learn how to do many entry level jobs exceeds that required for performing the job (1975, p. 158). Consequently, tutors play an important role in the project's implementation.

Providing face-to-face support when learners are first learning a skill can facilitate a more rapid and complete acquisition of that skill, especially skills involving motor components such as using a mouse and keyboard. For example, it is easy to show someone how to hold a mouse by actually, if they are willing, touching their hand and positioning the mouse. It is more difficult to teach the same skill though video demonstration or text-based instruction. During instruction, a tutor can actively gauge a learner's comprehension of learning material and provide supplementary instruction and practice as needed. This supports learner confidence and early application of that skill.

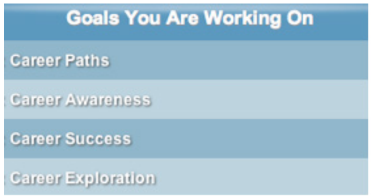
Stites includes both "active construction of new knowledge and skills" and frequent interaction and feedback as key to effective learning technology instruction (2004, p. 114-115). Tutors can provide support where the online content is inadequate for different learners. A tutor might see that a learner has exhausted the learning material provided but has not yet mastered the skill. In this case the tutor can use what he or she knows about the learner's skill level, interest, and experience to find additional relevant material. Hence, tutor-supported computer labs provide an opportunity for learners to overcome a major digital divide barrier - finding the necessary support to develop emerging digital literacy skills as a foundation for ongoing independent learning through technology.

Customizing Content

It is well established in both language learning and adult learning theory that appropriate and relevant content and context can enhance learner interest and support comprehension and learning. Our experience with computer- and Internet-based learning suggests this also applies to digital literacy skill development. Growley advocates finding content that reflects the interests of the learners (2000), and, as previously noted, Stites includes “connection to real-world contexts” as best practice (2004). Content and context were definitely important considerations in the development of the learning plans for the project. Designers consulted with adult basic education researchers and practitioners before defining the skills to cover and the context for the instructional content. Designers also used a feature of the Learner Web platform for customization of content to match learner characteristics and interests.

At the beginning of the project we searched for functional contexts relevant to many adult learners. The learning plans are structured so that learners, supported as need by tutors, first develop digital literacy skills through direct instruction and practice and then apply them in functional contexts. Instructional context is important throughout the learning plans but is especially important in the later plans in which learners have opportunities to apply emerging new skills. In these learning plans, we chose a functional context that many learners would likely encounter in the future - career exploration and job search (Figure 6).

When a learner first logs into Learner Web, he or she is presented with a series of questions that ask about native language, location, and skills. This last set of questions about skills is included in the Learner Web intake process to ensure that learners can self-identify learning needs. Of course, all of the content included in the plans was determined to be relevant by plan designers; however, it is the learner’s self-selection of a plan that maximizes its relevance.



Goals You Are Working On

Career Paths

Career Awareness

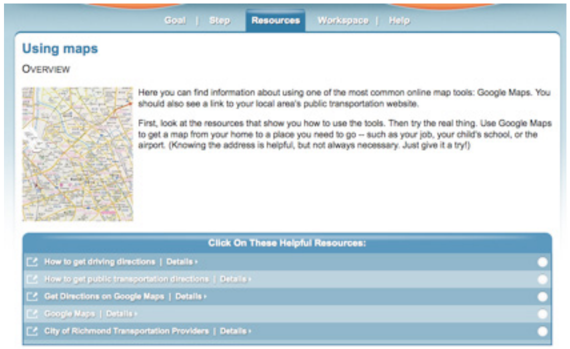
Career Success

Career Exploration

Figure 6. Career Exploration Content in Learner Web

The Learner Web allows for customization of content based on information in a learner’s profile. Customized content – for internal webpage text, external resource lists, and workspace items – is triggered by defined values of learner profile fields. These profile fields can be created for a variety of learner characteristics such as reading level, language preference, personal interests, and geographical location. In our project, content was customized primarily in terms of location and, as shown earlier, for language preference.

Figures 7 and 8 show the customized content that learners in two different cities see in the step entitled “Using Maps.” The first four resources shown are the same for learners in each location, whereas the final resource shown varies with location. In each case the link takes the learner to the appropriate local public transit website.



Using maps

Overview

Here you can find information about using one of the most common online map tools: Google Maps. You should also see a link to your local area's public transportation website.

First, look at the resources that show you how to use the tools. Then try the real thing. Use Google Maps to get a map from your home to a place you need to go -- such as your job, your child's school, or the airport. (Knowing the address is helpful, but not always necessary. Just give it a try!)

Click On These Helpful Resources:

How to get driving directions | Details ›

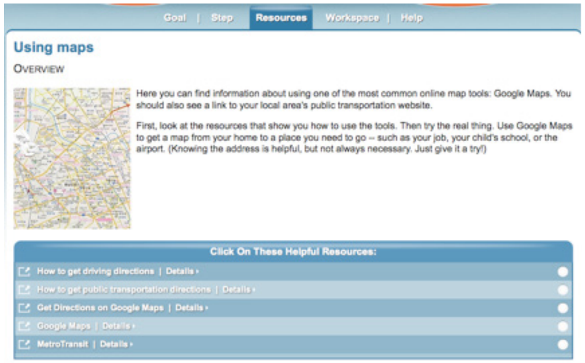
How to get public transportation directions | Details ›

Get Directions on Google Maps | Details ›

Google Maps | Details ›

City of Richmond Transportation Providers | Details ›

Figure 7. Using Maps Resource Page for Richmond, CA Learner



Using maps

Overview

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Click On These Helpful Resources:

How to get driving directions | Details ›
How to get public transportation directions | Details ›
Get Directions on Google Maps | Details ›
Google Maps | Details ›
MetroTransit | Details ›

Figure 8. Using Maps Resource Page for St. Paul, MN Learner

The software feature allowing for customization of content makes using real world context in the learning plans relatively easy. The impact of the feature is great; Sites writes in a literature review of learning technologies that using real world context is central to learning because it supports the "transfer and retention of knowledge and competence" (2004, p. 118). In other words, learners can use the tool and the help of tutors to gain emerging digital literacy skills and are more likely to persist in practice and application activities if both context and content are meaningful to them.

Where does Learner Web fit within the larger world of technology-mediated learning for LESLLA: Implications for the Field

The Learner Web expands the definition of second language literacy to include digital literacy as one of the many literacies that are required for full integration of immigrants and refugees. In the United States and elsewhere, being able to access information over the Internet, providing information on-line, selecting websites that address one's needs and interests are now part of the basic skills that every citizen, native speaker or English language learner, needs. As technology expands expectations rise: Most companies including fast food restaurants want job seekers to submit an employment

application on-line; clinics routinely suggest that patients verify information about medication on reputable websites or monitor clinic websites for personal health information, and schools expect parents to check the school's site to find out about homework assignments and school events. Increasingly, access to this information does not require full proficiency in English (school sites are often translated and Google translation provides an imperfect yet often serviceable understanding of key points on a site). Increasingly, in order to participate in technology infused cultures, all learners need a basic sense of how to access technology, how to navigate a web site and how to defend themselves against the onslaught of unreliable information and unsolicited products and services. The Learner Web provides second language learners a chance to develop the "new literacies" that are part of information processing in a digital age, and it does so by incorporating principles and ideas of purposeful teaching, adult learning theory, and instructional design.

In the LESLLA field and elsewhere importance of contextualized instruction as a vehicle for deep learning of contents is widely accepted. The Learner Web includes a several important features that support what we know about the ways in which adults learn[1].

1. Learner Web is task-based. Tasks are authentic (a student uses a map to find locations with free Wi-Fi in her/his community) and take place in a real Internet environment. Tasks are challenging but success is achievable as the learner is guided through a series of steps by both tutors and the learning technology. Learning is active and intentional as learners make decisions as to what sites and topics to explore for themselves. In this way, it offers an example of "situated

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[1] See also National Research Council: *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, eds John D. Bransford, Ann L Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking. (Washington DC: National Academy of Sciences 1999)

learning" – that is learners do not learn skills first and then transfer them to a real life context; rather they use skills directly and immediately in the virtual environment they are exploring.

2. The Learner Web reflects real life language use among bilingual/multilingual adults. It is not a language-learning site where information is only offered in the target language (English) and high levels of proficiency are required to access content and develop skills. Rather, the Learner Web interface and introductions can appear in multiple languages (at this point, English and Spanish and to a lesser extent Hmong and Somali; others can be added). It is up to the learner to select the language that feels most comfortable at any given point. Just as the brains of second language speakers are never locked into one language only and tend to "toggle" between languages depending on context and need (a process called "translanguaging[2]"), so the Learner Web does not lock participants into the language they originally selected. Rather, it is possible to choose between languages at any point in the Learning Plan. For example, a learner may start in the native language to get her/his bearing and get a good sense of the overall topic and then move to L2 to complete a task. Conversely, a learner might choose to challenge herself and start in L2 only to feel unmoored and decide to switch to L1 to lessen frustration.

3. Expansion activities allow students to explore their own interests and tackle information that on the face may look too difficult for their language level. We know that a "need to know" often drives students to tackle challenging text and undertake complex tasks. A student who wants to know more about news from his home country may independently find a way to scaffold the information (by moving back and forth between a native language newspaper and an English on-line newscast for example). In addition, the image rich nature of most websites allows students to understand context and overarching ideas, making comprehension of the printed word accompanying images much easier.

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[2] Ofelia Garcia, Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective (Indianapolis: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008)

4. Face-to-face interaction and self-directed learning are blended (the ratio depends on the needs of the learner). In moving through a learning plan, learners can move as fast or as slowly as they want and repeat steps as often as they find necessary (as students like to say "the internet has infinite patience"). At the same time, a real live tutor is available to reassure students that they will become Internet proficient in spite of early frustrations and help them get unstuck when the technology does not perform the way we would like it to perform. Participation does not require mastery of applications such as Word, PowerPoint, or Excel – a staple of traditional computer skills classes that stops many LESLLA learners cold. With Learner Web, there is no textbook to read or manual to consult. Instead, meaningful assistance is offered "just in time" in person and online as learners move forward through their plans or as they identify new topics to explore. This approach of receiving assistance and information "on demand" and as needed (rather than having to master a full set of skills ahead of time before they are applied to meaningful contexts) is one of the prime features of the interactive, dynamic learning models that young people increasingly respond to and that LESLLA learners could benefit from as well[3].

5. Through modeling, the tutor provides a form of "cognitive apprenticeship[4]" that allows learners to see

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[3] James Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

[4] See also Daniela Weisman, Hannes Hesse. Lernprozesse beim Problemloesen unter naeherer Betrachtung der kognitiven Lerntheorien: Anchored Instructions, Zielbasierte Szenarien und Cognitive Apprenticeship. (Grin Verlag 2007)

how a more expert person approaches Internet tasks and navigates the web. The thinking processes that most Internet proficient individuals use automatically are made visible as the tutor demonstrates a new task and the learner is guided through the steps. As a result, learning becomes transparent. The use of demonstrations, modeling of tasks, and use of "Think-Alouds" – a key part of tutor-facilitated learning – support what we know about the effectiveness of explicit teaching and engaged learning for learners who do not yet have strong academic skills and have little experience learning how to learn independently.

6. With some initial guidance, students are able to take advantage of Internet resources that facilitate comprehension. Google's ability to translate websites (while still highly imperfect), allows students to get the gist of an article before they read it in English. Similarly, Google Translate allows students to look up translations of words and simple phrases, gaining greater confidence and competence in using vocabulary in the target language (sentence translations are too dodgy yet to recommend). Text-to-speech gives students a chance to hear the target language spoken as their eyes move along the print and speech-to-text gives them a chance to dictate what they may want to write (though accents may throw the machine for a loop).

7. The Learner Web puts the notion of socially constructed learning[5] into practice. Learners interact with their tutors as they explore ideas together and select information that interests them. Every learner gets an e-mail account allowing her/him to communicate with others via the Internet; they learn how to Skype, allowing them to hear the voices and see the faces of friends and family that they may not have seen for a long time at the fraction of the cost of a phone call. Because of the tremendous interest in Skype, participants and their friends help each other to make this technology work and learners often become teachers in the process. Other social media invite similar involvement. Individual sites have created Facebook pages for their Learner Web participants inviting them to share information about themselves and their communities in either or both the target language (English) and the native language. Posting pictures and messages on Facebook allows second language learners to find their voice and have their say while they are still learning a new language (there is a great deal of tolerance of imperfect language use on the web). Learners thus have the opportunity to feel part of a much larger community that is digitally connected.

8. Learners have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that have currency in the modern world. No longer are LESLLA learners primarily defined by their perceived "deficits" (lack of literacy, lack of L2 proficiency). Rather, Learner Web participants can define themselves by the sophisticated knowledge and skills they are mastering and: finding information on the Internet, making informed choices about resources, successfully navigating websites and participating in social media. Since many other adults, foreign-born or native born, don't yet feel comfortable with new media, LESLLA learners can feel a genuine sense of pride and accomplishment.

The Learner Web is not for every learner. Lack of literacy remains a barrier for LESLLA learners at the lowest levels and puts real limits to the possibilities for learning and interacting through technology (programs elsewhere are developing Internet-based programs for beginner LESLLA learners). But for those learners who are new to learning technologies and possess some print literacy, tutor-facilitated models with bilingual options can open the door to a new world of digital learning.

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[5] Lev Vygotsky. *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes.* Edited by Cole, M., John-Steiner, V., Scribner, S., Souberman, (E. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978)

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WAYS OF TEACHING READING AND WRITING: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN ADULT LITERACY CLASSES IN EAST TIMOR

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Introduction

Many different methods have been used all over the world to teach adults and children to read and write, ranging from traditional spelling methods in which learners start learning the alphabet to methods based on the actual experiences that students bring to the classroom (Gray, 1969).

In East Timor, a developing nation in Southeast Asia that became independent in 2002, teaching reading has for a long time been guided by the method in which beginning readers start with learning the alphabet by heart, most often using the Portuguese or Indonesian names of the letters. In recent years, new methodologies and different didactic approaches have been introduced. One of them is the Cuban program *Yo, Sí Puedo!* (Yes I can), that was adapted to the East Timorese reality, resulting in *Sim Eu Posso* in Portuguese and *Los Hau Bele* in Tetum. This program, initially its Portuguese version and later mainly its Tetum version, has been used within the framework of the national adult literacy campaign that the Ministry of Education started in 2007 (Boughton, 2010). It provides the learner with three months of basic literacy training (Boon, 2011).

In section 2, we first present an overview of the different methods that have been used in teaching reading, focusing on their core features. In section 3, we describe the aims and characteristics of the *Los Hau Bele* program in the context of adult literacy education in East Timor, we try to place it in the classifications of methods described in section 2 and zoom in on a specific feature of this method: using numbers in order to help students learn letters of the alphabet. In section 4 we present data from observations in four different classrooms to see how teachers and learners were using this method. Finally, in section 5, we present our conclusions and some issues for discussion and further research.

Teaching reading and writing

In the early 1950s, William Gray and colleagues studied more than five hundred different sets of materials that were used in teaching reading to beginning readers (children and adults) all over the world (Gray, 1969). A team of reading specialists of the countries that were involved subsequently studied and analyzed about fifty sets for children and fifty sets for adults. They discovered that methods for more advanced readers differ radically from methods for early reading instruction and that what sometimes looked like differences in methodology turned out be a matter of different uses of terminology. They decided to focus on early reading instruction only and found that methods did not differ so much in the goals they wanted to achieve, but rather in what they started with, i.e. their initial emphasis, and in how they were structured. Their worldwide survey led to a classification of methods in two broad groups: "those which developed early and were originally very specialized; and those which are recent and are more or less eclectic" (Gray, 1969, p. 76). Figure 1 presents an overview of Gray's classification of methods that will be briefly discussed below.

Early specialized methods

Emphasis on elements of words (i.e. code) as a starting point
- The alphabetic or spelling method: Names of letters in alphabetical sequence (bee-a ba)
- The phonic method: Sounds of letters (/buh//a/ ba)
- The syllabic method: Syllables as key units in teaching (bo – la, bola)

"Synthetic methods"

Emphasis on meaning as a point of departure (meaningful language units)
- The word method (words as meaningful units)
- The phrase method (phrases)
- The sentence method (sentences)
- The story method (short stories)

"Global methods" or "analytic methods"

Recent trends

The **eclectic** trend:
- Eclectic methods that apply a combination of analytic and synthetic strategies that are used simultaneously, while also focusing on comprehension

The **learner-centered** trend:
- Author-prepared reading matter
- Learner-teacher prepared reading matter
- Integrated instructional materials

Figure 1: Classification of reading methods (after Gray, 1969)

Early specialized methods

The early specialized methods can be divided in methods with initial emphasis on elements of words (e.g. sounds) or elements of the *code* as others would call it.

The *alphabetic* or spelling methods are the oldest and have been (and still are) used all over the world for centuries. The basic idea is that learners start with learning the names of the letters in alphabetical order and then learn to combine these letter names into syllables (bee-a ba; i-ef if) and words (bee-a-gee bag). Webster's (1887) spelling book is one of the most famous examples in the US (Figure 2).

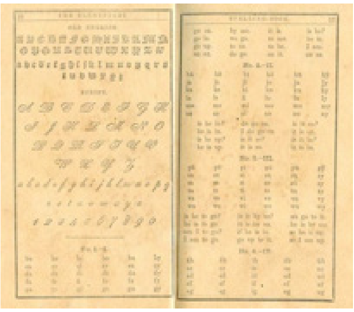
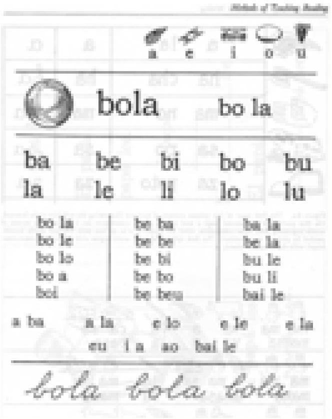


Figure 2: Exercise page from Webster's spelling book (1887)

The *phonic* (letter sound) method came into being when one realized that not the names of the letters, but the sounds of the letters produce the word when uttered rapidly (buh-a-guh bag). In most methods, initially the shapes and the sounds of the letters were introduced, beginning with the vowels and combined first into syllables and after that into words. The main advantage was thought to be the development of the ability to sound out the letters of a new word and to pronounce (and recognize) the word by blending them.

The *syllabic* method does not use the phoneme or sound, but the syllable as the key unit in teaching reading, because it is considered hardly possible to pronounce consonants accurately without adding a vowel. In teaching reading with this method, children or adults start with learning the vowels (which can be single syllables as well) and after that they practice learning all the possible syllables of the language in syllable strings like 'fa fe fi fo fu' or 'ba be bi bo bu'. (See Figure 3)



a e i o u

bola bo la

ba be bi bo bu
la le li lo lu

bo la be ba ba la
bo le be be be la
bo lo be bi bu le
bo a be bo bu li
boi be beu bai le

a ba a la e lo e le e la
eu i a ao bai le

bola bola bola

Figure 3: Example of a syllabic method (source: Gray, 1969: 97)

These three methods often are referred to as *synthetic* methods, since they guide the learner from the letters/sounds/syllables (meaningless linguistic units) to the larger, meaningful units like words and sentences.

In reaction to severe criticisms on the endless repetition of meaningless elements in synthetic methods and the risk of thus creating a dislike of reading, so-called mnemonic aids have been introduced to make the learning of the letters and the sounds of the letters more interesting. A few examples of these mnemonic aids in letter, sound and word recognition are presented in Figure 4 and 5.

The methods that -from the very beginning- emphasize *meaning* were partly developed as a reaction to the previous group focusing on code and are based on the assumption that meaningful language units should be the point of departure in early reading instruction. Depending on what were considered to be 'the true meaningful units' in language, a division may be made between *word methods* (that start with

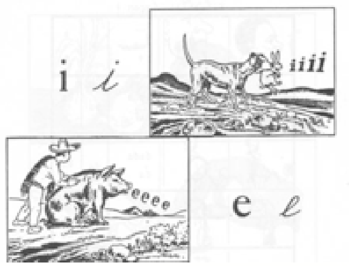


Figure 4: Mnemonic aid to remember the sound of a letter (Gray, 1969: 95).

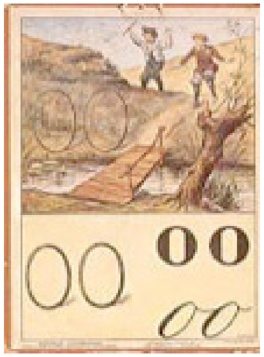


Figure 5: Mnemonic aid to remember the shape and sound of a grapheme (Hagen, 1984, p. 37).

whole meaningful words, often accompanied by pictures), *phrase methods* that start with phrases, *sentence methods* (that start with whole thought units) or even *story methods* that start with small but complete stories. These units have to be learned by heart and recognized as wholes until, at a certain point in time, the larger units are broken down into smaller units.

These methods are often called *analytic* methods (from the bigger unit to the smaller pieces). The extent to which the words are further analyzed into sublexical units varies widely, and methods that do not break down words into smaller units (or do that only after a long period of sight word learning) are called *global* methods or look-say methods. The whole language approach to reading (Goodman, 1986) is a global method that encourages readers to memorize meaningful words and then use context-cues to identify (or 'guess') and understand new words.

Recent trends

According to Gray, the early specialized methods diverged

sharply in the nature of the language units used in the first reading lessons and the basic mental processes involved (analysis, synthesis or rote learning). Changes made over time were meant to overcome weaknesses of each of the approaches leading to more and more diversification. Gray and colleagues observed greater changes in what they called more recent trends, which they presented under two different headings: the *eclectic* trend and the *learner-centered* trend, which according to them were not mutually exclusive.

The methods they called *eclectic* combined the best of the analytic and synthetic methods. These methods take carefully selected meaningful units (whole words that cover all the graphemes of the script or small stories that are centered on key words) which are analyzed (broken down into smaller units), compared and synthesized (built up again) more or less simultaneously right from the beginning. Procedures of, in Gray's words, "special significance" (p. 88) combined encouraging reading for comprehension and a thoughtful reading attitude with methods of paying attention to the code and developing word recognition skills. In the Netherlands, this methodology in beginning reading instruction has a long tradition: for more than half a century, all primary schools use methods that combine developing phonics and word recognition skills with reading for comprehension and reading pleasure. Also in adult literacy classes, although more attention will be paid here to the needs and experiences of the adult learners, the majority of the teachers combine reading for comprehension with phonics exercises, often using computer based learning technology.

The '*learner-centered* trend' was based on the idea that the interests, concerns, previous experiences and special aptitudes of the learner should be given first consideration, both in content (what the reading is about) and in the methods of teaching. These learner centered methods are classified by Gray according to the reading matter: author-prepared, learner-teacher conceived, or elaborated as part of an integrated instructional program. The content in the *author-prepared* primers for children often consists of simple stories about the same character, like Spot in Gray's own method ('The new we look and see'). The primers for adult learners deal with adults' experiences and needs. The *learner-teacher prepared* reading matter is based on the immediate interests of the learners and is prepared by themselves with guidance from the teacher. In adult literacy classes this often starts with discussions and raising awareness in the group and on the basis thereof developing reading material. Paolo Freire[1] became one of the most famous proponents of this approach (Freire, 1970), although Freire himself was always careful in investigating and developing key concepts (codifications) that guided both the cultural and political awareness of the learners, and their introduction into the written code. The *integrated instructional methods* are, according to Gray, based on 'more global concepts of learning and education' and include much more than reading and writing. Teaching of reading and writing is integrated into other parts of the curriculum. When children for example bring to class some strange looking insect that they found outside, the insect is investigated and discussed, and under the teacher's guidance the students dictate a story which the teacher writes down. This story is then used for teaching reading and writing. The French educationalist Celestin Freinet with his 'centers of interest' and learning based on real experiences and enquiry (Legrand, 1993) is a well-known representative of this approach.

Code versus meaning

The oldest *subject-matter centered* methods that Gray describes, start reading instruction with ready-made materials that can be bought and used. These methods can be divided into three groups: methods that emphasize code, methods that emphasize meaning and methods that from the very beginning emphasize both code and meaning. Many more recent methods are learner-centered: the reading materials are developed together with the learners, a practice that has been commonplace in adult literacy education in many countries.

Liberman & Liberman (1990) distinguish between methods that emphasize *meaning* and methods that emphasize *code*, arguing that methods that emphasize meaning (like the whole language approach) are based on the assumption that learning to read and write is as natural as learning to speak and that the only thing the beginning reader needs is opportunities to engage with written language, varied input of writing and a print-rich environment. The code emphasis methods (which Liberman & Liberman support) on the contrary assume that learning to read and write is not natural at all, because pre-readers do not have conscious access to the phonological make-up of the language they can already use. Beginning readers therefore need to be made aware of this phonological make-up (the alphabetical script is based on it) and need explicit instruction in the alphabetical principle (see also Kurvers, 2007).

Jeanne Chall (1999) distinguishes two major types of beginning reading instructions, based on the models that have been used to explain how reading is first learned and how it develops. One model views beginning reading as "one single process of getting meaning from print" while another views it as a two-stage process "concerned first with letters and sounds and then with meaning" (Chall, 1999, p.163). Heated debates between proponents of the two have taken place. If one holds to the one-stage model, one tends to see learning to read as a natural process (as natural as learning to speak) so there is no need to pay explicit attention to letters and sounds. The two-stage model assumes that learning to read is not natural, that it needs explicit instruction, particularly in the relationship between letters and sounds.

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[1] Freire is not mentioned in Gray's 1969 survey (Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in English in 1970).

Schematically, the basic distinction between these two approaches (emphasis on code or on meaning) can be summarized in the following Figures 6 and 7.

print → meaning

Figure 6: From print to meaning

(meaningful) print or letters → spoken language (letters - sounds) → meaning

Figure 7: From print via spoken language to meaning

Research

These classifications in themselves do not inform us on effectiveness of the various methods. Evidence of effectiveness has to be based on empirical research. In recent years, several studies have presented empirical research on evidence for instructional practice. In the field of second language and literacy acquisition, August & Shanahan (2006) and Goldenberg (2008), for example, looked at research done with children and youth, and Condelli & Wrigley (2004a, b) and Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon (2009) at research done with adult learners. All these studies refer to strategies related to phonemic awareness (phonics), as one of the key predictors of success. This would support Liberman's code emphasis methods and Chall's two-stage model. The studies with adult learners also stressed the importance of meaning from the very beginning as a key to success, like using native languages for clarification and connecting the teaching to the outside world (teaching literacy in context).

In this paper the focus is not on effectiveness, but on signaling, observing and interpreting the use of one (new) methodological principle. In the next section we first describe the method *Los Hau Bele* used in East Timor and try to define its position within the above classifications of early-reading methods. After that we take a closer look at how some teachers and their learners were engaged in using this method.

The adult literacy program 'Los Hau Bele'

Los Hau Bele is the Tetum version of the Cuban program *Yo, Sí Puedo!*. This program was developed in Cuba in the late nineties and has been used in mass literacy campaigns in many countries (Boughton 2010, p62). *Los Hau Bele* provides the learner with three months of basic literacy training in Tetum, the *lingua franca* and one of the two official languages of East Timor. The packet consists of 65 lessons on DVDs, a 16-page student manual and a 20-page teacher manual.

The *teacher manual* provides information about the program and general guidelines on how to teach adults, how to plan a lesson, and how to organize a 13-week program with five 1.5-hour lessons a week. It also explains the content and use of the student manual, which is based on a connection between letters and numbers so that, as is explained in the teacher manual, the learner can realize an association process between the known, i.e. the numbers, and the yet unknown, i.e. the letters[2]. The explanation continues with stating that using numbers like this is a way to facilitate the process of learning to read and write. The numbers 1-20 are connected to 20 letters as shown in Figure 8:

A a – 1	*L l – 6*	*S s – 11*	*F f – 16*
E e – 2	*N n – 7*	*M m – 12*	*X x – 17*
I I – 3	*K k – 8*	*H h – 13*	*G g – 18*
O o – 4	*T t – 9*	*B b – 14*	*J j – 19*
U u – 5	*R r – 10*	*D d – 15*	*P p – 20*

Figure 8: Combinations of numbers and letters in the *Los Hau Bele* program

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[2] Translated from the Portuguese version of the teacher manual (*Sim Eu Posso: Manual do monitor*, p.13), slightly differently formulated in the Tetum version (*Los Hau Bele, Manual treinador*, p.11).

After that, attention is paid to frequent combinations of letters, like *bl*, *pl*, *kr* (combined with vowels to build syllables: *bla ble bli, pla ple pli, etc.)* and *au, ai, se, je* and *ze.*

Then the manual explains the three phases of teaching in the 65-lesson plan. The first phase contains an explanation of the method (lesson 1), the student manual, the use of a pencil and how to make exercises in the student manual (lesson 2), the numbers 0-30 (lessons 3-5) and the vowels a-e-i-o-u (lessons 6-10). The second phase contains the study of the consonants (lessons 11-30) and the above mentioned frequent combinations of letters (lessons 31-47). The teacher is recommended to each time combine letters with numbers and then with drawings for key words containing that letter, like it is done in the student manual. With each key word a sentence should be made, i.e. *Sira han ha'as tasak* (They eat ripe mangos). The key word (here: *sira,* they) is then taken out and divided into syllables (si-ra), then other possible syllables should be practiced (*sa se si so su* and *as es is os us*), new words added and new sentences made. The third phase is for consolidation and it is recommended that the teacher presents the learners with a lot of exercises (i.e. with letters, cards). In the lesson plan we can see that the third phase also contains some math: the four operations addition, subtraction, multiplication and division (lessons 48-57).

The *student manual* starts with four pages on which the 20 letters to be learned are presented: 5 letters per page, always in capital and lower case, each combined with a number, a key word and a drawing, some words divided in syllables and some used in phrases. Each of these four pages on the left is combined with a page on the right with lined spaces to practice writing. The next page presents combinations of consonants (*bl, pr, kr*) with their syllables (*bla ble bli*, etc), combinations of vowels (*ai, au*) or consonants and vowels (*je, se, ze*). After that, three more pages provide lined spaces to practice writing. Then there is a page with exercises for numeracy, the four operations, and one page with a three-line statement in Tetum about being able to read and the importance of daily training. The last page presents the final test that learners will do at the end of the program: a form on which they can fill out their name, sex and country, the date, some phrases about themselves or their lives, and a signature.

Step 1.	Phrase:	*Sanan mo'os.* (The pan is clean.)
Step 2.	Key word:	*sanan*
Step 3.	Syllables:	*sa-nan*
Step 4.	Letter & number:	*s S* and how to form ***s*** and ***S*** *11 11*
Step 5.	Syllables:	*s + a = sa*, etc. *sa se si so su*
Step 6.	Syllables & numbers	*a s e s i s o s u s* *1 11 2 11 3 11 4 11 5 11*
Step 7.	Phrase & numbers:	*S a n a n m o ' o s .* 11 1 7 1 7 … 4 4 11
Step 8.	Repetition syllables: and numbers:	*s + a = sa*, etc. *sa se si so su* *a s e s i s o s u s* *1 11 2 11 3 11 4 11 5 11*
Step 9.	Write letters:	Write ***s*** and ***S*** on dotted lines
Step 10.	More words with *s*:	*sosa* (to buy), *sunu* (to burn), etc.

Figure 9: Steps in the *Los Hau Bele* DVD lessons

The *DVDs* contain the 65 lessons that are the heart of the method. In most of the lessons a new letter or letter combination is taught: you see a teacher explaining the new content to a group of adult learners, each time following more or less the same steps (slightly different from the recommendations in the teacher manual) like in lesson 18 (see Figure 9).

After several (often four) lessons in which new letters or letter combinations are introduced, there is a repetition lesson.

Teachers who work in the *Los Hau Bele* program can attend a one-day training session every two weeks. Here they learn about the didactic steps in *Los Hau Bele*, how to use the DVDs in the classroom, and how to follow-up on the DVD lessons with their own explanations and exercises for the learners in their classes.

It is interesting to see how this method can be placed in the classifications presented in section 2 of this paper. In terms of Gray's survey, it could be called eclectic: 'analytic' because it tends to start with a larger meaningful unit (phrase/word), that is then broken into smaller units and analyzed, basically according to the alphabetic/syllabic method, and 'synthetic' because it then builds up again to the key-word. An innovation or mnemonic aid that we didn't see before is the connection of letters to numbers, as an intermediate step between dealing with letters and syllables. In terms of Chall's models, one can wonder whether this would be a three stage method or a two stage method with a side-path or detour (see Figure 10).

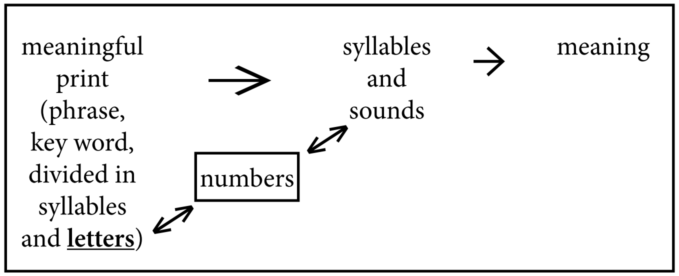
meaningful print (phrase, key word, divided in syllables and **letters**)
syllables and sounds
meaning
numbers

Figure 10: From meaningful print, letters and numbers via spoken language to meaning.

Teachers using 'Los Hau Bele'

In this section we will look at how four teachers in different parts of East Timor were teaching reading and writing to their adult learners within the *Los Hau Bele* program. We will answer the following three questions: How did they use the *Los Hau Bele* method and which steps did they take in their instructions? How did they help their learners to acquire the

alphabetic principle in the process of learning to read (see Chall, 1999; Liberman & Liberman, 1990)? And how did they use the *Los Hau Bele*-specific letter-number combinations in their lessons?

One lesson of each teacher was observed: in the districts of Ermera in the northwest of East Timor on 15-7-2011, in Viqueque in the southeast on 25-11-2010, in Covalima in the southwest on 20-2-2011 and in Dili in the north on 11-7-2011. All four lessons took place on the veranda of the teacher's house. The learners were seated on plastic chairs without tables, with student manuals, notebooks and pencils on their laps; the teachers used a blackboard in front of the group. None of the four teachers used the DVD's in the lessons observed, in two cases due to lack of electricity and of money for gasoline for the generator, in one case because of a power cut in the street due to local construction work, and in one case because a vital cable was missing. So the teachers had to fill the lesson with their own interpretation of what was supposed to be done, depending on the DVD's that they had watched earlier, the suggestions in the teacher manual and the two-weekly training sessions that they had attended.

The ***first teacher*** started the lesson with the letters R-r (the 17th lesson according to the teacher manual). She connected the *R* and *r* to the number 10, she repeated the five vowels connected to the numbers 1-5 and then explained the reading and writing of the syllables *ra re ri ro ru*, like in Figure 11.

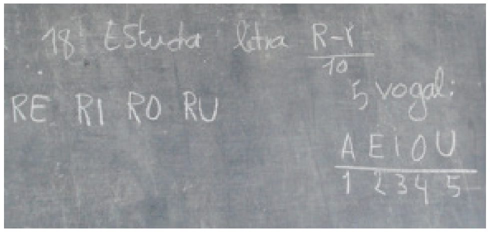

Figure 11: Letter *r* and five vowels connected to numbers, and syllables with *r*.

All learners were invited to the blackboard to write and then read series of syllables (*ra re ri ro ru*). Next, the teacher put the key word for r, *railakan* (= lightning), on the blackboard, divided in syllables, and invited learners to come to the blackboard and add the numbers under each letter of the word, like in Figure 12, and then read the word, from letters to syllables (using the letter names *eri-a-i rai, eli-a la, ka-a-eni kan*) to the whole word (*rai-la-kan, railakan*).

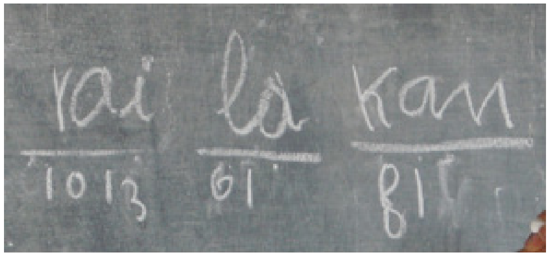

Figure 12: Numbers written under the key word *railakan* (lightning).

Finally the learners practiced writing their names, and the ones who were able to do so wrote the corresponding number under each letter of their name (see Figure 13).

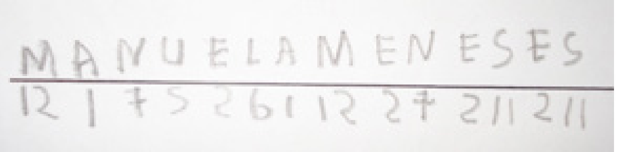

Figure 13: Name written by one of the learners, with each letter combined to a number.

The ***second teacher*** was teaching lesson number 48, in the teacher manual referred to as a numeracy lesson. His lesson consisted of two parts: one hour for numeracy and one hour for literacy. In the literacy part, the teacher started with the five vowels connected to the numbers 1-5, and then gave an explanation about the 20 letters and numbers in *Los Hau Bele*. The learners had to say each letter (using letter names like *efi* for *f*, *zjigé* for *g*, *aga* for *h*) and corresponding number several times. Then the teacher explained the complete Roman alphabet with six more letters, of which some are not used in Tetum but are frequently used in other languages that people in this multilingual setting often encounter (like *c* and *q* in Portuguese and *y* in Bahasa Indonesia). The 20 letters of Los Hau Bele and the complete Roman alphabet were repeated several times (read out loud by the learners). Next, the teacher explained about syllables with consonant-vowel order, like *ba be bi bo bu*, *ca ce ci co cu* and *da de di do du*, and vowel-consonant order: *ab eb ib ob ub*, etc. (see Figure 14).

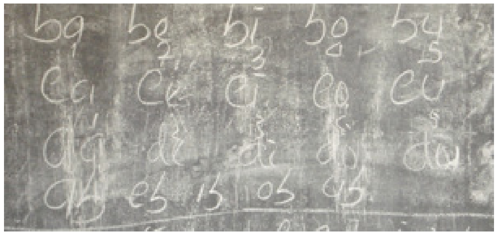

Figure 14: Syllables with *b*, *c*, *d* and the five vowels

The syllables were also repeated after the teacher in a top-to-bottom order (*ba ca da*, *be ce de*, etc.). After that, the teacher put words on the blackboard in which letters were missing. Of the missing letters the numbers were given and some learners were invited to the blackboard to fill out the missing letter that corresponded to the number, to complete the words like in Figure 15 (*uma* = house[3], *dalan* = road, *manu* =chicken, *maluk* = friend, *kalsa* = trousers and *kama* = bed).

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[3] The teacher later changed the 1 (that can be seen in the picture before the letters *ma*) into a 5, when he realized that he had made a mistake.

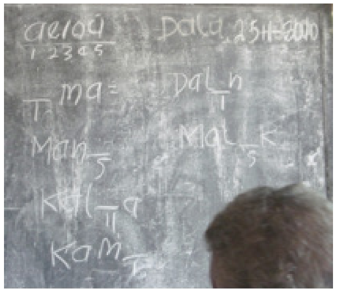
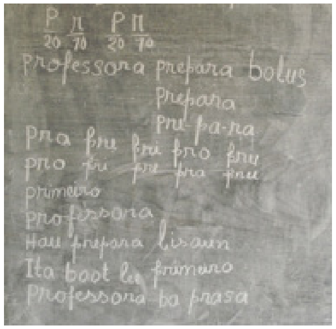


Figure 15: Words with letters missing but numbers given.

Finally, the teacher showed how to read these words by spelling and blending: *uh emi a uma*, *emi a eni uh manu*, etc.

The ***third teacher*** had started the (34th) lesson with writing a text on the blackboard as shown in Figure 16: the letters *p* and *r* (referred to as *pe* and *eri*) combined with the numbers 20 and 10, followed by a phrase containing the key word *prepara* (= prepare), which was then divided into syllables. Next, all possible syllables with *pr* were practiced: *pra pre pri pro pru,* and other words with *pr* and phrases containing words with *pr* were given.

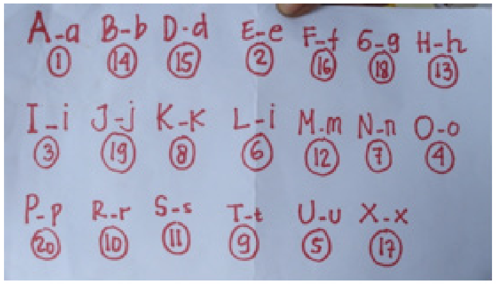


P r P r
20 10 20 10
professora prepara bolus
prepara
pre-pa-ra
pra pre pri pro pru
pro pru pre pra pru
primeiro
professora
Hau prepara lisaun
Ita boot la primeiro
Professora ba prasa

Figure 16: Text on the blackboard about letter combination *pr*.

This complete text was repeated after the teacher by the learners several times, and then they were asked to copy it in

their books. In the mean time the teacher practiced several times the 20 letters of *Los Hau Bele* (by using letter names like *efi* for *f*, *zjota* for *j* and *sjish* for *x)* and the letter-number combinations with an older learner who needed extra attention. They used a self-written paper with large letters and numbers (as the older learner had an eye problem), as shown in Figure 17.



A-a ① B-b ⑭ D-d ⑮ E-e ② F-f ⑯ G-g ⑱ H-h ⑬
I-i ③ J-j ⑲ K-k ⑧ L-l ⑥ M-m ⑫ N-n ⑦ O-o ④
P-p ⑳ R-r ⑩ S-s ⑪ T-t ⑨ U-u ⑤ X-x ⑰

Figure 17: Self-written paper with the 20 letters and numbers of *Los Hau Bele*.

The teacher then continued with a few additional words with *pr: presidente* (president), *preto* (black, in Portuguese), and a phrase with a word with *br: branco* (white, in Portuguese). Next, the teacher invited learners to the blackboard to practice writing their names and also the names of the village, sub district and district. He then sat aside again with the older learner to practice the 20 letters and numbers and his name, and the other learners joined in repeating letters and numbers. The lesson ended with a repetition of the names of their village, sub district and district.

The ***fourth teacher*** started with the letter combination *tr* (the 42nd lesson), explained how to write both letters and how to form syllables with them (*tee-eri-a tra*, *tee-eri-e tre*, etc.). She wrote the syllables *tra tre tri tro tru* on the blackboard and repeated their build up and pronunciation, also backwards (*tru tro tri*, etc.). The learners repeated the syllables after her several times and wrote them in their notebooks. The teacher also gave a few words with *tr*, like: *trata* (treat/arrange), *trigu* (flour, wheat) and *troka* ((ex)change), which the learners also copied in their notebooks. She then reminded the learners of the numbers 1-5 linked to each vowel, and discussed with them which other numbers had to be added under the syllables. Learners were invited to come to the blackboard and add the numbers under the letters of each syllable, as shown in Figure 18. After that, learners wrote the syllables and numbers in their notebooks (see Figure 19).

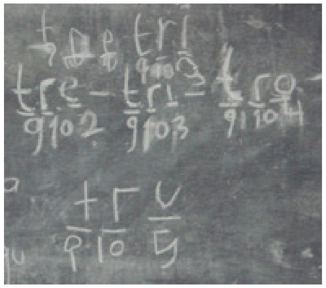


Figure 18: The writing of syllables and numbers on the blackboard.

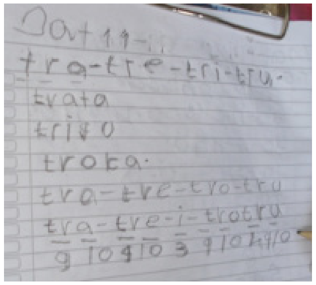


Figure 19: The writing of syllables and numbers in a notebook.

Next, the teacher explained about the build-up of the syllables by using her hand to cover up letters ('If you take out *a* from *tra*, what is left? If you take out *tr* from *tru*, what do you have left?'). Then they practiced the series *tra tre tri tro tru* again several times (reading them out loud). The next part of the lesson was spent on practicing writing names and other personal data (sex, country, birth date).

Conclusions and discussion

In the preceding sections we briefly described the *Los Hau Bele* method. When trying to place it in Gray's classification of methods, we have called it eclectic ('analytic' and 'synthetic'), with the extra feature of the mnemonic aid 'numbers connected to letters'. According to Chall's typology we also have called it a two- or three-stage method, depending on how one looks at the connection of numbers to letters. The four lessons observed then gave us a glimpse of various kinds of instructional practices that occur in today's adult literacy classes within the *Los Hau Bele* program in East Timor. We can see that teachers applied what they had learned about the methodology in different ways. The DVDs show series of steps that start with larger meaningful units (phrases) being broken down into smaller units and the teacher manual recommends teachers do so as well (the analytic method). All four teachers, in the lessons observed, chose to start with letters first, and go from there to larger (syllables) and meaningful units like words and phrases (the synthetic method). Only the third teacher, after introducing the letters *p* and *r* and the numbers 20 and 10, followed -in his writing on the blackboard- the steps more or less as suggested in the teacher manual and on the DVDs.

Regarding the teaching of the alphabetic principle, it can be concluded that all four teachers paid attention to the sounds of consonants and vowels and to the pronunciation of these when combined to syllables and words. The second and fourth teacher showed slightly more variation in this than the other two teachers, by changing the order of the syllables being practiced (*ba ca da*, *tru tro tri*) and of the letters (*ab eb ib*), or by covering parts of syllables and asking what was left.

Regarding the connection of numbers to letters, the teachers also took different approaches, although all four of them spent a significant amount of lesson time on this. Teacher 1 had the learners combine numbers with vowels, with letters of a key word (*railakan*) and with letters of their names. Teacher 2 combined numbers with the five vowels and the 15 consonants of *Los Hau Bele*, had the learners repeat the letter-number combination several times, and did a word game in which missing letters were represented by numbers. Teacher 3 used numbers combined to the letter combination *p-r* to be learned on that day and (with the older learner) to the 20 letters of *Los Hau Bele,* in the repeating of which the other learners joined in. And teacher 4 used numbers combined with letters of syllables (*tra tre tri tro tru*).

Of course these were only four lessons observed, and only one per teacher, but although the data are limited, it seems that one method has led to different interpretations concerning (a) the steps followed in terms of meaningfulness and size of units first dealt with, (b) the teaching of the alphabetic principle and (c) the use of the mnemonic 'numbers connected to letters'. Different interpretations lead to different instructional practices, as presented in this paper.

The focus in this paper is not on evaluating the effectiveness of the *Los Hau Bele* method. We analyzed data on how the method was used, obtained through class observations. From the data it is clear that the *Los Hau Bele* method aims at contributing to the acquisition of the alphabetic principle by paying attention to phonics (letter-sound correspondence, analyzing words and syllables into letters/sounds and blending letters/sounds to syllables and words). Although that probably does help learners to learn to read (see also Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Condelli & Wrigley, 2004a/b; Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 2009), one could wonder whether to achieve this goal the numbers are an aid to beginning literacy learners. Does the connection of numbers to letters indeed help them to remember those letters and, more important, the sound of the letters? Does it help them to acquire the alphabetic principle? We were not immediately sure how to interpret the letter-number combinations in *Los Hau Bele* method in Chall's steps (see section 3). The observations in section 4 revealed that the teachers also seemed a bit unsure (or at least: differed in their views) how to position the letter-number combinations in their teaching methodology. In the four lessons presented here, the main exercise for the learners seemed to be (next to writing or copying) rote association of letters and numbers, while the teacher seemed to do or model the main part of the 'literacy work': analyzing syllables and words and blending sounds and syllables.

Based on these observations, the question can be asked: When trying to teach adults to read and write, are the letter-number combinations a useful aid or an extra item to learn, still leaving the teacher to proceed with the letter-sound associations to teach word recognition? Little research has been done on this, neither in East Timor nor in other countries where locally adapted versions of the Cuban method *Yo, Sí Puedo!* are being used. Lind refers to a case study done in Mozambique that found "that the introduction of letters combined with numbers appeared to be too much at the same time and in too short a time for non-literate persons" (2008, p.91). Because learning to read and write is a cognitively complex process, more research is needed into using numbers connected to letters, to answer questions as formulated above for adults who are learning to read and write in East Timor as well as in other countries.

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Los, Hau Bele: Programa ida atu halakon la hatene lee no hakerek. Student manual, teacher manual (*Manual treinador*) and DVDs.

“WE WANT TO DEPEND ON US:” YEMENI WOMEN NAME SUCCESS

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Saint Mary’s College of California

Introduction

Yemeni women and ESL

Of the small amount of research on non- and low-literate ESL students, very little is focused on women in particular. Women as a whole generally have less schooling than men, and many women have never been to school at all (UNESCO, 2004; United Nations, 2005). Research has shown that women often have different learning needs than men, including preferences for gender-specific classes, a communal learning atmosphere, and a safe and validating classroom, as well as logistical issues such as transportation, childcare, and having daytime classes (Murphy Kilbride, Tyyskä, Ali, & Berman, 2008; Prins, Toso & Schaff, 2009; Filipek Collignon,1994). Additionally, there are other obstacles they face which include gender oppression, low self-esteem, emotional distress, poverty, age, and trauma, all which can affect their learning (Horsman, 1997; Horsman 2000; Moorish, 2002).

In the area where this researcher worked, Yemeni women comprised a significant portion of non- and low-literate female students. As a whole, Yemeni immigrants have only settled in a few distinct regions in the U.S.: Detroit, Buffalo, the San Francisco Bay Area , and Central California (Taylor & Holtrop, 2007). According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) only

30% of all Yemeni women are considered literate, as compared to Yemeni men who boast a 70% literacy rate (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). Given the high illiteracy rate amongst Yemeni women, the acculturation process for the Yemeni community is often skewed by gender. A health study done on Yemeni families in Detroit (Taylor & Holtrop, 2007) stated:

> Because of the cultural and language barrier, many Yemeni women in the United States depend on their husbands or other male family members to make family decisions that otherwise might have been controlled by the wife and mother (p. 65).

In addition to gender issues and power, literacy can also directly challenge or be in contradiction to a women’s own cultural identity and the cultural preservation of her family (Norton Pierce, 1995; Kouritzin, 2000; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). Muslim immigrant women face specific complexities in their struggle to adapt to a new culture, a new language, and in becoming literate. Rida & Milton’s study (2001) confirmed that Muslim immigrant women’s needs, “by virtue of their religious and cultural belief system,” (p. 35) differ than other immigrant women. They uncovered a variety of barriers to attending class, including transport and distance to and from class, childcare, and most often, judgment by others in their community (males or females). Furthermore, most women in the study testified that they were not comfortable going to class with either non-Muslims or men, preferring classes specifically for Muslim women.

In a similar ethnographic study, Sarroub (2002) interviewed Yemeni-American high school girls who identified aspects of their identity as “in-between-ness” as they were juggling a religious context, an American context, a cultural context and a family context. The girls were playing such a significant role in the family, fulfilling their roles as daughter in addition to being one of the only print-literate females in the house which granted them power of making many family decisions. Furthermore, the girls performed various important domestic duties which they had to perform on top of their educational duties. Often the balance was impossible. Moreover, many males in their lives, including Muslim boys at school, condemned them for pursuing their education, stating that they should be at home where they belong.

For Yemeni women living in the U.S., there is very little public space that they can claim as their own. In Yemen, society is culturally constructed around gendered space, giving women more opportunities to freely move about and conduct business (Kotnik, 2005), which is not reflected in the architecture of the U.S. In the study "Kull wahad la hallu" (Volk, 2009) offered much insight into the complexity of the lives of the Yemeni women in San Francisco. In Yemen, there is a large social network of support that does not exist for them in San Francisco, largely because their present living conditions do not facilitate the culture of hosting, or opening one's home and providing food and conversation to guests, which is necessary to maintain social bonds. The women in Volk's (2009) study felt isolated from their communities, and faced the complexity of conducting their life under new and challenging circumstances.

Students' own perspectives

Research has shown that there is often a mismatch between what the teacher wants the students to learn, and what the student's perspective actually is (Milligan, 1997). Paulo Freire (1970a, 1970b, 1985, 1998) alleged it was critical that the students' experience be the crux of the classroom content, as it not only promoted higher retention and application of subject matter, but also honors the students' existence. Given that there is minimal research on non- and low- literate ESL students that is taken from the perspective of the students themselves, this study was meant to support these students by bringing their voice to the table where the conversation has been dominated by researchers.

Research questions

In order to ensure their persistence and feelings of success in the ESL classroom, we must understand non-literate, Yemeni women's cultural perspectives on what a comfortable and fruitful learning environment is in terms of atmosphere, social elements, and learning expectations, given all the variables in their lives.

This study addressed three important questions:

1. What do non- and low-literate adult Yemeni females in the ESL classroom perceive as their successes in learning English?
2. What do they view as the main challenges to their success in learning English?
3. What do they feel they need in order to be successful?

Method

Setting and participants

This study was conducted in two classrooms in the San Francisco East Bay Area between April and June, 2010. For purposes of confidentiality, the names of the schools and the students have been changed.

For the individual interviews and focus groups this study used a convenience sample – both the researcher's own students as well as other female Yemeni students with whom the researcher had previously instructed or who otherwise had daily interaction with the researcher. Only women who were from Yemen and who had commendable persistence and attendance in class were asked to participate. The researcher determined that their particular perspective, given that they already had shown their motivation and endurance, would be insightful.

As the classroom was already familiar and comfortable, it appeared to be the ideal interview location to help facilitate honest and thoughtful answers. As seen in other studies where non- or low-literate women were interviewed (Warhol, 2004; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004) the sense of empowerment and voice the women had (which was carefully facilitated over time) was a major factor in the transparency of their answers.

This researcher was in her third year of teaching at both sites. Significant rapport existed between the students and this researcher, who often attended festivities in the homes of these students. In many cases, the researcher knew the participants prior to being their ESL instructor and was therefore seen as a friend and confidant.

Recognizing that there is often an inherent power dynamic between students and their instructor, this researcher had spent years operating a student-centered classroom, where the students made their needs known, declined teacher's requests on multiple occasions, and often determined the content of the class. Therefore, there was little doubt that the women felt empowered to accept or refuse requests or questions because they had already demonstrated their power to do so prior to conducting this study.

Nonetheless, it was necessary to remain conscious of any power dynamic throughout this study. Therefore, it was stated to the students that they could pass on answering any question or stop at any time. Furthermore, if at any point a student's hesitancy was sensed, the student was reminded of such. The researcher also volunteered to leave the room at any time per the student's wishes. Finally, it was stated that the student's decision to skip or terminate any part of the interview would not affect their relationship with their instructor.

Measurements/data collection

After piloting and re-crafting the interview questions, six interviews were conducted with students enrolled in ESL class at either ABC Adult School or XYZ Adult School. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour each. All students were interviewed at different times.

Due to the low English levels of the students, most of these interviews were completed with the help of a trusted upper-level female student or family member with whom the students had a positive rapport. It was a conscious decision to choose another student as opposed to hiring a professional translator because 1) most of the professional Arabic translators in the area were men, and due to religious reasons the women often would not or could not speak to another Muslim man, and 2) the amount of community and rapport between the students was already deemed to be at such a high level that it was thought the interviewees would be more comfortable (and therefore offer more detail) when speaking with a woman they knew.

After the individual interviews were completed, the researcher conducted two focus groups involving 18 adult Yemeni female ESL students of a variety of literacy levels. The questions focused specifically on what particular challenges Yemeni women face in pursuing their education. Again, upper level Yemeni students with whom the other students had a positive rapport acted as translators for the focus groups, in addition to responding to the questions themselves.

The interviews and focus groups were all audio taped and later transcribed for analysis. During the analysis, the data was carefully coded to determine the following elements in the transcript: 1) common themes and/or methodologies that were thought to be effective to student learning, 2) other factors deemed as critical to feelings of success, 3) non-pedagogical obstacles which interfered with learning (gender roles, trauma), and 4) any other emerging themes that arose. Additional themes were added as the analysis continued. Select quotations have been included in this study to support findings.

Results

Indicators of success

The focus here was to discover the specific tasks or moments in which a non-literate Yemeni woman felt success in English acquisition.

Empowering, concrete tasks

The women defined success in being able to perform concrete actions that held a significant amount of importance to them. For example, the women often mentioned the ability to make phone calls. Leena recounted her experience with phones: "She said she was looking for an 'on' button, she didn't know how to use it. . . . In Yemen, she tried. But in here she didn't try, because she scared that she's gonna call the police." The women talked about how they could only receive calls but not make them, thereby putting them at the mercy of the caller.

Some women had extremely vivid memories of being able to read for the first time, even articulating the content of what they read. Kamilah said that her favorite class was the day she started to read, recollecting a story about a boy in school. Similarly, Rihana joyously recalled about successfully reading pages from an adult beginning reader, namely *Sam and Pat*[1].

Many women talked about their experience in healthcare facilities. They noted that healthcare translators often spoke a different dialect of Arabic, and furthermore were not always accurate. Feeling frustrated, the women had a desire to speak for themselves. Bahiya spoke of her husband who did not always translate for her: "…he said wait, wait and I get so mad. I want to understand . . . " She mentioned her husband resisted asking her the questions the doctor was asking because they were 'private', and how uncomfortable she felt.

Others mentioned that they felt successful when they were able to talk to their children in English, mastering the ability to write their name, and being able to ask for things in public spaces.

Move to self-sufficiency

From a social perspective, the tangible tasks that were mentioned throughout the interviews – making the phone call, talking to the doctor, interpreting the road signs –are all things that hold a significant purpose or social weight. The women were delighted that they now could perform tasks that others around them could do but that they themselves were never able to beforehand. Rihana and Inas both mentioned the enjoyment in their ability to read stories, and Farah talked about her ability to ask people for things in public places. Both Inas and Maysun made mention of reading signs in public places when they are out with their families. Inas recognized the strong role that English plays in her life, stating, "I need that English for me strong."

Interestingly, all the tasks mentioned were tasks previously taken care of for them by a literate member of the family, but that the participants could now do on their own. Their testimony seemed to represent almost a shift from being the "other" to being a part of the in-group, or "belonging." Thurayya talked of her journey toward an independent life: "…I don't drive. I don't have a lot of family… There's nobody help me…So just sometime when I go anywhere, so just sometime believe me I'm crying. Because sometime I don't understand. What happened. What's going on…Now never I care. I take the address and I know where I go."

Their comments suggest that success is actually reflective of the desire to advocate for one's own self in a variety of circumstances. The longing to have control over one's own actions and dialogue seemed to be the core motivator for the women attending the classes. As Yaminha stated, "When I learn something new, I need to know more and more." And Dahab said so simply, "We want to depend on us."

Confidence and self-efficacy

When discussing why some women did not attend class, participants explained that those particular women were content with depending on their family. Bahiya stated, "Just a lot of women they say, well why am I going to go to school…I have my husband and all my kids to translate it for me if I go somewhere."

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[1] Hartel, J., Lowry, B., & Hendon, W. (2006). *Sam and Pat*. Boston: Thompson/Heinle.

So where and how do these particular women get the confidence to know that they have the power to learn English, and the resolve to want such autonomy in their life, especially when it is not seen as a necessity? Sometimes, the simple observation of other women in the classroom who have gained such autonomy is enough to convince a woman to not only want the same for herself, but to know that she is absolutely capable of obtaining such skills. Salma often made reference to the success of Kamilah, who started classes two years before her. Similar in age and in family setting, Salma held Kamilah in high regard and wanted to be just like her. Seeing Kamilah reading gave Salma the inspiration that she, a non-literate rural woman in her 50's, could do the same. Salma said that up until the moment she stepped in the classroom, she thought she was not able to learn anything, and it was that first day in class that she realized, for the first time in her life, that she was indeed capable of becoming literate.

Challenges to success

The focus here was on the particular obstacles that Yemeni immigrant women face when pursuing an education. In addition to logistical issues such as school proximity and/or transportation and a class providing childcare, there were a number of other themes that arose.

Domestic demands

In Yemeni families, a woman's domestic and social duties take utmost priority. The women in the present study stated that oftentimes they felt overwhelmed with providing meals and keeping the home presentable. The need for her to become educated or literate is often not given much priority because it competes with other tasks she must perform (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008). Some families were supportive of both the domestic goals and the academic goals, as Dahab explained: "My dad told us… go to school in the morning and do your work in the afternoon." But, oftentimes the family was not so lenient, and permitted her to go to school only if time allowed. Zahra explained, "…some husbands they're really, you know, strict…If the house is dirty he's gonna say, okay, why you gonna go to school when the house is messy like that. Like my husband… he's like…you want to go to school, go to school. You want to go shopping do anything that you needed. But these three things have to be ready: My kids have to be cleaned and feeded, the house is clean, the food is cooked." Frequently the women were simply too tired to come to class after performing their domestic work, therefore creating another hurdle.

Skilton-Sylvester (2002) spoke about the varying identities of an immigrant woman, such as her identity as spouse, mother, daughter, sister, and her working identity. As educators, it is fundamental that we understand how important these societal roles are in the women's lives and how these shifting identities relate to and determine her participation in the classroom.

Role of education

When asked why it is hard for Yemeni women to learn English the women expressed that traditional gender roles often get in the way. Some women stated that oftentimes a women's education was considered pointless as the woman was not going to use her education towards a job: "…the woman in Yemen, they didn't get some education. Because they say, what are you going to do? You gonna married and you going to stay in the house and take care of the kids and the husband and your husband family - you not going to do nothing."

These women have a faced a significant challenge: Wanting an education on its own merit. While they spoke ecstatically about being able to function independently with their new skills, this excitement was always shared amongst their family and community. This sentiment was mandated not only by male family members but also other female family members who did not value academic achievement.

Discomfort as a non literate woman/ peer encouragement

The women mentioned that oftentimes it was emotionally difficult for an uneducated woman to go to school as they lacked the self-confidence required to make the first step into the classroom. She may feel uncomfortable in the school environment simply because she has never experienced it. Leena stated she, "…didn't even know anything…doesn't even know how to count, or how to say ABC's …[I] felt embarrassed." Furthermore, some women stated that they thought it might be impossible for non-literate women to really learn. Rihana explained that she didn't know that she could be taught, and thought school was just for children or for people who had previously gone to school. This shows an uncertainty as to whether, as illiterate women, they felt there was a place for them in the classroom.

Some women testified to the discomfort of sharing the classroom with literate women, highlighting feeling "different" next to such women. They suggested that the apparent difference between the uneducated and the educated woman was often strong enough to make the uneducated woman leave the classroom, or to never register in the first place. This discomfort reinforces her dependence on other people in her family and community for assistance.

As such, the non-literate subjects had a clear memory of their first day of school, and talked of the nervousness and fear they felt. However, they noted that they also felt acceptance and comfort on that very first day and, had they not felt that way, they might not have returned to the class. It seemed that some major emotional barrier was broken on that first day, in which the women saw the success of their peers and also felt the warmth and encouragement in the room. The first impressions in the classroom can have a long lasting impact. Therefore, it seems critical that on a new student's first day the teacher use the other students as success stories and role models, so that the new student feels encouraged and knows that her success in English and literacy truly is a possibility. Perhaps a 'buddy system' or simply having students who have gained literacy skills give the new student a 'pep talk' can in itself bolster the new student's self-confidence and resolve to study.

Factors determining success

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, a number of themes came up which reflected what the women deemed as essential factors to their success in their education.

Teacher and classroom

When talking about success in the classroom, most of the women talked about the characteristics of the teacher and her teaching methodology. First and foremost, they stated that the teacher needs to be a female, and that her most redeeming qualities should be happiness and patience. They talked about the need for the teacher to be warm and friendly, and to do whatever she can to make the students feel comfortable in the classroom, convincing them that they can and will learn. As Kamilah said, "Some of the students get shy. You need to let them feel comfortable with you," and to explain to the students that they will learn "step by step."

The students affirmed the need to feel understood and acknowledged, and be given individual attention. Thurayya, who is a teacher herself, says, "Tell the teacher...you have to be good heart when you with new student. Please don't be mad. Don't be, you know, angry all the time. She have to be like a sister." The teacher should maintain her cheerfulness and tolerance and should never get angry or frustrated with their learning, and certainly should make a student feel bad for her lack of knowledge or retention. Leena said, "If you ask them anything, you don't make fun of them or anything. You just answer everything. Even if they pronounce like wrong or funny stuff, you help them, you correct them." It is the sense of feeling inferior that is to be avoided. The women's comfort level comes first, which goes well beyond the teacher simply being knowledgeable or covering the appropriate content, and instead signifies a human-to-human relationship of concern, encouragement, and understanding.

The women also pointed out the techniques used by the teacher. They stated that starting off slow and focusing on the basics is helpful. The teacher should also speak slowly and clearly, taking time to explain things, and to repeat content often. They complained about teachers speaking too fast and glossing over things, assuming that the students were following. Nibal echoed her: "…some teachers, they don't explain the right things or give us the levels they needed. So that's why they [students] drop early."

Similarly, the women mentioned that the teacher should not take any prior knowledge for granted, to rather assume that the women either have not been previously exposed to material or may need it presented once again. The women stressed the need for the teacher to always start from the beginning and to repeat content often, and not to be discouraged if they could not remember. They asked her to understand that when teaching non-literate students the process can be very long, but not to give up on them.

Support and resolve

Participant responses revealed the ways in which these women obtain or need support, and they indicated how they obtain confidence and resolve to continue with their studies. Three students made mention of pictures in particular, whether they were flashcards with pictures, picture dictionaries, or easy stories with pictures to help convey meaning. Kamilah additionally mentioned that DVDs, books, and homework help her with her learning at home. Others made reference to areas of organizational support – having a quieter house, someone to help at home, and not having younger children. Farah talked about the 'exchange' of English that happened between her and her children every evening: "Sometimes she learn here some words and she go there to give it to the kids. They learn from her, and some words they, they teach her."

Additionally, the women made mention of inner strength to reach their goals. A scenario, using a fictitious non-literate woman Yasmeen, was given during the interviews to allow the participant to give opinions without referring to her own personal situation. Kamilah offered advice to study from home, "Don't stay home, go to school...Try with the CDs, or type or that stuff that could help her..." Inas connected Yasmeen's situation to her own life, "…she have to work hard, so she can learn…nobody help me before. No kids, no husband, no nobody." Salma advised her to recognize the small victories: "She have to go to school. She have to learn. She have to go every day. She can learn something. She can learn. Even, like…her address or her phone number or, you know, anything." It seems that they all deeply understood that learning to become literate in English was an arduous process, but one that was definitely possible. The participants advised finding a way to persist even when it was hard, and to never give up. She must know within herself that, despite her lack of formal education, she is capable of achieving great things.

Future research

As LESLLA[2] educators and researchers, we must weave the opinions of the students themselves into our practice. Without their perspective, their definitions and their reality, our research is not complete. This research study lends itself to the discussion of non-literate LESLLA learners in 3 areas – what they view as success, what they feel impedes their success, and what facilitates their success.

However, this research study was limited by culture and gender in that all of the students were women from Yemen. Since culture and language are such pivotal factors, the findings from this study cannot be applied to all non- and low-literate students as these voices reflect the Yemeni experience. Similarly, a comparative study on gender, surveying both men and women, is recommended to focus on elements that specifically vary by gender. Additionally, this study did not discriminate by age, which is critical as a 20 year old non-literate student may have a different experience than a non-literate student who is 60. Therefore, it is essential that more research be conducted to help make our classrooms more successful and suited to a variety of LESLLA learners.

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[2] Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition, www.leslla.org

We must hone in on all aspects of student needs if we are to reach out and retain these same students. Within a year of completion of this study, both sites involved were both closed due to a lack of funding. Since then, only a handful of these women enrolled in another ESL class – the majority terminated their studies as they were not able to attend due to factors of 1) mix-gendered class, 2) the distance to school 3) lack of childcare, or 4) their trying a new class but did not feel comfortable. As educators of such a specific niche of learners, it seems imperative that we continue to consider the variety of needs of students that are not only present in our classrooms, but more importantly the needs of the students who feel unable to attend. If we educators continue to bridge that divide by responding to their voices, we can more successfully welcome them into a positive place of learning.

The women in the present study showed a resolution to learn that was very uplifting, and which was testimony to their own persistence, struggle, and determination to learn and to reach their goals. I thank them for sharing their experience, and hope that this is just one of many studies to come which brings their voices to ESL research.

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THE ROLE OF CLASSROOM TALK IN THE CREATION OF “SAFE SPACES” IN ADULT ESL CLASSROOMS[1]

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Perspectives on safe spaces in adult ESL

A common perspective held in adult ESL education is that classrooms need to be “safe spaces” – environments where learners are able to share personal concerns, admit confusion, try out new language, or ask questions, with relatively more ease than they would demonstrate in real-world contexts (e.g., a doctor’s office). For many ESL teachers, the concept of a safe space can guide pedagogical decisions about the extent to which learners’ personal histories and everyday lives outside the classroom are worthwhile topics of conversation for the language curriculum. Although “safe space” is a frequently heralded metaphor for describing supportive learning environments in adult ESL education, few empirical studies have documented the conditions which presumably support learner participation and willingness to exchange personal information. Scholars have waged a similar critique in other areas of education (Boostrom, 1998; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Stengel & Weems, 2010), such as this commentary from Barrett (2010) in social work education:

> “The notion that the classroom can, indeed must, be a safe space to facilitate student engagement and improve academic outcomes is so pervasive in the pedagogical literature that it is often presented as established truth, despite the fact that there is a dearth of empirical evidence documenting that safe classrooms are more effective at achieving those goals than other types of classroom environments” (p. 1).

Barrett’s (2010) observations help to illuminate a similar disconnect in the adult ESL/literacy field: although we have a myriad of reputable pedagogical practices for “bringing the outside in” (Parrish, 2004; Wallerstein, 1983; Wrigley & Guth, 1992; Weinstein, 1999), we lack adequate empirical evidence to reinforce these practices (Baynham, 2006). In the adult ESL/literacy field, research on the creation of safe spaces has the potential to validate what many teachers have long held to be true based on their own professional wisdom, daily observations, and intuition. To contribute to this broad research agenda, we investigated how one highly experienced ESL teacher and her class of beginning-level adult ESL learners manage interaction in an ESL grammar lesson which called upon a learner to share personal information about his immigration history in response to the question, “When did you come to the U.S.?” Applying methods of conversation analysis (CA) (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997; Schegloff, 2007) and examining the references to learners’ personal lives in the classroom talk, we looked for ways that the participants

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[1] We would like to thank the adult ESL learners and teacher featured in our data, who permitted their classroom experiences to be archived in The Multimedia Adult English Learner Corpus (MAELC). We also thank colleagues at Portland State University, Kathy Harris, John Hellerman, and Glen Sasek, who provided valuable technical support with our use of the MAELC. We also are grateful for feedback from conference attendees at the LESLLA 2012 conference and an anonymous reviewer. This research was partially funded by Award # P20 MD000544 from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

attend to language learning goals as well as interpersonal sharing goals in the grammar lesson. In this way, we sought to provide evidence in classroom talk for claims about the creation of safe classrooms.

The "interactional work" of LESLLA learners

By focusing on talk and interaction in a beginning-level ESL classroom in particular, we aim to provide evidence for the kinds of teacher talk that create opportunities for novice learners (hereafter referred to as LESLLA learners, or low-educated, limited-literacy second language learners) to share personal information. Perhaps more importantly, we also are interested in generating evidence for the "interactional work" (Harris, 2005; Hellerman, 2006, 2008) that learners contribute to the creation of safe classrooms, even at rudimentary stages of L2 development.[2] Without a doubt, LESLLA learners will require extensive practice with vocabulary and grammatical structures before they will be able to self-express spontaneously or formulate original sentences readily in the L2. Moreover, given the diversity in formal schooling experiences and beliefs about learning and teaching, LESLLA learners will likely vary in their ability to participate in classrooms where the teacher is attempting to create a safe environment. With limited to no experience in formal classroom settings, LESLLA learners cannot be presumed to have the classroom interactional skills (e.g., turn-taking, holding the floor, answering or asking questions about one's self) that are foundational to their ability to participate in meaningful L2 classroom discussions.

While scholars in other fields (e.g., social work, nursing, literature) (Boostrom, 1998; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Fecho, et al., 2010) focus on the classroom processes by which learners can exercise their right to self-expression, language socialization theorists emphasize the social outcomes that safe classrooms may be able to engender (Duff, 2007). Presumably, in a safe learning environment, learners gain more than just practice with target language forms used to structure the exchange of personal thoughts and experiences; they also gain opportunities to manage how others view them – as ESL learners, parents, workers, patients, refugees, and so forth. In this way, the "interactional work" (Harris, 2005; Hellerman, 2006, 2008) involved in the creation of safe spaces requires learners to attend to at least two important resources – personal information (what information you wish to share with others) and linguistic information (how to say what you want to share). In other words, learners need to develop linguistic competence (e.g., knowledge about grammatical forms, vocabulary, and fluency) to be able to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences to the teacher and other learners, but they also need "classroom participation competence," referring to the "beneficial ways to engage with the instructor and the curriculum" (Curry, 2007, p. 280). Curry's (2007) view on participation competence reinforces what Kathy Harris (2010) has referred to as a learner's capacity to "do school": "Learners who have attended school as children or adolescents come to ESOL classes knowing how school 'works.' They know how to start activities, how to ask for help, and how to be an expert or novice in a classroom interaction" (Harris, list-serv posting, April 12, 2010; see also Reder et al., 1984). In fact, from a language socialization perspective (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), it is more accurate to say that all language learners – no matter how proficient in English or competent at "doing school" they are – must learn the unique norms for speaking freely, asking/answering questions about one's personal life through repeated opportunities to participate in interactions with their teacher and other learners.

From a classroom community of practice perspective (Wenger, 1998), the ESL learners' participation is central to our

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[2] While most LESLLA studies tend to focus on the development of learners' literacy skills (learning to read and write), we focus on the learners' L2 oral communication skills (see also studies by Strube, 2009; Bigelow, et al., 2006), as well as their emerging interactional competence (i.e., their ability to use their L2 skills to manage interaction with others in the classroom).

understanding of the creation of 'safe spaces'. As members of an ESL classroom community, learners move from peripheral to full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the sociocultural practice of classroom discussions between teacher and students. As Duff (2007) observes, participation in these classroom interactions is significant "not only IN learning but AS learning" (p. 313). Over time, the learners' increasing participation in personalized exchanges with the teacher and other students contributes to the generation of further 'safe spaces,' thus enriching the community of which they are a part.

If both linguistic and participation competence play a role in learners' ability to benefit from a community of practice which is defined by 'safe spaces,' we posit that classrooms which create opportunities for learners to practice using linguistic structures, through repeated, meaningful routines, will be successful in allowing learners to move from peripheral to fuller participation in the safe space.

Learner immigration stories in the ESL classroom

As will be explained in greater detail below, this study focused on approximately eleven minutes of classroom interaction in which the ESL teacher (Deborah)[3] tells the class she wants to review irregular past tense verb forms, starting with the verb come. To demonstrate use of this verb, the teacher asks one of the learners, Armando, questions about how he came to the United States. We highlight this particular segment of classroom interaction because it demonstrates how teacher questions create the space for learners to share personal information about a potentially sensitive topic (e.g., a learner's personal immigration story) but also that the focal learner, Armando, and other learners play an equally critical role in holding the space open for further clarification, expansion, or commentary on his personal story about illegally crossing the border into the U.S.

It's critically important to recognize the sensitivity and ethical care with which many practitioners view the issue of immigration status as a topic for discussion in our ESL classrooms. Although the Workforce Investment Act stipulates that only learners with legal status may enroll in federally-funded programs, in reality, learners without legal status do enroll, via a variety of pathways (Wrigley, 2007). Amid the controversial, and often ugly, debates around routes to legalization, and in response to fears of deportation and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, teachers understandably may avoid the topic of immigration histories in the classroom. Indeed, there can be tremendous risk and consequences to learners who feel probed about their immigration status or history. By examining the "interactional work" that takes place when a learner does share his personal immigration story in the classroom, however, we hope to provide insights into the ways that novice ESL learners learn to negotiate classroom interactions around personal, potentially sensitive, matters.

Study context

The data analyzed here are drawn from a large corpus of video-tape classroom data, known as The Multimedia Adult English Learner Corpus (MAELC), based at the National Labsite for Adult ESL at Portland State University.[4] The segment of data we analyze in this paper occurred during the fourth week of a high-beginning level ESL class in winter 2003. According to the program's curricular guidelines, the learners at this level are expected to be able to "give information about themselves. They can use common greetings but usually cannot engage in fluent conversation."

The class met twice a week for three hours over the course of the ten-week term. The teacher (Deborah) was an experi-

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[3] All names are pseudonyms.

[4] The Multimedia Adult English Learner Corpus (MAELC), based at Portland State University, was established as part of a grant from the US Dept. of Education, Institute of Education, to the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. The full corpus comprises over 4,000 hours of classroom video recordings, from which our classroom segment was derived. For more information about the database, see Reder, et al. (2003).

enced practitioner who had been teaching at the school for about a year and half prior to the focal term. The class was an integrated skills class, with instructional time typically devoted to speaking activities, and reading/writing activities reserved for homework. In the session analyzed here, Deborah's lesson included review of wh-questions and the use of the irregular verb come.

The class consisted of fourteen learners: nine from Latin American countries, four from China, and one from Thailand. The learners' experience with formal education in their native countries varied, with ten of the learners having completed nine or more years. The remaining four learners had completed six years of formal education. Our focal learner, Armando, was one of these learners who typify the LESLLA profile. Notably, Armando had been enrolled at the school for 3 prior sessions (for a total of 50 weeks), longer than most of the learners, which suggests that he had had more opportunity to get accustomed to this particular school setting compared to other learners. For this study, because we were analyzing previously collected classroom data, we did not have access to additional demographic information on the classroom participants (age, years of residence, L1 use). Nor were we able to consult with the ESL teacher to do a member-check of our interpretations.

Through the transcription and examination of recorded, naturally-occurring conversations, conversation analysts aim to discover how participants use their turns at talk to understand each other and accomplish social actions. The major focus of such investigation is the sequential organization of talk as displayed through such elements as turn-taking and gesture. Utilizing a next-turn proof procedure as a means to understand speakers' interpretations, conversation analysts ensure that their analyses are based solely on the accomplishments of the participants in talk-in-interaction, rather than on their own assumptions (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1988). The primary aim of such research is not to uncover the causes of the participants' behavior, but rather to explain how that behavior is produced (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997).

The utility of CA for research on classroom interaction becomes clear when one considers Erickson's (1982) definition of teacher-learner talk as the "collective improvisation of meaning and social organization from moment to moment" (p. 153). He describes improvisation as "strategically adaptive action" in classroom talk, which falls in the center of a continuum between highly formulaic and highly spontaneous speech events. With respect to our present study, by examining turns of talk as they unfold during the process of improvisation, one can see the ways in which both learners and teachers are active participants in shaping safe spaces.

Analysis of linguistic competence and interactional competence at work

In this analysis, we see how a beginning-level learner, Armando, demonstrates both linguistic competence as well as "classroom participation" competence (Curry, 2007), in order to share a personal story about his immigration experience with his classmates. Other learners in the class were then able to share in this story by attending to both its content and form. These L2 oral skills and interactional skills, which we argue are a vital component to learners' language and literacy acquisition, are developed in classrooms such as Deborah's, which devote a significant amount of time to oral communication. This type of classroom literacy practice enables novice learners with little or considerable formal education, like Armando, to gain valuable practice in L2 interactions, and, from a socialization framework, learn the norms associated with the creation of safe classroom discussions.

Excerpt 1 (see Appendix A for transcript conventions) provides an example of what Baynham (2006) refers to as the 'dynamic push and pull' in classroom discourse, in this case, the push and pull of form and meaning, which seems to enable the teacher Deborah and the learner Armando to maintain different but complementary orientations to the significance of the classroom dialogue. Excerpt 1 begins as Deborah explains she will ask the class questions using the verb *come* to review irregular past tense verbs (also see Figures 1 and 2 for focal speakers).

Excerpt 1[5]

1→ D: So. Remember, um. (0.2) Remember (.) um past
2 that is regular and past that's irregular? Yes? You
3 remember? Yes? Okay. So these (.) this is irregular
4 ((points to word on board)). Right? Okay (.)
5 This is a question (.) with, I'm going to take the
6 example o:f (.) come. Okay, come is the verb that
7→ I'm going to play with. Okay? Um:m I would like
8 to know did- it's a yes or no answer. Did you come
9 to the U.S. i:n u:m: (0.2) two th- in the year two
thousand? U:m (.) Armando.
10 Ar: (No I didn't.)
11→ D: No I- No what? ((puts hand to ear))
12→ Ar: No I don't.
13→ D: I- I didn't.
14 Ar: No I didn't.
15→ D: Yeah that's the first thing that you said okay?
16 ((turns to board and writes question on board))
17 So did you come to the U.S. in 2000. Okay? Okay.
18 I- I- okay. What is this? ((circles "U.S." on board))
Is this place? (0.2) Or time?

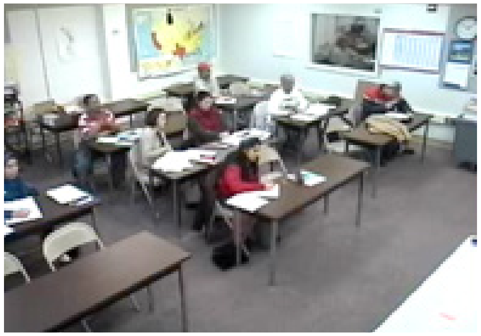

Figure 1: Armando in back left corner of classroom

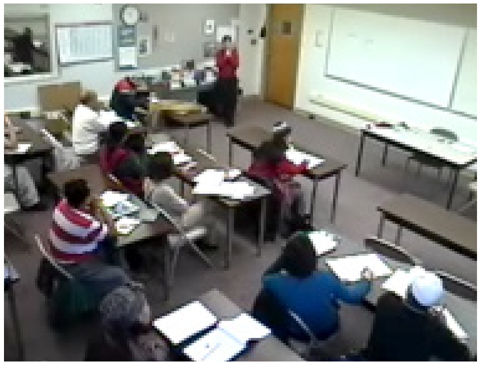

Figure 2: Deborah in front left corner of classroom

Deborah's question did you come to the U.S. in 2000? (Lines 7-9) represents the first turn in what appears to be an initiation/response/evaluation sequence. As part of this sequence, Deborah provides Armando with corrective feedback on his use of the past tense: Deborah repeats the first part of Armando's sentence (Line 11, "No I – no what?"), pauses, and uses a hand movement (places hand near ear) to prompt him to speak louder. In Line 13, the teacher explicitly corrects the past tense mistake in Armando's second attempt to answer the question in Line 12, and then in Line 15, she affirms he already had given the right response earlier (the evaluation move).

As the following excerpt begins, Deborah appears to model her thinking about how she will use the verb *come* in a question.

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[5] Video clip is available for viewing at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Excerpt%201.
Entire 11-minute class segment is available at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Entire%20Transcript

Excerpt 2[6]

24 D: Time. Okay and he said no:: I didn't. ((writes
25 sentence on board)) So first, this is my verb. And first
26 I ask a yes or no question. And I thought hm:: I'm not
27→ going to ask him about his weekend. I'm not going
28→ to say di:d you come to school this weekend. I'm not
29 going to do that. I'm going to ask him about the United
30 States. Did you come to the USA in 2000? And he said
31→ no I didn't. No. Hm. Okay. Tell me more. So so what
32 do I ask then? (.) It has to be a "wh" question. ((writes
33 "wh" on board)) He said no. So I would like to know-
34 this is wrong right? ((points to question on board))
35 He said no. So what do I wanna know? I want to-
36 S: when
37 D: when uh-huh. When?
38 S: (did you come)
39 D: Uh huh - when ((writes on board)) did you come
40 S: to USA
41 D: to the USA? Okay? ((turns around and gestures to
42 Armando)) What's the answer?
43 D: What time would be precise? Would be very precise? Yes?
44 Ar: I- I come.
45 D: Well what did he say? Ask him. Ask him.
46→ I: ((turns to face Armando)) when did you come to
47 United States?
48 Ar: (I come to United States in 1999.)
49 Fa: It's I came?
50→ D: Very good. I came. Okay. It's going to be that one
51 over there. ((points to other board)) ((writes sentence
52 on board)) I came to the U.S. in 1999? Okay. Okay. U:
53 m. Okay so I have one yes or no question and then I
54 have one we call these "wh" questions and I want one
55 more. Hm:: What else did I want to know?

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[6] Video clip is available for viewing at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Excerpt%202

56 S: (   )
57 D: Or maybe how. I'm talking to Armando. I want to know more.
58→ Fa: How do you, how do you come to United States?
59 D: How did you come to the United States ((writes
60 question on board)) And what do you say Mister Armando?
61 Ar: I come for the (.) border.
62 D: Oh you came through the [border?]
63 Ar: [Uh hm.]
64 D: Okay.

In Lines 27-28, Deborah gives an example of a question she won't ask (Did you come to school this weekend?), perhaps because the answer is obvious and thus the question is not worth asking (learners don't come to school on the weekend). Her instruction "Tell me more" (Line 31) seems to signal to the learners that the 'right' way to complete the question-answer task is to ask one another substantive questions of each other. In this way, Deborah's instructions help to establish guidelines – the norms – for asking/answering questions about one another's personal history in class. In response to Deborah's instructions, a female learner Inez asks the question when did you come to United States? (Line 46), and a male learner Farruco later asks another question how do you, how do you come to the United States? (Line 58). In response to both learner questions, the teacher provides corrective feedback on their use of the target grammatical form, reflecting her orientation to the pedagogical purpose of the conversation. She also praises the learner Farruco for providing a corrected version of Armando's response to the when-question (Line 50), additional evidence that she is focused on the grammatical accuracy of Armando's response.

In Excerpt 3, we see Deborah and Armando co-construct an expansion of his immigration story.

Excerpt 3[7]

66→ D: Horse?= ((pantomimes riding a horse))
67 Ar: =I running. I running
68→ D: No? You ran? Okay. So you walked. You didn't
69 walk you just ran.
70 Ar: I walked too.
71→ D: You walked? And then you ran.
72→ Ar: I walked for eighteen hours.

Here, Deborah uses more elemental question structures – words with rising intonation (Horse? Line 66) and canonical word order with rising intonation (You ran?, Line 68; You walked?, Line 71) – rather than the wh-questions she instructed the learners to use earlier. Nor does she draw attention to the fact that *walk* is a regular verb, and *run* is an irregular verb like *come*. In this way, Deborah seems to temporarily suspend the focus on form and function of wh-questions and shifts her focus to learning more facts about Armando's immigration story.

With regards to the potentially sensitive content of Armando's story, Excerpt 3 seems to represent critical moves in this interactional sequence. Line 72 seems to mark a pivotal moment in the interaction when Armando volunteers additional information about his immigration story: that he walked for 18 hours to cross the border, displaying his own agency in directing the telling of his personal immigration history in the classroom. In addition, the lines before Line 72 highlight the ways that the teacher's interactional moves are contingent on the learners' contributions. Note also that Armando's utterance – *I walked for eighteen hours* (Line 72) – is one of the few grammatically intact utterances he makes in this entire exchange.

Unlike other utterances in this interaction, the sequence in Excerpt 3 does not rely on the traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation exchange, but rather reflects a relatively more complex interaction and meaning exchange between Deborah and Armando.

Excerpt 4 begins with Deborah's compelling response to Armando's declaration in which she asks permission to write his response on the board as a sample sentence (Can I write that on the board?) (Line 74), a move she did not display in response to his earlier utterances.

Excerpt 4[8]

74→ D: Okay. O:oh. Can I write that on the board?
75 Ar: uh hm.
76 D: Okay. ((writes on board)) I walked for (0.2)
77 I: he
78 D: no ((writes on board)) he walked for eighteen
hours
79→ I: Wow
80 D: on the border. Across the border or to the
81 border? ((runs in place)) or across.
82 S: across
83 ((writes on board)) across the border
84→ I: Wow - this is a marathon?

Deborah's request for permission seems to provide evidence of Armando's agency in this interaction, as well as the teacher's willingness to build classroom talk around learners' verbal contributions. Her request for permission also seems to reflect her own responsiveness as a listener to his story, signaling her awareness that Armando has just shared information that may not be permissible to share in other public contexts. One female learner, Inez, seems to be the most vocal in her amazement at Armando's journey, emitting a "wow" twice in lines 79 and 84.

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[7] Video clip is available for viewing at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Excerpt%203

[8] Video clip is available for viewing at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Excerpt%204

Further evidence of the agency ascribed to Armando in this exchange is found at the beginning of the following excerpt (Lines 90-92) when a female learner in the back of the room (off camera) asks Deborah whether Armando's story is true.

Excerpt 5[9]

90→ S: (laugh) xxx is this true?
91→ D: Yes it is true. (0.4) Yeah people are wondering.
92 People don't know.
93 Ss: xxx [untranscribed learner voices]
94 S: (walk)
95 D: Yes. Yes. He walked=
96 S: =He walked.
97 D: Through the border
98 S: (walking?)
99→ D: Yes. No not through the border. This is the border
100 ((walks to map in the back of the room)) Where
101 did you cross? Did you cross here here here here
102 or here? ((points to various points on map)) Into
103 California or into Arizona? Do you remember?
104 Ar: Arizona. ((points at map))

Deborah responds that the story is indeed true (Line 91), and then turns to Armando to comment that some learners in the room may be confused because "people don't know," meaning perhaps that some learners in the room have never directly experienced fleeing across the border or don't know someone who has. Deborah's comment also serves to position Armando as someone who can teach others about this important topic. Deborah then directs the class's attention to the

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[9] Video clip is available for viewing at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Excerpt%205

map on the back wall of the classroom (see Figure 3); in lines 99-103, she prompts Armando to point out exactly where he crossed into the U.S. Armando replies that he crossed into Arizona (Line 104). Deborah's move (using the map) serves to further legitimate the truth (and value) of Armando's story and ratify his agency in the telling of his immigration story.

Following the exchange in the above excerpts, Deborah explains to the class that Armando was asked many questions because "people were interested in his story" (Lines 207-208 below).

Excerpt 6[10]

205→ D: Okay. Thank you Armando. Thank you for
206 sharing. Okay. Uh. Okay so I asked him more
207→ than two "wh" questions. We ended up asking
208 him many because people were interested in
209 his story. Okay? But this is a little bit of what I
wanted- I wanted to see.

Deborah's expression of appreciation to Armando and her use of metalanguage (i.e., the talk about the value of his story and its role in the grammar lesson) signals the end of the class discussion about Armando's story and the transition to the next lesson activity. This expression of appreciation suggests her responsiveness to Armando's willingness to communicate and take risks, potentially reaffirming her classroom as a safe space.

Deborah's appreciation move may be interpreted within Valenzuela's (1999) caring framework, which makes a distinction between aesthetic care and authentic care. Based on her ethnographic study of Mexican-American high school learners, Valenzuela observed the prevalence of aesthetic caring, characterized by the dispassionate articulation of rules, learning objectives, and curricular frameworks which

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[10] Video clip is available for viewing at: http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/Viewer/viewer.php?pl=Safespaces&cl=Excerpt%206

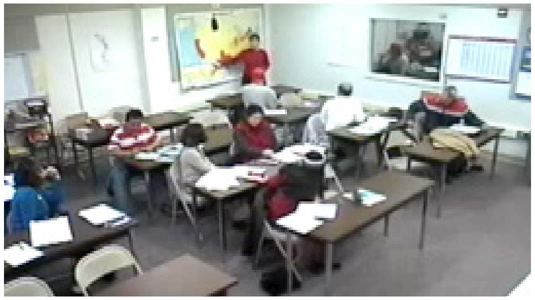

Figure 3: Deborah and Armando at wall map

aim to pass on knowledge to the learner. Valenzuela further observed that "schools are structured around aesthetic caring whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas rather than a moral ethic of [authentic caring] that nurtures and values relationships" (p. 22). Deborah's appreciation toward Armando for sharing his personal story arguably represents a display of authentic care, one which may promote future openness to "bringing the outside in" not only from Armando, but from the other learners as well.

As noted earlier, given the exploratory nature of this analysis, and given that we did not have an opportunity to consult with the teacher about our interpretations, we refrain from drawing firm conclusions about Deborah's intentions. However, Deborah's talk – her efforts to validate the truth of Armando's story, her request for his permission to document his story on the board, and her expressions of gratitude to Armando for sharing his story – provides evidence of her beliefs about the appropriateness of personal content in ESL classrooms. Her talk-in-interaction, which is both contingent and responsive, seems to enable her to achieve her objective of learner practice with question-formation, while simultaneously promoting an atmosphere of safety. We suggest that in a class of learners coming from various backgrounds and with various past immigration experiences, this atmosphere contributes to the building of a community of practice in

which they can share these experiences without the hesitancy they may confront in real-world contexts.

Discussion

Our analysis here reflects insights of Freirean practitioner Pia Moriarty (1996) who critically examined the significance of personal questions in ESL classrooms, particularly those with a survival English focus. According to Moriarty (1998), personal questions such as What is your name? Where do you live? are often regarded as "mere practice at expressing existing realities. They are supposed to be publicly neutral, and at the very least, not harmful to students" (p. 25-26). However, in a critical analysis of interaction in an ESL citizenship class Moriarty taught in the early 1980s shortly after the passage of the Immigration and Reform Control Act (1986), she found that political realities outside the classroom "left the most straightforward questions and answers with a resonance and a politically charged electricity that skewed my simple requests for grammar practice and human connection" (p. 33).

We would posit that a "resonance" and a kind of "charged electricity" is similarly evident in the interaction in Excerpt 2, after Armando replies "I come for the border" in response to the teacher's/Farruco's question "how did you come to the U.S.?" An additional charge seems to accompany Armando's declaration in Excerpt 3 "I walked for eighteen hours", as evidenced by Deborah's novel request for permission, and the teacher's affirmation of the truth-value of Armando's story. "Skewed" seems to convey a negative connotation, which reflects Moriarty's (1996) concern that teachers narrowly view the pragmatic function of their personal questions in the ESL classroom. Because our analysis of classroom talk remains exploratory at this point, we would prefer a more neutral sounding word as our intention here is to demonstrate how questions and answers around personal information in the ESL classroom may be reflective of different orientations towards the same utterance, in this case the question "How did you come to the U.S.?" Rather than "skew", we opt for the word "intersect"[11] to represent the ways different lines of meaning run through the same utterance but at different angles (e.g, teacher focus on form, learner, and meaning).

Perhaps then, what is socially normative in the ESL classroom is the way grammar practice creates opportunities for indirect sharing of real-life stories, stories that often may be too powerful to tell on their own. While teachers may be intent on integrating personal content into grammar exercises, these tasks may serve as rehearsals for real-life conversations that learners may have outside the classroom. However, this is not the trend we would argue is evident in this particular classroom interaction: learner's legal status is often purposefully side-stepped as a topic for ESL classroom, which prompts us to wonder, what is the likelihood that Armando will use his L2 linguistic knowledge (e.g., formation of wh-questions, use of irregular verb come) to share the details of this journey to other audiences outside the ESL classroom? Perhaps this is unlikely. However, we might imagine Armando one day recounting his immigration story to a child or grandchild who does not speak his native Spanish.

With respect to the discussion of classroom talk in the creation of safe spaces, the value of Armando's agency as a story teller seems to lie in his contribution to a classroom community of practice where:

- the teacher provides opportunities to develop grammatical forms that can be used to convey personal information; she also models ways that speakers in L2 classrooms can shift orientation from form to meaning, and back to form.
- learners are explicitly encouraged to ask personal questions of one another, motivated by the teacher's urging to "tell me more", that is, to ask and give details about one another's histories and backgrounds. More expert story-tellers help to apprentice less expert story-tellers gain competence in managing "push-and-pull" interactions which shift readily back and forth between questions that privilege form and questions that privilege personal content.

Implications for classroom practice

This paper highlights classroom interaction which took place on the seventh day of a new term (the fourth week of class), when the teacher knew some of the learners already (e.g., Armando) but not all. This observation is notable given that we have attempted to identify patterns of talk associated with the integration of personal content. With respect to implications for classroom practice, our study has underscored for us the importance of viewing learner contributions to classroom talk as important resources for language acquisition. Based on this initial exploration, we invite adult ESL practitioners and researchers to move away from two default conceptualizations of the pedagogy around the creation of safe spaces:

- the "toolkit" approach, which would lead us to believe that there are specific strategies and techniques that, when employed, create safe spaces, and
- the "magic" approach, which tends to romanticize the ESL classroom, embracing the idea that the mere act of bringing ESL learners of diverse backgrounds together in a classroom will give way to the open exchange of personal stories.

This does not mean that established pedagogical strategies that encourage learner participation and personal sharing – for example, the use of teacher questions and the provision of the sufficient wait time so learners have time to formulate sentences – have no place. Rather, we must encourage teachers to view the creation of safe spaces as a domain not strictly under teacher control. Both learner agency and teacher contingency promote the creation of safe spaces. Armando's willingness to contribute his immigration story with the class marks his learner agency, while Deborah's contingency is evident in her willingness to make space for personal content to enter the grammar lesson.

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[11] We would like to thank our anonymous reviewer for suggesting this alternative wording.

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Appendix A

Transcript Conventions (adapted from Schegloff, 2007)

[ ]	Overlapping talk
=	'Latched' utterances
(0.5)	Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, in tenths of a second
(.)	A 'micropause,' hearable but not readily measurable
.	Falling intonation contour
?	Rising intonation
,	'Continuing' intonation
::	Prolongation or stretching of the preceding sound, with more colons representing longer stretching
-	Cut-off or self-interruption
word	Underlining indicates some form of stress or emphasis
(( ))	Transcriber's description of events
( )	Transcriber's uncertainty about utterance
xxx	Inaudible talk

UNDERSTANDING ADULT LEARNERS AS MULTILINGUAL/MULTICULTURAL INDIVIDUALS: PRACTICAL AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

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When working with adults who are learning a second (or third, fourth, or more) language and who have limited education and limited formal literacy skills in their native language, our focus in LESLLA is primarily on their learning of the target language. As stated on the LESLLA website (http://www.leslla.org/about.htm), our primary research base comes from second language acquisition and second/foreign language learning literature, and our desired outcomes are proficiency in the target language and successful integration into the target society. This is, of course, the foundation of and vision for our work in LESLLA, an approach and a goal that we all value, and a critical component of LESLLA learner success.

At the same time, it is possible in this endeavor to focus so much on the target language (usually the primary language of the country in which we work) and on learners' integration into the majority culture of the country, that we run the risk of overlooking the often complex and rich language and cultural backgrounds and experiences of the populations in our programs and classes. Even adult learners who have limited education and literacy in their native language(s) (or language varieties) can benefit from accessing the knowledge, experiences, and skills that they do have and from perceiving that others consider that knowledge and those experiences and skills to be valuable. In addition, their languages and associated cultures can bring tremendous value to the programs and communities involved and to the educational experience overall.

In this article I argue that knowledge about, valuing of, and possibly even development of the native languages and cultures of students in LESLLA programs is critical to our successful work as educators and researchers and to the success of the students themselves. I show how this view aligns with research evidence supporting the value of native language proficiency in learning a second language and the value of building on students' personal and cultural profiles in instruction. I make specific recommendations for programmatic approaches, educational practice, and research that value adult learners as bilingual/multilingual and multicultural individuals and support and build on that background. Finally, I suggest ways that we as a LESLLA community can work together to develop this focus and approach.

This article focuses on language learners and education experiences in the United States and Canada and, therefore, on education in English. Each country in the LESLLA community has different learner populations, educational goals, and educational policies and approaches. The goal is that examples from the research available in the United States and Canada, with language learners who are not necessarily LESLLA adults, will raise issues and suggest approaches that are applicable with LESLLA adults in all of the countries involved in this endeavor.

Adult Learners as Multilingual/Multicultural Individuals

Jim Cummins (2005), Patricia Duff (2001), Ofelia García (2009), and others have described the many ways that languages, dialects of languages, and contexts and opportunities for language use can bring richness to individuals and communities and contribute positively to identity and positioning in the educational experience and in society. Research in other countries on the important role of the mother tongue in learning a second language provides ample evidence that education in the mother tongue promotes learning of the second language (see Dutcher, 2004, for a review; however, most of the studies cited focus on the language learning of children). Research on second language acquisition with children and adults in the United States and Canada indicates that recognition of individuals' linguistic and learning strengths, whatever they are, is a strong first step toward facilitating learning (e.g., Auerbach, 1995; see discussion in Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010).

At the same time, in many education programs in the United States and Canada, the only language used as the standard for educational success is English. Languages other than English are not valued in our schools and, often, in our society generally. (See Wiley, 2005, for discussion of the emerging importance of English in U.S. language policy and education.) As a result, as García (2009) points out, “Written standard English in U.S. school assessments is increasingly used to create differences between monolinguals [monolingual English speakers] and bilinguals, which are then used as gate-keeping mechanisms for promotion, high school graduation, and college entrance” (p. 39). Cummins (2005) writes, “Within the mainstream classroom, students' knowledge of additional languages has typically been viewed as either irrelevant or as an impediment to the learning of English and overall academic achievement. Many students continue to be actively discouraged from using or maintaining their home languages” (p. 585), and “Children understand very quickly that the school is an English-only zone, and they often internalize ambivalence and even shame in relation to their linguistic and cultural heritage” (p. 590).

In the United States, students who speak languages other than English are often described with such terms as "second language learners," "English language learners (ELLs)," and "immigrant L2 learners." We do not acknowledge, even in our terminology, that the learners we are describing/labeling have another language and cultural profile, and possibly even another educational profile outside of our educational program. (Descriptions used in other countries—e.g., in the United Kingdom, "learners of English as an additional language"— and the phrase "English for speakers of other languages" come closer to recognizing the language resources that students have.)

Martha Bigelow (2009) gives a specific example of the pattern in education programs in the United States of overlooking important components of students' lives. Fadumo (a pseudonym), a teenage girl from Somalia, attended an urban high school in Minnesota as a ninth grader. Although she had rich language, cultural, and community experiences and strong family engagement and support outside of school, she found little help or support from friends at school and often spent the entire day alone. She graduated from high school and enrolled in the local community college because of her exemplary behavior and strategic handling of high school challenges, which endeared her to her teachers and led to her success. Still, Bigelow wonders (following the conclusions of Zhou & Kim, 2006) if there could have been more support for Fudamo as a *Somali* teenager while she was in school, with all of the language and cultural components that that might include. Bigelow suggests that one approach might be to provide Somali youth like Fudamo with after-school and weekend school opportunities, where they would study and learn in their native language and share aspects of their culture. The weekend school would provide peer networks, foster a sense of ethnic identity, and (if the weekend school experience was recognized as having value), could even share in the responsibility of educating the students.

Bigelow concludes that

> In the world of public education, immigrant and refugee adolescents are often characterized by what they lack at school. Students' gaps in English language proficiency or background knowledge are often the focus of discussion around their educational needs. While it is essential to acknowledge what these students need to know and learn, it is also important to counterbalance a very powerful discourse of deficiency with a more well-rounded image of their strengths and assets. One way to do this is to examine immigrant students' and families' strengths by learning about the home- and community-based social and cultural capital that students bring to their schooling experiences (p. 7, citing Gibson, 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; and Zhou & Bankston, 1994).

Another example of a student living in the United States with strong social and cultural capital outside of school, which is not recognized or rewarded in school, is Henry, a 10th grade student in a high school in Connecticut. Henry's experience with languages in and out of school is documented in a description of his German Saturday school program. (Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, July 2009). Because he was very young, he attended a Saturday German school organized by the German School of Connecticut. By the time he reached 10th grade, he scored in the 95th percentile on the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) German proficiency test and was considering pursuing higher education in Germany. The language proficiency that he reached in German, and the scores he earned, qualified him to enroll in university classes with native German speakers in Germany. However, his entire language experience took place outside of his public school, German was not offered in his school, and he received no school credit for his German study. When asked if he studied any other languages in school, he said that in order to earn the required foreign language credit, he took three years of Spanish. He added, “But I realized that, given the school language experience, there is no way I could reach the proficiency in Spanish that I have reached in German.”

Neither Fudamo nor Henry are LESLLA learners. LESLLA was established to address the needs of adults with limited literacy in their native language, many of whom have undergone major life transitions, had very limited opportunities for education, and experienced considerable trauma. Although some of these features apply to Fudamo, she was able to enter, study in, and graduate from high school. Henry grew up and was educated in the United States, speaking, reading, and writing the majority language of the country, and at the same time, studying German in a second educational program. At the same time, it is worthwhile knowing their stories, as a number of components are relevant for us as a LESLLA community to consider:

- Their formal education experience ignored and did not provide them with opportunities to develop, or benefit from, the language and cultural knowledge and experiences of their home, parents, and family.
- Henry had an entirely different, second, personal and educational profile based on access to a second educational program and opportunities to use a second language outside of school. Fudamo’s life as a Somali teenager was largely ignored in school.
- Henry’s language and educational profile outside of the program facilitated and shaped his future opportunities. Bigelow argues that Fudamo’s high school outcomes could have been different with higher expectations and more culturally relevant pedagogy.

Fudamo’s and Henry’s stories, while very different from each other and from the stories of LESLLA learners, can open our minds to new ways of thinking about the learners in our programs and particularly about their experiences outside of our programs and the social and cultural capital that they may have access to and bring to the educational experience. This is the focus of this article.

Research Supporting a Focus on Languages and Cultures of Learners

Since the 1970s and 1980s, language advocates and researchers have asked whether students benefit from education in their first language and from educational experiences that are culturally responsive and compatible with their personal, family, and community experiences. While focused on education of children, UNESCO argued as early as 1953 that the best medium for teaching individuals starting to learn a language is their mother tongue (UNESCO, 1953, p. 11). UNICEF (1999) agreed, arguing that students are quicker to learn to read and acquire other academic skills when first taught in their mother tongue (p. 41). Tucker (1999) concluded, “The cumulative evidence from research conducted over the last three decades at sites around the world demonstrates conclusively that cognitive, social, personal, and economic benefits accrue to the individual who has an opportunity to develop a high degree of bilingual proficiency when compared with a monolingual counterpart” (p. 3).

Proponents in the United States of instruction in the native language argue, based on reviews of the research, that providing this opportunity while students are acquiring proficiency in the second language will promote their school success, and that not providing it puts them at risk (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Others argue that when students lose their proficiency in their native language, when it is replaced by English in school, an important personal and cultural resource is lost (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001). At the same time, opponents of native language instruction, often with a very limited research base for their beliefs, argue that it interferes with or delays English language development and academic achievement (Rossell, 2000). Arguments such as this one by Rossell, as well as specific policies related to use of language in school, have had an impact on education in the United States, Canada, and other countries (see discussion in Wiley, 2005).

Similar discussions relate to the importance of designing instruction that is relevant and responsive to students' home languages and cultures, with proponents arguing, and some research showing, that if instruction is responsive to and includes students' cultural experiences, students will achieve at higher levels. Opponents of culturally responsive instruction (again, often with a limited research base) argue that students need to learn the norms and behaviors of the majority culture and not be left in second-class, separate status within the school and, ultimately, society. (See discussion of these differing views in August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 368.)

While these issues can be argued endlessly based on one's social and political stance and the research (or theories formulated as research) cited to support one's position, in the 1990s the U.S. Department of Education sought to resolve educational issues like these by setting up a system for examining the research base for specific instructional practices. Criteria for scientifically based research were established, the research support for specific instructional practices is reviewed according to these criteria, the level of evidence for specific instructional practices is determined, and practitioner-focused papers are published describing these practices and the research that supports them (IES Practice Guides, Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). With this vision in mind, the What Works Clearinghouse (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc) was established, to provide the results of high-quality research to answer the question, "What works in education?" and provide educators with information they need to make evidence-based decisions (What Works Clearinghouse, 2008). Eric Hanushek, Chair of the National Board for Education Sciences, speaking about the What Works Clearinghouse, said, "People now accept that rigorous methods can be applied to education problems; that scientific methods can be applied to education and should be"(Spark, 2010).

With the establishment of the What Works Clearinghouse and the U.S. Department of Education's efforts to determine to what extent specific instructional practices are evidence-based, we have the opportunity to review research according to specific criteria and determine what evidence there is for the use of students' native languages and incorporation of their cultural backgrounds in instruction. Two such reviews are the National Literacy Panel (August & Shanahan, 2006) and the review of promising literacy interventions for adult students learning English (Condelli & Wrigley, 2004a, 2004b).

The National Literacy Panel, which conducted an extensive review of the research on approaches to literacy development of students who speak languages other than English and carefully screened studies according to What Works Clearinghouse standards, concluded that there is some evidence that use of students' native language during instruction can promote learning and achievement. Studies meeting the standards showed no indication that use of the native language in instruction impeded academic achievement in the native language or in English, and some studies found significant differences in learning outcomes, favoring students who received instruction in the native language (August & Shanahan, 2006). Claude Goldenberg, a member of the panel, concludes, "If you learn something in one language, you either already know it in another language (e.g., transfer it to another), or you can more easily learn it in another language" (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 15).

Condelli and Wrigley (2004a, 2004b) reviewed the research (from 1983 to 2003) on adult basic education (ABE) and adult English as a second language instruction, separating the studies into two types: 1) those that meet What Works Clearinghouse standards (17 studies), with experimental design and randomized subject assignment, quasi-experimental design with comparison groups, or regression discontinuity designs; and 2) qualitative studies. Of the studies that meet What Works Clearinghouse standards, one shows positive gains in reading and oral English communication skills of students when teachers used the native language to clarify concepts, introduce new ideas, or provide explanations. Other qualitative studies point to benefits of native language use in instruction. Condelli and Wrigley (2004b) conclude that, "Using learners' native languages, or giving them opportunities to interact in their native languages, can enhance students' sense of competence and self-worth and possibly free up cognitive resources for dealing with the learning tasks at hand" (p. 38). When possible, teachers might use the native language for clarifying concepts, introducing new ideas, or providing explanations (Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 2009). Of course, it is not always possible or practical for teachers to use students' native languages. This is something that needs to be determined program by program. A number of different options are available, as discussed below.

There is also evidence that culturally responsive/relevant/compatible instruction can promote student learning. The Institute of Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), in an IES practice guide on *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices,* points to moderate evidence that "looking for opportunities to bridge activities outside and inside the classroom" (p. 28) and "making literacy experiences more relevant to students' interests, everyday life, or important current events" (p. 26) can increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning. Condelli, Wrigley, and Yoon (2009) describe a study that found that adults learning English as a second language learned more, as measured by scores on standardized tests, in classes where the teacher made connections between life outside the classroom and what was learned in the classroom, than in classes where teachers did not make such connections. The literature on culturally responsive instruction for Native American students indicates that instruction that is culturally relevant and values students' languages does not inhibit students' academic success, and it may help to promote development of skills in math and reading and specific meta-linguistic skills (Bacon, Kidd, & Seaberg, 1982; Hirata-Edds, 2011; Frigo, et al., 2003).

Questions still remain about the evidence for using the native language in instruction and designing linguistically and culturally responsive instruction. Even with these findings — the results of specific studies, with some strong evidence, with specific groups of students, in the United States — there is a lot more that we need and want to know. Foremost for the LESLLA community is the fact that none of the studies discussed here involved LESLLA adults, with limited formal schooling and limited literacy in their native language. What do specific program designs and instructional strategies, which value students' native language and culture and build on these in instruction, look like with these learners, and what is their impact? What out-of-program and out-of-classroom experiences and learning opportunities are these individuals engaged in, and what value are those experiences bringing to instruction and their learning?

When a specific practice is determined effective based on specific research studies that meet specific criteria, we still need to know, for example,

- Is the practice more effective with some learners than with others?
- Is it more effective in some settings than in others?
- With what level of intensity and over what periods of time is it effective?
- What level of skill does the teacher need (e.g., in incorporating learners' first/primary languages into instruction) to be effective?

As Goldenberg (2008) points out, while individual studies point to the success of certain approaches, we often lack a body of solid studies that permit us to go beyond a general finding about the positive effects of a specific focus and approach. This caution is not meant to discourage us from seeking guidance from research to inform our instructional practice but rather to advise that we proceed with caution and with knowledge about the features of our specific learner populations and instructional settings.

Implications for Instruction, Teacher Preparation, Program Administration, and Research

With these cautions in mind, there are many implications of this work for practitioners and researchers working with adults with limited education who are learning a new language and culture. Here I discuss some implications for instructional practice, teacher preparation, program administration, and future research.

Instructional Practice

Reviews of research have provided guidelines for using the native language to promote learning of another language, even when the teacher doesn't know the native language. For example, Huerta-Macías (2003) and Huerta-Macías and Kephart (2009) list the following activities that learners might engage in:

- Write in their native languages in personal or interactive journals (with fellow students, the teacher, or family or community members)
- Read books, at home or in class, in their native language and discuss them at home or in class, in pairs or in small groups
- Interview family and community members in their native language and discuss their findings in class with speakers of the language
- Meet in homogeneous same-language groups to discuss concepts learned in class

To provide culturally responsive instruction that builds on learners' experiences, knowledge, interests, and strengths, teachers might

- Engage students in learning by starting with content and experiences they are familiar with and interested in and then moving to new knowledge and skills (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008)
- Use topics and narratives from learners' lives as the basis for curriculum development (Kinloch, 2012; Weinstein, 1999)
- Bring authentic materials to class to use in tasks and other activities, "bringing the outside in" (Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 1999)
- Use the language experience approach, where groups share experiences and then talk, read, and write about them (Crandall & Peyton, 1993)
- Use group and pair work, in which students practice the language, "notice the gap" between their language and that of their partners, and push themselves to reach the next level and to be understood (e.g., Swain, 2005)
- Promote student interaction through task-based and problem-based interactions (e.g., Ellis, 2003)

(See discussion of these and other approaches in Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 1999; National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics, 2007; Peyton, Moore, & Young, 2010.)

Teacher Preparation

Teachers need guidance and support for implementing these practices, especially when the focus of the program, and of instruction, has been on learning only the majority language and culture. Programs might provide learning opportunities for teachers to review research and improve their practice in workshops; study groups (e.g., lesson study); journaling; coaching, shadowing, and mentoring;

observing each others' classes and discussing their observations; and watching videotapes of instruction where these principles and practices are being implemented. (See Smith, Harris, & Reder, 2005, for descriptions of these professional development practices.)

Program Administration

Program administrators might lead staff in better understanding the populations living in their specific neighborhood, district, state, or country by investigating questions such as the following, in the areas of languages used and education opportunities in the language:

Languages used

- What languages and language varieties are spoken/used in the country/area/program?
- Who speaks and uses them? Where? When? For what purposes? In what venues?
- What opportunities are there to develop proficiency in the language?
- What social networks are there? What media are accessed? What opportunities do the speakers experience as a result of using the language?
- What social and cultural capital do this language and cultural knowledge and background bring to the education situation? (Bigelow, 2009)
- What resources are there for learning more about the different language groups and education programs in the country/area/program? How can these resources be accessed and used? (e.g., Census data, population maps, program directories)

Program staff might want to:

- Map the linguistic and cultural profile of the country/area/program in terms of these questions

- Interview and document speakers of the languages and the benefits that they see for their linguistic and cultural knowledge
- Publish articles about the languages that learners speak, the value of those languages to the speakers, and key issues related to use of those languages (following the approach of Bigelow, 2009)

Education opportunities in the language

- Are there education programs in the country/area/program focused on developing proficiency in the first/native/home languages of the learner population?
- What types of programs are there? Where are they? What can be learned from them?
- What are their goals, strengths, and challenges?
- What are the benefits of having them in place — to the individuals involved, the education system, the country?

Program staff might want to do the following:

- Develop and make available resources to inform instruction that builds on and uses the language and culture
- Identify and document educational programs in which the language and culture are developed (following the approach of the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, www.cal.org/heritage)
- Document ways that the language and culture learned in these programs contribute to learners' success in their families, communities, and workplaces

Future Research

Clearly, research is needed on the ways that first language proficiency and use and cultural knowledge can facilitate learning in the target language and contribute to the development of bilingual/multilingual and multicultural individuals.

As a LESLLA community, we might begin by updating the research agenda developed at LESLLA 2006 (Recommendations to further the field of low-educated second language and literacy acquisition – for adults, 2009) to include a substantive focus on the role of the native language and culturally responsive instruction in programs for LESLLA learners. In our research, we might ask questions such as the following:

- What program models are successful with learners with these profiles?
- Is it possible in our programs to develop bilingual oral proficiency, biliteracy, and multicultural competence rather than simply seeking development of a new language and literacy and integration into a new culture?
- What is the research base across countries on use of languages other than the target language in the classroom with these populations? What research needs to be done on these questions?
- What is the research base across countries on culturally responsive instruction with these populations? How do we define culturally responsive instruction with these populations? What research needs to be done on this question?
- What political, social, and political dynamics in our countries/areas/programs are facilitating or blocking progress on addressing these questions?

Conclusion

This article focuses primarily on learner populations in the United States and Canada and on efforts to establish levels of evidence, publish and review syntheses of research that meets standards of evidence, and make applications to instructional practice. What does the research in other countries in the LESLLA community say about the strength of native languages and cultures in LESLLA learners' lives, the ways

that they can be included in instruction, and the outcomes of those efforts? What instructional implications grow out of that research? We as a LESLLA community might decide to, and build structures and systems that allow us to, expand our horizons beyond a primary focus on the target language and majority culture in order to fully understand the learners we work with and build on and develop all of the knowledge and experiences that they bring to their learning.

Bigelow (2009) gives a case study of a Somali teenage girl (Fudamo) in high school and the social and cultural capital that she brings. We learn a great deal from this study about the importance of learners' experiences outside of school in their school success. We also see that Fudamo faced many challenges, and the school could have served her better. There are many gaps to be addressed in our educational programs, if we are to contribute to develop a society in which all of us bring all of our experiences, knowledge, and skills to the educational endeavor. We have the opportunity to come together as a community, with different studies like these, and develop a plan for building on the linguistic, social, and cultural capital of learners in our programs.

As Cummins (2005) argues, advocates for language renewal and use of languages other than only the target language can and should work with educators and language communities to highlight the value of the languages spoken and to develop and disseminate instructional strategies and materials for incorporating and building on multiple languages in educational contexts. We as the LESLLA community have the opportunity to undertake this important work together.

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ACQUIRING ENGLISH AND LITERACY WHILE LEARNING TO DO SCHOOL: RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

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Introduction

This study explores how English learners in a largely adult high school "do school" when their backgrounds often do not include print literacy or formal schooling. We analyze particularly revealing examples from two of our focal students – two Somali girls named Ayan and Nadifa. We assumed that our participants would bring linguistic resources, learning strategies, and coping mechanisms to their new schooling experiences in the United States. We assumed that they would engage in ways of solving problems and interacting with classmates and teachers that are grounded in cultural norms and informed by pre- and post-immigration experiences, including home-based and digital media literacies. However, we did not know how these assumptions would unfold in a classroom.

Like all people, our participants are cultural beings. Ayan and Nadifa, while new to school, bring funds of knowledge, resilience and emerging social and cultural capital useful to navigating institutions in the United States as shown in other studies (e.g., Bigelow, 2007, 2010). While we recognize the potential for the experience of being in school for the first time to be dramatic – possibly disorienting, exciting, stressful, engaging, fun and strange to newcomers – this analysis seeks to move beyond the qualitative experience surrounding the newness of school and literacy to a close analysis of a small number of everyday classroom events. These instances are informative to educators seeking deeper understandings of how youth with limited formal schooling learn in mixed-literacy level high school classes.

All students, including newcomers, traverse every day the dynamic social and interpersonal aspects of the home, the school, and the multiple classroom learning environments students. In these ecologies, we assume that there are issues of power and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991) enmeshed in English language acquisition among adolescent newcomers. Furthermore, we are keenly aware that youth are actively creating, resisting, flip-flopping, and negotiating their social position at school. Adolescents' identities – what is known about them and what they wish others to know about them – have observable effects in the classroom in terms of social status as peripheral or legitimate members of the classroom community. We acknowledge that systems of oppression in the new learning environment push and pull youth through the identity work they are doing at school (Bigelow, 2008). We also acknowledge that youth who are in school for the first time are often up against a deficit discourse among teachers, in the media, and even among peers who characterizes them as incapable (e.g., the *pobrecito* syndrome).

Academic success is also mediated by the curriculum: its cultural relevance and its permeability. There often seems to be countless reasons for the opening and closing of learning opportunities. Regardless of common institutional barriers in public schooling (Darden & Cavendish, 2012), and limitations in how teachers are selected, prepared and supported (Childs et al., 2011; Skinner, Garretón, & Schultz, 2011; Stillman, 2011), students have agency (Mercer, 2011) as they traverse school policies, (dis)engage in tests, assignments and everyday classroom learning opportunities. It is with full recognition of the complexity of context that we attempt to understand what it means to learn English and develop emergent literacy skills for newcomers.

Literature Review

There are few accounts in our major journals of how adolescent emergent readers acquire a new language (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). It is also uncommon to encounter data about how this population of English learners engages in classroom language learning. Because the phenomenon of interrupted or limited formal schooling is not new among adolescent immigrants and refugees to the United States, we can only assume that these learners have been in SLA, learning strategy, and classroom studies, although not explicitly identified. Some studies carried out in schools, however, have noted that their participants were emergent readers. For example, in an ethnography of a high school Valenzuela (1999) describes Carolina, Lupita and Estéban, all adolescents learning to read for the first time. In group interviews reported in their study (pp. 133-140), the students relay experiences of humiliation and shame in school. Lupita felt that she wasted her first six weeks of school because the teacher could not teach her anything. Estéban said that none of them expected special treatment, but that the mistreatment they had to bear had been very difficult. Estéban took the initiative to negotiate his grades with his teachers and take oral rather than written tests. He reports being granted permission to copy from a textbook for a grade rather than write an essay. He also told about sitting in the back of the room so that a fellow student could read aloud to him. Sadly, these strategies did not sustain him. In fact, all three of them dropped out that year. Valenzuela argues that because there were no classes for emergent readers like Carolina, Lupita and Estéban, the locus of their disenfranchisement rested "squarely with the structure of the curriculum" (p. 139). This study, while suggesting some ways for surviving in high school without print literacy did not, however, explore in detail what was happening in the classroom for these students.

In a case study of a Liberian child in a third-grade classroom (Mary), Platt and Troudi (1997) examined teaching, tutoring and learning experiences from a sociocultural perspective. In Mary's school, the English learners received pull-out ESOL services and were in grade-level classes for most of their day. The case study arose after Mary's teacher co-led a professional development opportunity in her district for other teachers on ESOL strategies. The classroom teacher and the researcher wished to learn more about Mary because she "could barely read, write, solve math problems, or speak English" (p. 30). Platt and Troudi wished to explore the nature of Mary's learning and the nature of her interaction with her classmates. The researcher videotaped Mary in large- and small-group learning in which Mary's learning processes, coping strategies and interaction were captured in detail. The theoretical frameworks drawn upon in their article to gives an important dimension to classroom learning. For example, the authors critique the mainstream cognitive SLA work of the time (i.e., Krashen's input only view) and instead opt for Vygotsky's view of language learning as an ongoing human activity crucial for developing higher mental processes. Central to their understanding of how language is acquired is the notion of assisted performance, or learning with a more competent interlocutor. The authors coin the term "zone of actual development" (ZAD) as a way of identifying what Mary can do on her own, versus the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which is what she can do with assistance.

Through analysis of videotape and fieldnotes, Platt and Troudi found that Mary fulfilled her teacher's expectations of culturally adjusting to the third-grade classroom. Mary also shows indications that she was moving toward self-regulation with the assistance of her classmates and teacher. In a lesson about planets, Mary volunteered facts she learned (e.g., "Saturn has rings.") and participated willingly via an imitative mode. When she was not asked to perform academic skills, Mary was an equal participant in her class. Data from tutoring sessions revealed that Mary was not making progress in her ability to recognize more than a few words. She relied on pictures to make meaning from texts. With peers, Mary was often able to obtain unsolicited help which, authors argue, helped her develop functional language skills without needing print literacy. Theoretically, Mary was self-regulated. She knew how to function in the classroom and her classmates knew implicitly how to work within her ZPD to help her "complete her performance" (Holzman, 1995). By distributing readings skills to peers, Mary was able to play the computer games with a peer, as a total task, and her outward behaviors suggested she participated; however, she was able to emulate the behavior of control. In pair work, Mary was good at looking busy and had practices that helped her stall (e.g., looking up as if she's thinking, writing, erasing, sharpening pencils, looking in her bag). Researchers report a very telling instance from their data when Mary was trying to work alone, stalled for as long as possible, but was on the wrong page and was unable to follow.

In a study with many similarities to Platt and Troudi's study of Mary, but with an adult female in an intensive English program, we see that "good student" behaviors can mask gaps in academic language through high school and into the university. Vásquez (2007) conducted a case study of "Festina," who came to the U.S. at the age of 13 as an Albanian refugee. Their observational and interview data showed that teachers viewed Festina very positively despite her weak writing skills. Festina's strong oral proficiency in English enabled her to garner positive regard over many years and avoid acquiring the academic language needed for her to be successful in her courses beyond the intensive English program. Vásquez reports that Festina had been in a refugee camp, but not that her formal schooling was seriously interrupted. Her high school transcript shows her grades moving from Cs, Ds, and Fs to As and Bs by her third year in high school. Despite good grades by the end of high school, Festina scored quite low on the TOEFL and was required to enroll in the university's intensive English program (IEP). When she was allowed to enroll in university classes, she was not successful (GPA 1.27). These findings contribute to other research documenting a common phenomenon of long-term academic language challenges resulting in additional years beyond high school in universities or community colleges (Bigelow, 2010; Harklau, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). This literature documents a contradiction between teachers' assessments of English learners' skills as strong with grades and other academic markers of success. It is obviously essential for high school curricula to equip English learners, including emergent readers, with strong academic English, regardless of their ability to "do school" or exhibit "good student" behavior.

Studies focusing specifically on learning strategies among L2 learners seem to have largely ignored or overlooked adolescent or adult emergent readers. Instead, this line of research has concentrated on what a "good learner" does with the assumption that strategies may include print literacy. Literature from the field tells us that strategies can be taught, can be conscious, and can become automatic over time. An important finding is that strategy use is that more proficient learners employ a wider range of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies more efficiently than less proficient learners (Green & Oxford, 1995; Kaylani, 1996; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Oxford, 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Philips, 1991). Directional causality is often unclear in this work; that is, perhaps these individuals became more proficient because they used "good learner" strategies.

Cohen (in press) definition of language learning strategies focuses on the aspect of conscious choice: "thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalised by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks

from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance." However, this research program and the empirically derived conclusions generated thus far, we fear, are based on literate learners. There are a few studies focusing on classroom language learning strategies with emergent readers, which have not been disseminated widely. For example, Degenhardt (2005) studied adult English learners (Karen, Hmong, Latino) in a community-based ESL program. She documented strategies used by her participants as they worked on a project together finding that the Hmong and Karen students used interactive, social strategies less than the Spanish speakers. In a similar vein, Reimer (2008) conducted a classroom-based study with 11 Hmong emergent readers with no prior formal schooling. Reimer framed her study using mainstream research on language learning strategies (e.g., A. Cohen, 1998; A. Cohen, 2011; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) with the intent to bring a more diverse learner into this research agenda. Through interviews and classroom observations, Reimer found that adult Hmong students use a variety of strategies effectively. Reimer approached her research deductively by looking for cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies found in the strategies literature and then exploring unique strategies in her data through inductive means. The most common effective strategies included the following examples:

1. Having paper and pens ready
2. Copying from the board
3. Attending to classroom activity
4. Copying from the board
5. Asking questions to show comprehension
6. Repeating dialogues and words
7. Using text, pictures to orient themselves to the class materials
8. Asking the teacher for help.

Some of the ineffective strategies she identified included keeping track of papers, copying with only attention to form, not meaning, and avoiding interaction with the teacher.

Our read of this literature leads us to suggest that culture, albeit in largely implicit ways, potentially informs learning strategies. We question, however, what this means when print-based strategies are culturally juxtaposed to strategies involving interaction and oral language use. In other words, societies which use more print literacy include cultures which somehow prefer learning through tools involving print and societies which do not use print literacy as much somehow prefer learning through interpersonal, hands on ways. These conclusions are problematic because even heavily print-based societies also use oral language across a wide range of genres. Furthermore, if students do not have the option of relying on print-based learning strategies such as note taking, it is impossible to say that orally-based strategies are a preference. Learning through means which are not print-based is the only option until basic print literacy is achieved.

Given the potential importance of learning strategies, and the dearth of research on how newcomers with limited experiences with print negotiate many new academic demands, this study sought to examine classroom practices and behaviors of learners new to the U.S. and new to school. Our aim was to investigate examine some of the potential ways in which newcomers learn to do school in a new language, while simultaneously acquiring new literacy skills and new academic content.

The study

To address these issues, this paper draws from four months of intensive, ethnographic observation in two newcomer classes in one all-English-language-learner high school (Franken International). Researchers worked closely with school leadership and teachers across one academic year. For four months in the Spring term, we observed two class periods three-to-five days each week; conducted interviews and language and literacy assessments with students individually or in small groups; and collected copies of student work. Most sessions were audio and video-taped, resulting in more than 100 hours of classroom video data.

The context

All students at Franken International are English language learners who have come to the U.S. as adolescents or young adults. For many, Franken International is their first encounter with formal schooling. Students range in age from 14 to 21, and the majority have either Somali or Spanish as a first language, although there are also speakers of Oromo, Amharic, Vietnamese, Lao, French, Hmong, and Nepalese. Franken's publically stated aims are to "support high academic achievement in an accredited high school setting and by working in partnership with local colleges". Franken International has ten full-time teaching staff and enrolls about 150 students, 90% of whom are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

Franken International is housed in one wing of a large urban comprehensive high school which serves primarily African American and Latino students. In part because of its small size but also due to the staff's enthusiasm and dedication, the tone of the school is friendly and upbeat. Students and staff routinely greet and banter with each other; students are supportive of one another and, for instance, quick to help a new arrival understand her course schedule; and the school is not characterized by the national, racial, ethnic or religious inter-group tensions well documented in other contexts (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997; Fordham, 1996; Lee, 2005; Lopez, 2003; Pollock, 2004; Yon, 2000),

Our role and stance

We began our work at the request of Franken's principal, who sought to establish a university-school research partnership. For four months, we observed classes across the school day, participated in weekly faculty training and leadership meetings, and worked with some teachers on their unit and lesson plans. In February, we began intensive participant observation in two classes, taught by the same teacher, Ms. Mavis. For the remainder of the school year, we occupied varied roles in those two classes. We served at times as teaching assistants (e.g., working with students in small groups, passing out materials, helping students individually), as confidants (sharing students' problems, triumphs and small stories in the hall), and on some days as university researchers (testing students in the library, setting up the recorders and taking notes on our laptops in the back of the room) (Ainley, 1999; Rounds, 1996). The majority of students and staff explicitly welcomed us, although not all and not always. For instance, several students withdrew from study, stating they did not wish to be interviewed or video-taped in class, and not all staff opened their classroom doors to us as widely as Ms. Mavis chose to (Duff & Early, 1996).

Focal teacher

Ms. Mavis held reading and ESL licenses. She had lived in Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer, and spoke French and some Spanish. Ms. Mavis made a point of discussing and validating students' native languages in the classroom although they were not systemically used for instructional purposes. Overall she treated her students respectfully, as intelligent young adults; students frequently stated they learned a lot in her class. Both periods were focused on developmental literacy skills (including vocabulary, grammar, bottom-up phonics), and students included the most recent arrivals to Franken International. Despite students' beginning-level English proficiency, Ms. M. also attempted to include higher order skills such as prediction and plot analysis, as well as materials she felt would be culturally familiar (e.g. stories with a moral, often from another country).

Data analysis

Across four months, the project yielded 59 hours of audio-video-taped classroom observation, 5 hours of interviews, and 44 hours of individual or small group tutoring sessions. Our qualitative analysis focused on recordings of classroom interactions; students' written work; and 10 focal students' performance on elicited assessments in English and their dominant language (i.e., Somali, Spanish, Amharic or Lao).

As our focus was on identifying students' strategies for learning and doing school, that is on analyzing strategies as practiced by *these* students in *this* particular context, our initial step in analysis was to review classroom observations and field notes with the goal of identifying salient strategies within the local ecologies of these two classroom. Through this inductive coding approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), we identified many different strategies. These included 'seeking interpersonal support', 'pronounced oral participation', 'bilingual note-taking', 'self-vocalization', and 'work arounds', among others. We simultaneously identified 'critical incidents', that is interactions evident in the observations that were unusual, involved conflict, or clear enactment of resistance to school or teacher policy. We then looked for patterns across the students, classrooms, and activities. Informed by this broader coding, below, we provide detailed microethnographic analysis of specific classroom events in order to illustrate some of the strategies used by these learners.

Research Findings and Analysis

The remainder of the article focuses on two of our study's focal students: Ayan and Nadifa. The following are instances where these two focal students made choices about how to engage in classroom learning activities.

Ayan

This is Ayan's second year in Ms. Mavis' introductory English class yet her English writing skills and productive oral skills are among the weakest in the class. At the time of the study, she had been in the U.S. for one year; Franken International was her first formal school experience. Ayan caught our attention immediately as she frequently sought support from us, the teacher, and fellow students. She was often the target of Ms. Mavis' reminders and reprimands for talking out of turn or not staying on task. Ayan sometimes engaged in overtly oppositional resistance to teacher requests. In addition, the academic skills that Ayan possesses were at times overlooked and undermined in class. For instance, while she does not write in Somali, she is a proficient speaker of that language; yet another was routinely ratified as the expert in the class.

Ayan relied on two, inter-related strategies which facilitated her engage with academic work: (a) peer support/interaction, and (b) physical movement and bodily contact with other students. As evident in Excerpt 1 ('Ayan, no copying!') below, she is highly skilled at both. We now turn to analyzing in detail one segment of classroom interaction involving Ayan. Our aim is to illustrate some of the many skills that Ayan possesses that allow her 'to do school' effectively; many of these are apparent only through close, microanalysis of her interactional moves, and thus difficult to observe in real time, in real classrooms.

The focus of this particular class was past and present irregular verbs. Students were given a worksheet with a list of 16 irregular verbs in the past tense (e.g., *saw, went, began, was, drank, blew*, *hid*) and told their task was to provide the present tense. These verbs had appeared in the folk story the students had been working with over the last few weeks. Ms. Mavis explicitly recognized that this would be a challenging task for them. After modeling the task at the front of the room with document projector, she tells them: "Ok, you see how many you can do. Try to find verbs you know. See how many you can do on your own, OK? Try to do some on your own." Immediately, Ayan signals to Ms. Mavis that she needs help with *saw.* Ms. Mavis walks over to her desk and assists her through body language (point at eye). The interactions described below

are what follow when Ms. Mavis moves on to help another student. (See transcription conventions in the Appendix)

Excerpt 1: 'Ayan, no copying!' (March, 2011)

1	Ayan	((turns head and body towards her Amharic-speaking seatmate, Aisha, and begins to fill out her worksheet, silently moving her head back and forth as she looks first at her seatmate's paper and then at her own))	*6.25-6.55*
2	Ayan	((whispers to seatmate, smiles and then slaps her playfully on the shoulder))	*6.56-7.01*
3	Ayan	((turns her gaze and body behind her, making eye-contact with Somali boy, Said, who had stronger English skills; then in one quick swoop grabs his worksheet and puts on her own desk))	*7.02-7.06*
4	Ayan	((looks silently at this Said's worksheet))	*7.07-7.14*
5	Ayan	((twists head around to smile slightly at Said, with tongue out of her mouth))	*7.15-7.16*
6	Ayan	((compares her and Aisha's worksheets with that of Said))	*7.17-7.34*
7	Ms. Mavis	((approaches Said's desk))	*7.35*
8	Ayan	(twists around in alarm, making eye contact with him))	*7.36*
9	Ms. Mavis	Said, you don't have this paper?	*7.37*
10	Ayan	((twists, smiles and returns Said's paper))	*7.38*
11	Ms. Mavis	Ayan, no copying.	*7.39*

12	Ayan	((pats Aisha on the shoulder and then collapses on top of her giggles, simultaneously making eye contact with Said))	*7.40-7.46*
13	Ayan	((twists around to grab Ms. Mavis at the elbow forcing Ms. Mavis to turn her body 180 degrees))	*7.47-7.48*
14	Ayan	TEACHER! ((holds up her worksheet above her head with two hands))	*7.49*
15	Ms. Mavis	ok. good Ayan. ((continuing to walk towards the front of the room and over to another group of students))	*7.50-7.51*
16	Ayan	((leans over her worksheet, moving her head back and forth))	*7.50-8.16*
17	Ayan	((turns around and attempts to make eye contact with Said))	*8.17*
18	Ayan	((turns around again and attempts to make eye contact with Said))	*8.26*
19	Ayan	((taps Aisha on the shoulder))	*8.30*
20	Ayan	((holds up her worksheet so visible to Said, twists head around, smiles, says something inaudible and then takes his worksheet, with his apparent consent)	*8.35-8.41*
21	Ayan	((writes, and occasionally erases, at her desk intensively, moving head back and forth while Ms. Mavis is just one student over))	*8.42-9.33*
22	Ayan	((silently and slowly returns paper to Said without making eye-contact))	*9.33-9.34*
23	Ayan	((leans over her paper and looks closely))	*9.35-9.36*
24	Ayan	'Teacher! Teacher!' ((waves and tries to touch Bigelow as she walks by))	*9.40-9.44*
25	Ayan	((laughs and waves paper around audibly))	*9.45-9.50*
26	Ayan	((consults with Aisha, looks around room))	*9.51-10.25*
27	Ms. Mavis	((approaches Ayan's desk, looks over her paper from above))	*10.26*
		Ok. this goes here. and this goes here. ((pointing at her worksheet, and then demonstrates 'hop' by physically acting out))	*10.29*

In this roughly four-minute segment, we see how Ayan simultaneously and seamlessly manages multiple social relationships (e.g., with Aisha, Said, and Ms. Mavis) and succeeds in effectively 'doing school' by making progress on her assigned worksheet. Also evident here is a sharp contrast between Ms. Mavis' directions to work independently and Ayan's intensive recruitment of interpersonal support. In quick succession, she establishes collaborative relationships with two students around her, primarily through physical contact and body language; borrows twice the worksheet of more-English-proficient student behind her; and elicits support and praise from teacher at three different points. In the span of four minutes, she completes at least fifteen overt, interpersonal moves. In addition, during this same work period she also gets up to hug another Somali girl and walks across the room to get candy from a Latino boy. This excerpt highlights how skilled Ayan is at multi-tasking and being very aware of who is nearby (e.g., head turning with Ms. M's voice), and how to manage relationships with classmates while simultaneously doing written task.

This segment also reveals Ayan's proficiency in 'doing school', and her understanding of what is officially and unofficially sanctioned in this classroom. For instance, she understands that *officially* she is not supposed to copy, as evident by her alertness at Ms. Mavis' approach (moves 7 and 8) and her return of the worksheet *before* Ms. Mavis says 'no coping', as well as her laughter after the fact (moves 10-12). Ayan also seems to understand that *unofficially* there is no real punishment for doing so (as she repeats 'offense' in move 20 with Ms. Mavis very nearby). Indeed, despite multiple flagrant violations of classroom rules (e.g., no copying, working independently for this task), Ayan successfully 'gets by': that is, she completes the task (and even gets a compliment of 'good' from M.) and does not get in trouble.

Nadifa

Nadifa has been in the U.S. and at Franken for two years. Nadifa's gaze is often on her own paper and toward the front of the room. She is typically sitting up very straight, with her papers out and her pen in her hand. She consults with other students, like Ayan, but for particular reasons, not as her default for getting her work done. She brings strong interpersonal skills to her interactions with classmates and teachers. Nadifa is outgoing and talkative, asks questions, seems to try hard, has good attendance, smiles a lot, is well-behaved and clearly enjoys school. She is a storyteller herself, with a repertoire newcomer stories– some funny, some very heartfelt.

Nadifa has a range of effective learning strategies. These include: using lists and taking notes (mostly in English – compared to some of her peers with some L1 literacy who use bilingual lists); seeking interpersonal support (not so much in terms of getting help getting work done, like Ayan, but we see longer oral negotiations in Somali and English); looking at pictures to help comprehend stories; she is able to engage with text at the teacher's pace and stays focused, and pronounced oral participation (typically repeated, solo and loud).

Nadifa is also skilled at doing 'work arounds,' that is she sometimes finds ways of getting the task done, but also possibly missing the intended learning opportunity of the task (e.g., when doing matching card activities that entail putting in columns flash cards with certain sounds/letter combos, she might use color coding to sort rather than by spelling/sound; skillfully copying). Nevertheless, in many ways she is a good student and highly proficient in 'doing school', that is keeping notebook organized, organizing papers, conforming to classroom expectations.

However at times, Nadifa's ways of doing school are informed by her oral language skills and culturally-based ways of enjoying oral texts. We suggest that Nadifa's way of doing school is intertwined with a cultural stance toward literacy. In Excepts 2 and 3, we see how she engages fully with the texts, briefly resists, and then complies with formal, some resistance, and then compliance to school literacy practices.

Regularly across the year, Ms. Mavis would play animated videos based on the current folktale students were reading (www.storycove.com). In these videos, a narrator reads verbatim from the children's book and the characters are minimally animated. Nadifa, in particular, found these videos amusing and highly engaging. She and other Somali students would laugh each time at the same point the story was played (e.g., when the main character put a pot of beans on his head, in *Anasi the Spider*) (fieldnotes 2.23.11). The students would laugh at the punch line many times over – and even sometimes when there was no obvious punch line.

This pleasurable engagement with texts was at odds at time with Ms. Mavis' attempts to have students critically analyze the structure of the stories. Throughout the year, Ms. Mavis attempted to have students identify the story characters, setting, the main problem, climax, resolution and moral of the stories. This was highly challenging for most students. Ms. Mavis would attempt to promote this skill by frequently stopping the video and asking questions of students as evident in Except 2. In this segment, the class is watching the video of *How the Tiger Lost his Stripes*. Many students seem to enjoy the video, laughing and smiling.

Excerpt 2 ('Nadifa engages with text') (Feb 2012)

1	video narrator	And back at my house I will go and get him. The man started to walk off.	*0-7.54 (sec)*
2	Nadifa	((alert with eyes on screen and erect posture))	*0-7.54 (sec)*
3	Ms. Mavis	((click stop on the video))	*7.55*
4	Nadifa	((claps hands above head, turns body to the side and chuckles))	*7.56-9.20*
5	Ms. Mavis	So, how many of you think that is the climax?	*10-12.37*
6	Nadifa	((covers her mouth while raising her right hand))	*12.50*

Here we see how Nadifa manages her own frustration that the story has been interrupted. She claps and laughs, but immediately raises her hand in response to Ms. Mavis' question about the climax of the story. In Excerpt 3 below, in contrast, we see Nadifa's resistance to this sort of analysis. Here, Ms. Mavis stops the video to ask students to predict what will happen next.

Excerpt 3 ('Nadifa protests predicting') (Feb 2012)

1	Video narrator	A change has come said the tiger.	*0-4.43 (sec)*
2	Nadifa	HEA! ((loudly, in a deep voice))	*6.18*
3	Ms. Mavis	So now remember (.) you will the rest of it, ok?	*8.81-11.38*
4	Nadifa	Oh my god ((turns to side of room and smiles))	
5		We are going to make predictions. I will show it again from the beginning, OK?	*13.33-15.76*
6	Nadifa	NO!!! xxx finish. ((loudly and then smiles and turns to side of room))	*15.79-18.65*
7	Ms. Mavis	Don't worry about seeing the rest. ((not clear))	
8	Nadifa	((turns to classmate, speaks in Somali))	*30.79*
9		OK (.) this time while you watch think (.) about (.) the plot (.) how it begins (.) the timing (.) the climax (.) What do you think the resolution will be? OK?	*33.32 – 46.23*
10	Video	((music playing))	*36.27*
11	Nadifa	((turns to the side and looks away from the video))	*36.27*
12	Video narrator	Title … written by XXX Illustrated by XXX	*46.23*
13	Nadifa	((as narration starts Nadifa turns back towards the screen))	*46.23*

Here we see Nadifa's clear irritation with Ms. Mavis' more academic agenda. She protests the stopping of the video; she seems to want to enjoy the story in its entirety. Ms. Mavis, in contrast has another agenda: a more abstract analysis of plot. Here we see how Nadifa advocates for her wishes, but also resists academic literacy demands. She turns her body away from Ms. Mavis and the screen (at the front of the room) to resist; notably returns her gaze immediately when the story is restarted. Further, shortly after this protest, Nadifa acquiesces and returns to actively answering the teacher's comprehension questions (e.g., "Why does he think he is better than man?").

Discussion

These examples suggest ways in which strategies can be productive (or functional) for students in terms of promoting engaged learning and/or in what we call 'doing school' – e.g., getting school tasks done efficiently but not always seeming to learn from classroom tasks. For instance, Ayan's interactional strategies were functional in helping her 'do school', but it is questionable to what extent they helped her really engage with material and to learn. These strategies, in some instances, also violated explicit rules and were not sanctioned by teachers.

Nadifa, in turn, adjusted her preferred (and possibly culturally-informed) way to listen to a story to the school context. She resisted the unnatural pausing in the story but chose to stay engaged and answer the teacher's questions about the text. Nadifa gave in to 'doing school', and also gave up enjoying a folktale for a little while. This example illustrates some of the ways in which literacy practices in school-based settings often collide with ways of engaging with text outside of the school walls. Particularly in a reading class, students are using text to learn, rather than learning through text. They are explicitly taught how make sense of text in ways that are particular to the context of school. This means manipulating the text to practice reading strategies (rather than listening, laughing at the jokes, learning), answering questions to show comprehension (rather than debating the ending, discussing the moral), and documenting the contour of the story on plot diagrams (rather than enjoying the craft of the storyteller). An even more culturally distinct way of understanding a story is the plot diagram. Segmenting an entertaining story in a way that fits a triangle is a very abstract way of engaging with narrative when new to print. Nadifa was able to excel at this task because she sets aside authentic ways of understanding a story and embraces this very academic way of making a story abstract. In the name of becoming a reader in a school context, Nadifa was willing to shift her orientation to this new way of engaging with text.

As we examined these and other interactions in our data we reflected on the tenets of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy. In this respect, we have more questions than answers. For instance, the classroom content relied heavily on 'multicultural' folktales, but many of the ways of learning and interacting around these folktales did not leverage cultural preferences, nor culturally-grounded ways of learning or knowing. However, if the class were to be similar to classes in Somalia or the refugee camps in Kenya, students would likely have to listen to the teacher most of the time, copy from the chalk board, repeat what the teacher says, and memorize a great deal. If this is culturally relevant pedagogy, in that it is similar to the students' past experiences, it does not seem to be something that most educators (including us) would advocate for.

Finally, these data call into question to what extent such behaviors are language learning strategies and whether, instead, they are better considered coping mechanisms of some sort. As these newcomer students face multiple and overlapping challenges with respect to language learning, academic content learning, and literacy learning in vastly new cultural contexts, some of these behaviors might well be as much about negotiating, navigating, and surviving these demands as they are consciously chosen language learning strategies. Fine-tuning this distinction (between language learning strategies and survival strategies) is perhaps not essential — for researchers or teachers, and certainly not for students themselves. What is important, as we hope this paper has illustrated, is close attention to the particular ways that students engage with academic tasks and cope with classroom demands, and greater awareness and inquiry by teachers and researchers into if and how these behaviors ultimately support or undermine their academic progress.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

CAPS	spoken with emphasis (minimum unit is morpheme)
.	falling intonation at the end of words
,	rising intonation at the end of words
?	rising intonation in clause
->	continuing or flat intonation (as in lists)
!	animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation
(.)	pause
[	overlapping speech
+/…	interruption (self or other)
@	laughter
::	elongated sound
“ ”	reported speech
(( ))	transcriber’s comment

LOW-LEVEL LEARNERS: PRIORITIZING TEACHING TOPICS

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How can instructors best choose learning topics, an instructional sequence, and which language skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing—to stress for results that are both measurable and meaningful to our LESLLA students?

Many refugee students come to ESL classes with so much to learn, and low or no literacy skills. When students need so much English language learning, where do we begin? How do we proceed? Many programs, when faced with low-literate learners, want to “be all things to all people,” which results in a “smorgasbord of educational offerings,” or a ‘whatever works’ philosophy that engulfs the learners in an endless variety of activities” (Wrigley, 1993, p.463, as cited in Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). This paper explains the process two instructors followed to restructure what was once a ‘smorgasbord’ Foundations level class into a systematic, low-level ‘pre-literacy’ ESL class focusing on daily life topics, basic communication and acculturation, and skills that may help prepare for literacy instruction. We detail the typical structure of a class and present the learning goals we have for our students.

Background

The work we do with our refugee students happens at Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC), a community-based organization located in Pittsburgh, PA, USA. GPLC provides instructional programs in English as a Second Language, basic skills (reading, writing, math), GED Preparation, workplace skills development, and family literacy. All services provided to students are free. Volunteer tutors provide one-to-one and small group instruction throughout the city while professional instructors are responsible for classroom instruction at a central location. The professional instructional staff is responsible for creating curriculum, lesson planning and some materials development.

Incoming ESOL students are assessed with the *BEST Plus (Basic English Skills Test*[1]*)*. *BEST Plus* is an individually administered, face-to-face oral interview designed to assess the English language proficiency of adult English language learners in the United States. *BEST Plus* is a combined test of listening and speaking skills. As an oral assessment, *BEST Plus* provides a short, practical test that meets the accountability needs of publically funded programs that report to the National Reporting System (NRS). The following chart illustrates the *BEST Plus* scoring and the corresponding SPL (student performance levels) and NRS levels.

ESOL Speaking/Listening Correlations Using Best Plus

Scale Scores	**SPL Levels**	**Nrs Level**
400 and below	0-1	Beginning ESOL Literacy
401-417	2	Low Beginning ESOL
418-438	3	High Beginning ESOL
439-472	4	Low Intermediate ESOL
473-506	5	High Intermediate ESOL
507-540	6	Low Advanced ESOL
541-598 complete level = 599+	7 and above	High Advanced ESOL

From: http://www.nrsweb.org/foundations/related_documents.aspx

Our students are mainly newly arrived Bhutanese refugees along with some Burmese and Iraqi refugees. They range in age from 30-70 years old, and the majority of these students spent nearly 20 years in refugee camps. Students entering our Foundations level class scored at a 0-1 SPL level/Beginning ESOL literacy level, with over two-thirds of the class scoring under 200 on the *BEST Plus*. The Spring Institute's updated speaking and listening descriptors categorize these students as ranging from no ability in English to minimum functioning skills, understanding a few isolated words to understanding a limited number of simple learned phrases. Native English speakers have great difficulty communicating with these students at this level. (see http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/slspls.html)

In addition to the *BEST Plus,* GPLC also uses a writing sample to assess students. Many Foundations level students can write the Roman alphabet with varying degrees of success and difficulty. Some can write their names; some can write their addresses. At the highest Foundations' level, some students can write a few words in their native language. Some students have no writing ability and even refuse to hold a pencil. Based on these writing samples, we believe most of the students in our Foundations class are either nonliterate (learners who have had no access to literacy) or semiliterate (learners who have had limited access to literacy instruction).

GPLC has always offered a Foundations class, but the class grew and the students' needs changed as more refugees at this skill-level resettled in the greater Pittsburgh area. This is when we began to restructure the class, realizing we needed more instructors and a more systematic plan specifically directed at low-literate learners with little or no educational background. Currently, our class accommodates between 20-30 students daily (over 30 students are enrolled); it meets Mondays through Thursdays for two hours per class. The class is separated into three groups by level, and we have three teachers. The class is open-enrollment, open-entry and open-exit; new students can join the class at any time (and most refugees join soon after arriving in Pittsburgh), and students leave the class when test scores and informal assessments show they can advance or when they begin jobs.

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[1] The BEST Plus assessment was created by the Center for Applied Linguistics, and more information can be found at: http://www.cal.org/aea/bestplus/index.html.

The Kind of Teaching We Value

We began restructuring this class by reminding ourselves of standard components of effective teaching. As experienced teachers, we believe instruction should be student-centered; students learn best what they most want to learn. Many educators maintain that adult education is most effective when it is "experience centered, related to learners' real needs, and directed by learners themselves" (Auerbach, 1992, p.14). Secondly, we believe that effective instruction should be explicit and systematic. It should follow a logical, progressive sequence, one that introduces fundamental skills and then builds on them. Also, instruction for adults should be explicit: the instructor needs to know exactly what she wants students to learn, and students should have a clear sense of these expectations plus an understanding of why the knowledge is important (Knowles, 1978). Finally, instruction should be routine-based. Routine is important for all learners, but it's crucial for adults with little or no formal education. When learners lack an understanding of 'doing school', a standard daily routine can help prepare and organize their minds for learning, and it can be comforting: they know what to expect when they enter the classroom (Freeman & Freeman, 2002).

With these components of effective teaching as the overarching principles for our class, we addressed the questions of *where to start* and *how to proceed* in order to make the best use of our class time. We looked to ESL textbooks for guidance.

Looking To Textbooks

While beginning ESL textbooks gave us good ideas for learning topics, we found them not suitable for students with no or low literacy. Typically, these books contain too much text on the page, the pace of the learning is fast, and they require an understanding of how to quickly maneuver around standard school-like text skills. For example, a matching activity that requires different tracking skills than reading a sentence (students have to draw a line connecting elements from two columns) shares a page with a listen and circle exercise and a fill-in-the-blank activity. With low-educated adults, each of these school activities needs to be explicitly taught, a time-consuming and often confusing task. Also, often exercises assume students have a visual/cultural literacy necessary to make sense of a task (Bruski, 2011). For example, images of hugging as a greeting or pictures of an American police car are used as part of an exercise while no explanation is provided to help understand the graphic component.

Next, we turned to beginning literacy ESL textbooks. These texts focus on different approaches to teaching beginning reading skills, with a strong emphasis on writing and/or copying. Though we don't want to discount the importance of writing, we know that for many of our students, writing ranges from a difficult to an exhausting task. We also find that the more students focus on writing, the less they are able to concentrate on speaking and listening. Though the beginning literacy texts reminded us of important functional literacy skills, these texts helped us solidify a priority: we wanted to provide our students with instruction that would help them connect and communicate with others around them in their daily lives.

A 'Pre-Literacy" Class

Research indicates that students with more oral language facility have more success with literacy (see Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2009). It has also been noted that pre-literacy instruction should precede print-based literacy instruction. In addition, cognitive research indicates that a great deal of preparation is needed before actual reading instruction begins (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). With this in mind, we decided to design a 'pre-literacy' class, one that addresses speaking and listening skills in order to develop a large working vocabulary and a sense of language structure, and explicitly teaches some aspects of 'doing school' that might help prepare students for literacy work in the future. Two questions guided our class design: *Where do our students encounter English?* And, *How is what I'm teaching relevant to my students' communication needs?*

Where Do Our Students Encounter English?

Research suggests that instruction at this low-level should have "a highly functional, personal focus—more so for them than for other adult language learners" (Bigelow& Schwarz, 2010).

To establish this practical, personal focus, we asked ourselves, *Where do our students encounter English?* We came up with the following list:

- school (ESL classes plus their children's schools)
- bus
- shopping
- social service agencies
- doctor's offices
- work (some of our students have jobs)
- apartment complexes, including interactions with apartment management
- traveling between these places

This question, and this preliminary list, is what we use to choose topics for our instruction. Though the topics aren't so different than what you may see in a beginning ESL textbook, our instruction is much slower, not wholly reliant on 'school skills', and focused on communication and acculturation.

Communication Needs

Since oral communication is our goal in this initial class, we came up with a pivotal question that guides our curriculum and our daily work: *How is what I'm teaching relevant to my students' communication needs?* We ask ourselves and each other this question whenever we are surveying what to teach and how to teach. If we can't find a practical, pertinent answer to this question, we don't follow through with a lesson.

The daily plan

Key components of effective teaching, an emphasis on daily-life encounters with English, and a communication goal guide the structure of our classes, which follow the same general routine every day. Our routine consists of three distinct parts. We begin class as a large group, and then break into three small groups to carry out essentially the same lesson designed for success at different levels.

The Three S's: Small Talk, Social Etiquette, and Situating

As a large group, we begin class with work on The Three S's: small talk, social etiquette, and situating. As students settle into the classroom, we start with small talk, which consists of practicing simple language chunks featuring typical American cultural content. We ask about the weather (Americans frequently talk about the weather), and we talk about who arrived early, on-time, or late. We ask standard questions Americans may ask of foreigners: *Where are you from? Where do you live now? How long have you lived in Pittsburgh? Do you like Pittsburgh?* We teach this information by modeling, and since the class is open-entry, we backpedal and review as new students join class.

Next, we practice some kind of social etiquette, communication that will help students interact with each other, their teachers, other staff and students at the center and people in the community. At school and in the community, we had witnessed students' inability to tune in to their surroundings because of a lack in cultural knowledge (specifically cultural etiquette) and a basic lack of vocabulary. One incident involved a field trip to a drugstore to examine prices. As the students huddled in the aisle, native English speakers repeatedly said 'excuse me' in attempts to get past, but the students did not register that request. This resulted in them receiving dirty looks (and in the teachers having to physically move the students). Our social etiquette lessons include simple ways to initiate and negotiate greetings (*how are you, have a nice weekend, see you tomorrow*, etc.) and saying 'excuse me' in a variety of situations from finding a seat in class to moving down a crowded hallway. We even teach the correct way to cough, sneeze, and blow your nose in order to not spread germs or offend American's sense of politeness. We teach social etiquette lessons through modeling and precise repetition. For example, we emphasize the exact same 'how are you' dialog in every class with no variation. (*How are you? / Good, thanks. And you? / Good, thanks.*) This rote learning assures mastery of one kind of social interaction. We reserve about 20-30 minutes for small talk and social etiquette activities.

Finally, 'situating' involves preparing for school-like activities. We do this by focusing on calendar activities. While the first two activities have a more relaxed feel about them, with students answering and asking questions in a more free-flowing style, our situating activity sets the stage for school learning. The students become visibly more serious, focused, and quiet when asked to take out their monthly calendar (which we copy on different colored paper each month). Our instruction for this segment of class also is more typically school-like. We begin with a classic listen and repeat choral activity to practice ordinal numbers. We ask the same calendar questions in the same order every day: *What day is today? What day was yesterday? What day is tomorrow? What was the day before yesterday? What is the day after tomorrow?* We conclude this section by asking how many students are in class, and then counting to check the number. By the conclusion of these activities, students are ready to break into their leveled groups and continue their learning.

Number Activities

Based on the list of where our students encounter English, numeracy instruction emerged as a priority. Our students encounter numbers in many daily situations. They need to know bus numbers, dates and times, prices, phone numbers, and addresses. What follows is a summary of the number instruction we do by levels. This part of our daily routine takes approximately 30 minutes.

Low-level Number Instruction

Instruction for our lowest-level students focuses on counting to 100, emphasizing how the pattern of numbers increases by 10's, and reading numeric (not written) numbers from 1-100. Daily life applications of number skills include counting objects in our room and in their lives (*How many chairs are there? How many sons do you have?*) and reciting, hearing and understanding phone numbers, social security numbers, and bus numbers. We also introduce coins and dollars at this level, emphasizing sight recognition and a knowledge of value and basic money counting. We use real coins and copies of dollars copied onto light-green paper so they are the correct size and approximate color. We count money in a very systematic way, starting with mastering counting pennies. Next, we begin with a nickel and add pennies; then we being with a dime and add pennies; then a quarter and add pennies. We do the same with dollars. At this level, students also practice hearing and reading numeric prices and understanding the dollar symbol and decimal point.

Mid-Level Number Instruction

At the middle level, students focus on counting by 5's, 10's, and 25's; understanding, hearing, and reading numeric dates and digital times; and reading numeric numbers in the hundreds. Instruction focuses mainly on daily life applications of reading, counting, and understanding larger monetary amounts. Students also learn comparison language, how to say if a number is more or less, least or most. Though we still do a lot of hands-on work with coins and dollars, at this level, we introduce 'school-like' activities, such as listening and circling worksheets and number writing. Worksheets are typed in large-print Century Gothic font and are sparse, containing only 8-15 items and no graphics (see appendix). It's important to note that we explicitly teach, through modeling and repetition, how to read these worksheets, and this is often a long process. We also work on communication skills focused on prices and shopping. Students learn how to ask how much items cost, how to estimate approximate totals, and how to engage in checkout conversations involving appropriate greetings, in addition to listening for totals and change.

High-Level Number Instruction

Our highest level students focus on hearing and writing larger numbers, counting large amounts of money and making change, in addition to mastering numeric dates and digital times. We do more work with listening/circling worksheets and with writing numbers. We also emphasize more complex communication at this level. Students learn how to read appointment cards and communicate appointments to their instructor and fellow students. They also learn to check the accuracy of change they receive and practice different shopping check-out dialogs to express if they've been given enough or not enough change.

Daily Life Picture Stories

At the center of our instruction are daily life picture stories.

These stories focus on familiar daily-life situations in order to teach vocabulary for the things that surround our students, provide opportunities for students to communicate about their daily lives, and teach cultural etiquette and appropriate interpersonal communication.

We create some of our own picture stories, but mainly we adapt stories from texts. These texts, though great resources, are *not* designed for students at this level and require many changes to make them easy for the students to understand and 'read.' Some adaptations we make are to simplify the narrative by cutting frames, add bodies to pictures, add details to make materials more applicable to our students' experiences (for example, we added a Pittsburgh city bus fare box for a story about riding the bus). Also, we always use color photos to introduce the story's vocabulary and then clarify the connection between the photos and drawings in a story. Studies have shown that nonliterate subjects are better at naming two-dimensional representations of real objects when presented as colored photos as compared to black and white drawings (Reis, 2006).

Most importantly, we simplify and regulate the story's syntax to highlight basic sentence structure. As much as possible, we write story scripts that follow subject + verb + object structure or subject + verb + object + prepositional phrase structure, either in simple present or continuous present tense. We aim for highly repetitive noun and verb use.

Stories follow a logical sequence. For example, one sequence of stories begins with Shopping for Food, then progresses to Paying for Food, Cooking Dinner, Clearing the Table and Doing Dishes. Another sequence we teach begins with Getting Dressed, then progresses to four related stories: Leaving the House, Riding the Bus, Walking Somewhere, and Coming to School. (We created Walking Somewhere and Coming to School specifically for our students to address problems we witnessed: students didn't understand crosswalks and negotiating crowded sidewalks, and they weren't following the proper procedure to enter our building, which requires showing ID and interacting with a front desk person.) (See Appendix B)

We follow a four-step routine with the picture stories:

- Teach vocabulary using large color photographs.
- Tell the story using large pictures while students only listen. (We do this several times.)
- Provide copies of the story without text. Students listen and repeat many times. Next, they listen, repeat, and answer questions. Then they listen, repeat, and personalize.
- Provide copies of the story with text. Students listen and repeat. (The version with text is given out only on the final days of working on a story.

We realize *we are not teaching reading* by giving out a story with text. We use the text to model tracking of words and to teach accurate counting of words, reinforcing how text looks and works on the page. We also know that many of our students have children who are literate and who may be able to reinforce the language we've been teaching by reading the story.)

Stories range from five to 12 picture frames. Generally, we take approximately two weeks to complete each story. (This gives a sense of the amount of repetition we stress.) Approximately every six weeks, we take time to review past stories. Our goals for story work vary by level.

Low-Level Story Goals

At the lowest level, we expect that students will learn new vocabulary for nouns and corresponding verbs and will have some success with placing verbs and objects together (*sweep the floor, wash the dishes*). We expect students to excel at listening exercises that ask them to identify which picture matches which sentence from the story. We also expect an understanding of prepositional phrases (*in the bag, on the table)* even if students have difficulty with the syntax of this structure. At this level, we also begin work with listening for the number of words in a sentence. We tap or count out words so they can hear when one word starts and another ends. Students should be able to answer basic questions to show story comprehension (yes or no questions using do/ does; what/ where questions). Also, students should be able to answer yes and no questions to personalize the stories. (*Do you wipe the table? Do you sweep the floor every day?*)

Mid-Level Story Goals

With middle-level students, we work on mastering vocabulary for nouns and verbs while emphasizing the syntax of a complete simple sentence with particular emphasis on the order of verbs and objects. In addition to the goals for the lower-level students, we expect mid-level students will be able to repeat a simple sentence from the story script with a high degree of accuracy. Students exhibit more retention of vocabulary, showing an ability to talk about a single story picture when the story sentence hasn't just been said to them. (The syntax may be wrong, they may omit a subject, but they can communicate the general idea without being prompted.) Students at this level have greater success with hearing and counting individual words in a sentence and can complete verbal cloze exercises with high accuracy (particularly when the missing word is a noun or verb). Mid-level students can work in pairs to place cut-up picture frames in the correct story order.

These students can also communicate more complex connections between the story and their lives. They should be able to answer the beginning-level questions in more detail, in addition to like/don't like questions and who and when questions (*Who washes dishes? When do you wash the dishes?).* Again, the students' syntax is not exact, but their answers exemplify comprehension and appropriate communication. Finally, at this level, we begin some explicit verbal instruction in basic grammar points, such as gender-appropriate pronouns.

High-Level Story Goals

Our high-level students master story vocabulary and the simple syntax of the stories. We emphasize hearing the number of words in sentences and replicating sentences with exact precision. Students can often explain two or more picture frames with a high degree of accuracy. At this level, we put more emphasis on precise pronunciation of key words.

We work on more complex questions to personalize the stories. In addition to the questions noted above, students are asked to tell about their daily activities in relation to the story. For example, after the story 'Cleaning the House,' students explained their cleaning routines. They made comparisons to what was the same as the story and what was different.

Though we don't expect mastery, at this level we explicitly teach some grammar points, such as singular pronouns. We begin modeling present tense conjugations, and as explicitly as we can, we teach the difference between simple present tense and continuous present tense.

What Success Looks Like

Success, for our funders, is defined by an NRS level gain on the BEST Plus test after 50-100 hours of instruction. However, with low-level, low-educated students, this goal is most often not realistic. Success, instead, presents itself in different ways, some of which we can quantify, but many of which are difficult to quantify.

Our first measure of success is retention. We keep in mind research that shows adults with no print literacy did poorly in beginning ESL classes that stressed literacy, and they dropped out in much larger numbers than did more literate students. (LaLyre, 1996, as cited in Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). After we restructured this class, we saw a sharp increase in hours of instruction. The average student is now staying in class 6-12 months, which results in 200-400 hours of instruction. Next, we are seeing gains in *BEST Plus* assessments, gains we think are relatively large for this level. On initial retesting after 60 hours, many students' scores went from 88 (the lowest possible BEST Plus score) to the 200's. Students who initially tested in the mid to high 200's are making NRS level gains, sometimes after 100 hours, though more often after over 200 hours of instruction. Many students are nearing level gains, but are topping out in the high 300's. We continue to evaluate our practices to determine how we can help them advance.

We have noted, but not quantified, changes in students' abilities to comprehend questions and to string words together using more accurate syntax. For example, when we are talking about their daily lives, many of our students now place verbs and objects in the correct English order ('washing dishes') which is opposite of Nepali syntax ('dishes washing'). Students are quick to answer random, though common, questions in short, complete sentences. (Were you late? *I was early.* How's the weather? *It's cloudy and cold.*)

What is more difficult to quantify are the changes we see in the students' interpersonal communication skills. Students are more socially engaged with us, one another, and with the staff at the center. We see this when they learn each other's names or talk with students who are not part of the same ethnic group. They greet the receptionist when they come in and say goodbye when they leave. Students now say and respond to 'excuse me' in appropriate situations. They say 'thank you' and 'you're welcome'. They tell us and each other to 'Have a nice weekend.' They are eager to communicate news: *No class, appointment tomorrow.* Or, *Deepa coming Saturday, Sunday.* Finally, when asked what they like about the United States, they answer *English class.*

Conclusion

What is frequently missing in low-level classes for low-literate English learners is a systematic, intentional approach. By narrowing our focus to communication and acculturation in addition to teaching some pre-literacy 'doing school' skills, we've been able to create a class with clear, pertinent goals.

The teachers have a clear vision and a clear sense of logical progression, which helps us better define what we can do to help our students advance in their language learning to feel more connected to and more comfortable in their new lives.

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Appendix A

Listen and circle.

(Example: Low-level number worksheet)

a.	11	21	33
b.	45	52	60
c.	5	8	19

Listen and circle.

(Example: mid-level number worksheet)

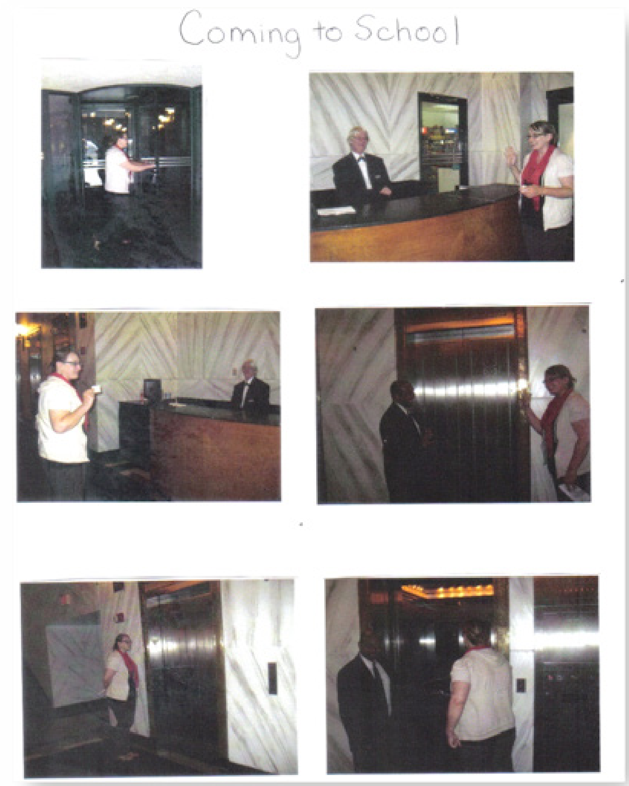
a.	$33 .33	$30.13	$50.53
b.	$19.19	$90.19	$19.90
c.	.67	.76	.69

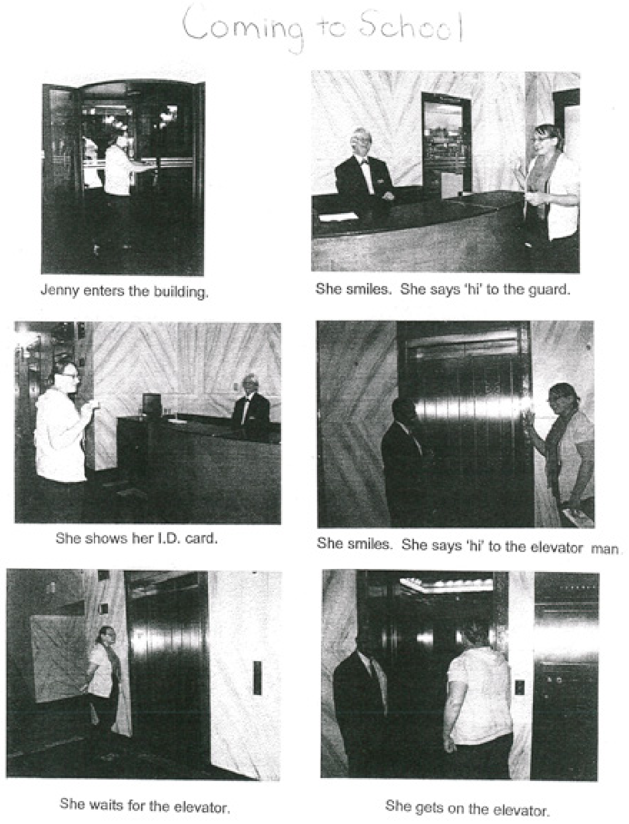
Listen and circle

(Example: high-level number worksheet)

a.	$32.99	$23.99	$43.99
b.	$66.16	$66.60	$16.60
c.	$525.25	$555.50	$500.00

Appendix





Coming to School

Jenny enters the building.

She smiles. She says 'hi' to the guard.

She shows her I.D. card.

She smiles. She says 'hi' to the elevator man

She waits for the elevator.

She gets on the elevator.

CAUTIONARY TALES OF LESLLA STUDENTS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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Introduction: Experiential Genesis of the Study

My interest in the topic of LESLLA students in high school classrooms grew out of my years as a teacher of English language learners in and around Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, USA, when several waves of such students began arriving in the late 1990's. While fairly well-prepared to provide second language instruction to students who were literate in their prior language(s) and had experienced Western-style academic schooling, we teachers were at a remarkable loss with regard to students who were new to school, literacy, and English. At that time, as so often now, most schools did not collect prior schooling information from incoming students, and so I can confess to the collective professional error of not having even recognized in the beginning that prior schooling and literacy were such determinate factors in explaining why some students with low initial English proficiency moved ahead quite rapidly and in predictable developmental fashion, while others progressed slowly, arduously, struggling with and not usually mastering the academic concepts and cognitive dispositions required for success in American schools. Over the years of working with these LESLLA newcomers—Hmong, Karen, Latin and Indigenous American, Liberian, Oromo, Sierra Leonean, Somali, Sudanese, and others—my colleagues and I became deeply aware of the distinctiveness of their needs along with the inadequacies of our available instructional responses. I began to realize that what we were encountering was not a mere skill gap but an abyss between ways of living and knowing, and it was this realization that coaxed me back to the role of second language education researcher.

New Horizons: Topical Focus and Form of Research

It has often and accurately been noted (Tarone, Bigelow, & Hanson, 2004; Bigelow & Watson, 2012) that Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has too long ignored the situation of LESLLA learners as a topical focus, leaving the discipline with an incomplete account of how these learners acquire language. In an analogous way, I would like to suggest that the SLA discipline in general as well as the community of LESLLA researchers in particular has operated according to strong methodological biases whereby studies following a scientific mode and rationale are hugely predominant. While it is not my purpose to argue for the complete abandonment of scientific or data-driven approaches, I would argue that in order to achieve a fuller, deeper understanding of LESLLA work, it is important to also practice other forms of research which yield different perspectives on different kinds of questions in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the work that LESLLA students and teachers do. My argument follows the spirit of what many others have asserted in the general educational context (e.g., Guba,1990; McDonald,1988; Polkinghorne, 1983, 1988), namely, that studies in the human sciences premised on an assumption of their own objectivity are inevitably limited by the very limits of human objectivity itself. A different, more interpretively analytic research form is required to plumb the deeper strata of human meaning, which is what I have attempted in the larger study from which the cautionary tales below are excerpted (Watson, 2010). This is not a mere intellectual exercise, however—far from it. What first occurred to me in the practical teaching context is even more clear today: unless we boldly address the fundamental epistemological discordances involved when young adults raised in a milieu conditioned by orality are pressured to function quickly, at amazingly high levels, in a context produced according to the values and dictates of the (to them) foreign mode of literacy, we will not as a discipline be able to provide a truly meaningful, responsive pedagogy that both works effectively with these students within the literate world system, *and* is careful to do so in a way that treats them and their cultural and cognitive ways of being justly and respectfully.

In terms of research methodology, the form of the research practiced here is hermeneutic, which is an ancient Greek term referring to the art of interpretation. This approach to understanding has a 2000+ year history, and is often called upon when clarity in understanding is particularly elusive, as in the case of interpreting the meaning of wisdom or sacred texts. It is also used in social science and educational research to plumb the deeper meanings of human experience (Gallagher, 1992; Smith, 1999, 2006). Following hermeneutic and phenomonological education scholars like Bollnow (1974), Smith (1988), and van Manen (1988), I employ here the constructed anecdote as a device for presenting themes and experiences relevant to our work as educators. Van Manen describes the constructed anecdote form in research as “narrative with a point” (1990, p. 69), indicating that it is important for the anecdote to carry a sense of purpose and cogency. An anecdote is not to be understood as a mere illustration or embellishment, but as a “methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (van Manen, 1990, p. 116) in the manner of an allegory or parable. Van Manen further notes the prominent place of the anecdote in oral tradition, and emphasizes its social and often conversational character. The successful constructed anecdote renders truths that may not otherwise be seen, in a manner that is not purported to be scientifically accurate and objective, but challenging and evocative. It should be noted that a hermeneutic form of research employing carefully constructed stories is without question more naturally harmonious with forms of knowing and teaching in oral cultures than is empirical, scientific research in the Western literate tradition—this alone is reason enough for LESLLA researchers to embrace hermeneutic approaches in seeking to understand and build solidarity with LESLLA learners.

Deeper Dimensions of Phonetic Alphabetic Literacy and Orality

What follows, then, are polemically-toned interpretations of lived experience intended to provoke thought and to allow things to be seen in a new way. In these tales I have tried to ascertain, express, and *interpret* the experiential and affective situation that exists in students and educators trying to bridge the abyss between relational orality and phonetic academic literacy.

The understanding of orality that guides me, as inspired by the work of Battiste and Henderson (2000), Becker (1992), Irele (2001), McLuhan (1964/1994), Mosha (2000), Olson and Torrance (1991), Ong (1982, 1988) and others, and pointed out at the LESLLA 2011 plenary by Andrea DeCapua and Helaine Marshall (2011), does not simply refer to the act of speaking and listening, but rather to the way of conducting and valuing life in oral cultural contexts, which is very different from the way of conducting and valuing life that has evolved over 3000 years as a result of phonetic alphabetic literacy. The phonetic alphabetic literate way of life, it should be firmly noted, is the one in which most all readers of a volume such as this are utterly immersed — it is the inheritance and lifeworld of every Western culture, and the adopted and adapted form of academic pursuit in most colonized cultures. While this is not the place to review the legacy of phonetic alphabetic literacy (for a thorough review see Watson, 2010), it must be acknowledged that the effect of phonetic alphabetic literacy is intense, massive, and almost completely unrecognized. It is essentially what McLuhan (1964/1994) meant when he coined the phrase, "The Medium is the Message," that is, the *vehicle* of communication strongly influences the *content* and *valuation* of thought and communication; in particular he devoted massive scholarship to the study of how the phonetic alphabet made it possible for the first time to communicate without reference to context, auguring a revolutionary shift in human relations. He states:

> A single generation of alphabetic literacy suffices in Africa today, as in Gaul two thousand years ago, to release the individual initially, at least, from the tribal web. This fact has nothing to do with the *content* of the alphabetized words; it is the result of the sudden breach between the auditory and the visual experience of man [sic]. Only the phonetic alphabet makes such a sharp division in experience, giving to its user an eye for an ear, and freeing him from the tribal trance of resonating word magic and the web of kinship. (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 84)

Smith relates this essential insight to the role of literacy in our contemporary world, stating that "the culture of literacy, which Western culture is, has created its own crisis in the sense that a culture oriented by print is one oriented by a particular way of arriving at what should be valued, and how" (Smith, 1999b, p. 71). Irele (2001) explicitly connects phonetic alphabetic literacy to academic traditions, stating that the academic structure and intellectual hegemony of the West is inseparable from phonetic alphabetic literacy. As I have explicated elsewhere in an extensive historical review (Watson, 2010), cultures of alphabetic literacy have characteristic value orientations, which include abstract categorization, linear thinking, definitions and indexes, propositional logic, syllogistic reasoning, reference to texts, and methodically conducted research for truth validation. What are pre-empted in the Western literate approach are the cultural values of orality: experience, context, community, belonging, ambiguity and spirituality—pre-empted by the authority of the eminently scrutable written phonetic word (Irele, 2001; McLuhan, 1964/1994; Olson & Torrance, 1992; Ong, 1982).

To be clear, it is not and has never been my purpose to discourage the teaching and learning of phonetic alphabetic academic literacy. I am an avid user of the International Phonetic Alphabet, I have advanced certifications in phonology and have taught university seminars on the subject. As a teacher of LESLLA students, it is part of my daily teaching practice to instruct LESLLA students in phonemic/phonetic awareness using materials I myself create. The purpose here, and it is an important one, is to be sure that we who have no particular intrinsic reason to do so take to heart the lesson that phonetic alphabetic literacy *changes* people and societies in profound ways that we should pay attention to since we are at the leading edge of this change.

The long-term cultural and cognitive effects of phonetic alphabetic literacy is such a difficult and easily dismissible topic, one that very few if any of us had any preparation for in our own licensure and graduate courses, one we have considered even less than the role that the cars we drive or the computers we all use have in global warming. Suffice it to say for the moment that I am addressing educators as attendants, indeed midwives, to a process by which we guide our students from the kind of non-phonetically codified, oral world they know to some kind of reconciliation with the foreign world of hyperliteracy, with its radically different valuings, a world we ourselves are both products and promoters of. It is therefore not frivolous nor incidental but rather of the highest ethical and instructional importance for us to explore *what is at issue*, and *how best to proceed*, in a deep sense, when high school students from a background of orality encounter literacy and Western academic thinking for the first time as adolescents and young adults.

Cautionary Tales of LESLLA Students in the High School Classroom

The following tales are varied in context, focus, and length (two short and narrative, one long and polemical), they are postcards from the edge of the abyss between the values of academic hyperliteracy and the values of orality. They provide not a definitive report but an interpretive evocation of a few moments in the clash of oral and literate ways of life, which are, as a First Nations participant at the 2011 LESLLA symposium pointed out, ways of life not easily reconciled. I have termed these tales cautionary because they are constructed as lessons, intended to shed light on obscured phenomena, to warn about dangers, and to call educators of good will to continue their advocacy of the most challenged LESLLA students. It should be noted that the tales have a critical whistleblower quality in that they are politically toned, and meant to shed light on current practices, policies, and beliefs that are inappropriate, ineffective, or worse. They point to things we should **not** do as a way of framing a better conversation about what we **should** do as educators, administrators, and policymakers in whose hands lies the fate of LESLLA students.

Tale #1: Learning to Fake It in Science Class

I want to tell you about a sheltered ESL science class at a large urban high school. Newcomer students, the majority without prior schooling, were asked to do a practice activity from the textbook which involved classifying line-drawn cartoons of activities such as hockey, bowling, tennis, swimming, golfing, gardening, etc. according to whether they were indoor activities, outdoor activities, or both. Students were to write A on the pictures for indoor, B for outdoor, or C for both. This scene presents many dimensions of the challenges that LESLLA students face. The first challenge was of course trying to understand what the pictures represented, as few of the students knew about such sports as hockey or golf or even gardening as a leisure activity. Another difficulty was with reading the names of the activities, a phonetic labor which as often involves reading the teacher's lips as much as reading the letters on the page. The labels students were told to use followed the "abecedary" system, using the alphabet itself as an indexing tool. This caused more problems than those raised in an alphabetic world might imagine, with students tending to write 'inside' or 'outside' or 'I' or 'O' on the pictures, rather than an artificial designation of A, B, or C. It was a very difficult exercise, brightened a bit by the fact that many of the students had participated in after school programs in ice-skating and tennis, held at indoor facilities in the area.

The truly astounding moment came at the end of class, when the very kind and well-meaning teacher went through the activity with the class, displaying correct answers on the overhead projector, as students rushed to confirm and correct their responses in one of those flying eraser moments so common in such classes. When the teacher got to tennis and asked how it should be classified, an unusual number of hands flew up—the students who had been bussing to an athletic club for months to attend tennis class were confident to say that tennis was an indoor activity (and likely proud to know exactly what the activity was). The teacher's answer key, though, had this listed as an outdoor activity, and so after some animated discussion, he finally decided that "we will just *say* that it's an outdoor activity, ok?" Several students looked to me with questions in their eyes (I was the adult organizer of the tennis program), but no one said anything. Still, erasers did not fly so fast this time, and I was acutely aware of a feeling of discomfort in the room, testimony to a direct clash between the desire to do well in school, get good grades, please the teacher, and act like a student versus the knowledge derived from one's direct, lived experience. One might wonder why the teacher didn't just go for option C, 'both'; I suspect it had to do with ease of grading from an already completed answer key, or perhaps was strongly colored by the teacher's own experience, certainly not to any malice on the teacher's part. The point here is not to speculate on the teacher's motives or dubious teaching skill, rather, the deeper point I want to make is about the ease with which the teacher and certainly any number of resident American students can adopt an arm's-length relationship to knowledge, we can just *say* that something is what it isn't if it helps us get a good grade—it doesn't matter anyway. Oral cultures do not think of knowledge this way. Knowledge comes from experience, is transmitted within experiences, and always matters. We may also note the inestimably powerful role that the traditional authority of the teacher played—a word from him was able to override the experience of a dozen orally-educated students.

Tale #2: The Torture of Prescribed Hyperliterate Curriculum

This is a story from a high school experience that illustrates the different levels of distance educators have from the human lifeworld, and how these levels of distance impact empathetic understanding and the instruction of preliterate newcomers. At an urban high school which has the specific mission of educating the district's newcomer ELL students, a math teacher whom I will call Mr. Warsame was experiencing a lot of frustration with the new "discovery" math curriculum. Mr. Warsame, a native of Somalia, is a very intelligent, multilingual, veteran teacher, a man devoted to his immigrant and refugee students whose experiences mirror his own in many ways. While his task of bringing students whose learning needs begin with basic addition and subtraction to a point of being able to manage algebra and geometry in just a few years had always been a great challenge, things took a turn for the worse a few years ago when the district adopted the new curriculum and a new pedagogical approach to go with it. This expensive new constructivist curriculum followed a lesson model that called for a brief "launch" or introduction, then devoted the bulk of the class period to an open learning phase in which students were to act as independent inquirers who use their cognitive schemata to discover patterns and create solutions, and closed with a brief wrap-up when results are shared with the class. Introduction of new material in the textbook was through contextual vignettes which described an event in which the target math skill would come in handy—the whole textbook in other words, was presented as a series of story problems in English, based on American cultural contexts, albeit using inclusion-friendly names like Juan and Farhiya and Htoo Saw and Ying.

Since he began implementing this approach a few years back, Mr. Warsame had seen a troubling decrease in student learning and an increase in frustration, copying, and "losing assignments." Many of his students, some years most, had not been to school before, and didn't have the prerequisite skills and ways of thinking that the new curriculum assumed students to have. He had attended several professional development courses in best practices for ELL students, including courses in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008), and knew that all ELL students, especially those with limited education and literacy, need to have careful, step-by-step, explicit, scaffolded instruction that meets them at their level. The new math approach that he was required by the district to use was in many ways the diametric opposite of what research and his own experience told him was effective practice with ELL newcomers lacking formal schooling.

And so, although he felt that "all but a few of my students just can't learn this way," Mr. Warsame followed the mandates communicated at regular district professional learning community meetings of math teachers, many of whom reported how difficult this new textbook series was even for their English-speaking, grade-level educated students, although some from the more affluent high schools with few ELLs found that the discovery approach to pedagogy

worked well. As the year progressed and the disparity between mandated instructional approach and real instructional needs of students became more and more painfully apparent, Mr. Warsame shared his impressions with the school's instructional facilitator, an experienced ESL teacher and teacher educator whom I'll call Ms. Mohahan, asking somewhat furtively if he could use the adaptive math series he had used in the past even though he was being instructed by the district to use only the new curriculum. Ms. Monahan's response was that, yes, of course he could, if it allowed the students to learn the material, which the two spent some time confirming matched topically almost chapter by chapter with the new curriculum. Ms. Monahan relayed all this to the principal, who spoke to Mr. Warsame in support of modifying presentation of content so that students could learn it. This was, after all. the district's ELL high school, charged with tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs of its unique student body.

Some time later, it became clear that Mr. Warsame was still trying to stick with the prescribed curriculum, which resulted in some very painful class experiences which Ms. Monahan observed as part of her teacher coaching duties. She could see that it was torturing both students and teacher to try to conduct lessons in this way, going through pedagogical motions that could not have much meaning for students, amounting not only a waste of instructional time but a sort of systemically intentional inflicting of pain motivated by an inquiry-oriented ideology that was based on assumptions appropriate to a literate, numerate, well-educated, English-proficient, ideal student. Mr. Warsame was trying to respect the authority of the district, the students were trying to respect the authority of Mr. Warsame, and the result was an excruciatingly painful simulacrum of learning that had nothing to do with what, by virtue of their experience, the students needed nor with what, by virtue of his experience, the teacher knew they needed. When Ms. Monahan spoke to

Mr. Warsame about this, he threw up his hands in a recognizably East African gesture and said, with evident frustration, that all the math teachers were being told in no uncertain terms by district administrators, in meetings run by professional consultant types that came off a bit like propaganda sessions, that all teachers were to use the new curriculum not only faithfully but enthusiastically. He compared it, chuckling, to the old Soviet system (he had lived for years in Cuba), but expressed concerns about his job if he were to stand against the tide.

When invited to a meeting with the principal and the district math curriculum coordinator, Ms. Monahan, a veteran of many wars between ESL departments and administration, was thrilled to think that perhaps here would be an opportunity to customize the district policy in support of newcomer ELL math needs. She therefore laid out, in full and honest detail, what the experiences in this school had been with the math curriculum, describing how tortuous the experience was, something akin to educational waterboarding, which certainly no one wanted or intended. Motivated by the exciting potential of this partnership with the district curriculum office that could truly benefit LESLLA students and not sweep their needs under the rug, she delineated point by point some basic understandings from research about good content instruction for older ELLs, an area of research and teaching Ms. Monahan specialized in. The math coordinator shared the district perspective on math instruction, talking about the desire to move away from rote memorization and direct instruction, and the two, in over an hour's conversation, explored how the current district policy did and didn't converge with best practices for ELL students, in particular newcomers without prior schooling. When the principal returned to the room, all three agreed that the math coordinator, Ms. Monahan, and Mr. Warsame should team up to work on creating guidelines for a model math curriculum with ELL and LFS student needs in mind. Ms. Monahan left the room ecstatic, and rushed to tell Mr. Warsame. Spirits were lifted that day. It came therefore as a surprise when the principal received a phone call from a senior district curriculum administrator a few days later, letting him know how the conversation, especially the word *waterboarding*, had shocked the math coordinator. This district is *not* waterboarding, came the message from above. As for the instructional needs that were the focus of the conversation, the outcome was this: the prescribed math curriculum continued as before, and nothing further was done with the plan to create guidelines for teaching math to LESLLA high school students.

This anecdote reverberates with the clash of oral noesis and hyperliterate academic practices on many levels; what I want to highlight here is the differential extent to which knowledge that is empathetic and participatory, versus objectively distanced, impacts decisions about what to do in this experiential context. Although himself a person of high literacy and numeracy, born and educated in pre-war Somalia, Mr. Warsame is deeply attuned to the lifeworld of his students, both as their teacher and as a member of the ethnic community. His interests are entirely fixed on how they can learn best, and he is a fan of any curriculum that can support them. But he is also a person with real life concerns, in fear for his job if he bucks district programs. Ms. Monahan, a veteran of many schools and many policy battles in which the best interests of ELL students almost always lose, is weary of the new segregation whereby the actual needs of students are sacrificed to a pedagogical ideology out of touch with the students' experience and the experience of those who teach them. The district math coordinator, who is herself most certainly evaluated on how faithfully she implements the mandated curriculum, and sees herself as an advocate for academic rigor, is not only out of touch but is unconcerned with getting *in* touch with the actual experiences of a few students and teachers who represent a small proportion of the total district enrollment, and who attend an alternative high school anyway. She, too, is a real person with real-life concerns, and her performance evaluations will not be enhanced by deviating from the plan. Even the curriculum itself is based on imaginary idealized experiences—the story problems—which may be intended to be more interesting and socially inclusive, but end up having the contextual, lifeworld effect of excluding the students whose experience, and English reading proficiency, is quite distant from the cultural and educational assumptions on which the curriculum is based.

The inexorable, take-no-prisoners, progress model of what indigenous Canadian scholar Marie Battiste calls cognitive imperialism (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) is on full display in this story: power emanates from the center via professional development meetings that give teachers the playbook, manipulate their mental endorsement, and finally subjugate the classroom lifeworld, forcing all the non-literate, non-academic vibrancies into strictly foreign formats that distort and maim and deaden. The horror to those in power is not the pain of what is happening but the marketing disaster of having someone use the word *waterboarding* to describe the effect of the curriculum on a particular group of marginalized students. What matters is that the district has spent a lot of money on branding, and the last thing they need are some fringe staff members using inflammatory language; what is completely ignored are the lessons that could be derived from attunement to the lifeworld of students and teachers. Hermeneutically understood, this story, as so many others in schools today, demonstrates the practice and failure of applying the thinking of the *Naturwissenschaften*, the natural sciences, to educational situations requiring the insights of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the human sciences (For an excellent intorduction to the great hermeneutic scholar Wihelm Dilthey's discussion of the Natural versus Human Sciences, see Rickman, 1979.) It demonstrates the blind pursuit of a scientific-positivist ideal of academic *rigor*, which, like rigor mortis, freezes policies and scenarios so that they can be expertly sectioned, rolled out, bought into, and evaluated, when what we need is an infusion of academic *vigor*, a way of carrying out the events of education that is deeply, intersubjectively attuned to lived life, to what the real and often unexpected needs of the situation are.

Curriculum theorist James MacDonald once quoted Einstein's question: "What does a fish know about the water in which he spends his life? (MacDonald, 1988, p. 102). From the literate scientistic perspective, the fish knows nothing about water—not the chemical formula, not the temperature of freezing and boiling, not how to purify water in lab conditions nor mix it industrially with other substances, nor any of the scientific minutiae that are the province of hydrologists. From the oral indigenous perspective, the fish lives and breathes water, is enveloped by water, is born, finds a mate, gives birth in, and dies in water. A fish knows how to navigate water, sensing and responding to its slightest undulations every minute of its life. No one knows more about water than a fish. The difference is precisely to what extent knowledge is conceived as empathetic and participatory as opposed to something one has or wields from a state of separation. Both kinds may be considered knowledge, but not of the same thing, and not with the same costs and consequences.

Tale #3: LESLLAs in High School: The Sacrificial Paradigm

Thirty years of scholarship on neocolonialism by Battiste and Henderson (2000), Bhabha (1990, 1994), Dussel (1995, 1998), Kristeva (1991), Mazrui (1990, 1998), Said (1978, 1993), Spivak (1988, 1999) and others has explicated relationships between structures of knowledge and forms of oppression of the foreign Other. Phonetic alphabetic literacy and the structures of Eurocentric rationality have played a cornerstone role in the construction of a system leading to the present configuration of academic endeavor. In order to reach levels of academic achievement which are considered age-appropriate in American education, high school ELL students of primarily oral background must journey across a perilous abyss that has been historically set against them in discourses of Enlightenment rationality combined with violent imperial will to power, even up to and including manifestations of these in American education. For these students, the noetic stakes are high. As Ong says:

> There is hardly an oral culture or predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers that is forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. You have to die to continue living. (Ong, 1982, p. 15)

Death is a steep price to pay for literacy and the world it opens one to, but, lest we give in to scoffing, this is not as hyperbolic a description as some might believe. Based on the understanding of the oral psycho-social structure and the legacies of Enlightenment rationality and colonialism that I have extensively explicated elsewhere (Watson, 2010), I submit that the experience of LESLLA learners in US high school classrooms presents a modern manifestation of what Dussel has called *the myth of sacrificial reason* (1995, 1998), in which students are forced into an artificial relationship with language and with the world that drains the oral indigenous life out of them, and a survival mode with regard to instruction that is characterized by massive pretending on both the students' and the teachers' parts. This state of affairs is both the observable and the predictable consequence of the encounter between a living relation with the living word/world of the oral way of life and the frozen, murdered, dissected form of academic knowledge presented by and in the Western classroom. In this section I will tell a final cautionary tale, a strong interpretation of the sacrificial paradigm in initial literacy classrooms, in order to make a point that is usually suppressed by triumphant Western educational discourses, for as Said has said, "we must excavate the silence, the world of memory, of itinerant, barely surviving groups, the places of exclusion and invisibility" (Said, 2004, p. 68). We must engage the underside of literacy's modernity.

Standard American Academic English (SAAE) as codified in textbooks, disciplinary literacy programs, governmental and district standards of achievement for every grade and subject, and standardized assessments, is the modern apparition of Learned Latin (Ong, 1982), the mother tongue of no one, a set, prescribed medium developed for academic purposes, a vehicle, formed specifically around literacy constructions, which serves to sort students according to economic future, according to class (Illich, 1973, 1991). Its primary mode of instruction is definitional, abstract, categorical, and determinate; it is sealed, like the fate of oral culture trying to acquire these norms. The artifacts of Standard American Academic English, the standardized language of education in American schools, can be found in virtually every American public high school classroom, where vast branding, marketing, and buy-in initiatives have worked hard to make them seem appropriate and rigorous. SAAE is founded on and enacts a philosophy which is devoted to the elimination of ambiguity and resists the epistemological and moral challenges of alterity. It is the academic end of history, situated outside of development, the final evolutionary endpoint of humanity's Universal Culture in all its bellicose splendor, superior to localized knowledges and invulnerable to their unscientific oral critique.

Resident American students suffer the effects of deadening, monolithic SAAE in proportion to their distance from privilege, many of them unable to march in step to its insistent drumbeat, resulting not (so far) in a radical reconceptualization of SAAE's modernist dispositions but in a redoubling of standardization efforts that, having left a lot of children behind in the past, are supposed to somehow leave fewer behind as the bar is set higher. The unspoken but obvious extrapolation is that some students are expendable, there is no intention of creating a more informed citizenry and a more equitable distribution of wealth according to the principles of democracy, but to realign American education according to the needs of the neoliberal globalized economy, which by its own definition provides just a few places at the top. The fictitious facticity of frozen academic English frustrates great numbers of native English speaking students raised in American society, but, since they receive it over a longer time and in smaller doses, it does not shock them as it does oral newcomers. I am referring here to the strong form of cultural dissonance, or what has also been called at this conference "the third trauma" of school. SAAE presents a surreal challenge to students who enter this way of valuing as young adults whose formative experiences have occurred within other cultural and linguistic paradigms. The world that they have known is gone and they are struggling to find new footing, all the while trying in every way they know how to *look* perfectly adjusted, to appear as if they fit in and can smoothly manage information whose body temperature has been lowered to near death (Caputo, 2000).

The vast abyss between oral noesis and that of hyperliterate SAAE receives little notice in a situation of extremely limited time and the federal requirement that each school and subset cell within the school show "Adequate Yearly Progress," determined by a standard formula under the No Child Left Behind law (2008), in order to maintain autonomy and retain funding, factors which drive teachers to ignore the actual time needed by students and surge forward to "cover" the required units using the mandated methods. The situation that these pseudo-educational behaviors creates forces the development of elaborate

measures of survival by high school students without prior schooling, which takes several forms.

Presented with impossible-to-comprehend sentences approved for high school subjects by curriculum committees made up of monolingual literates, newcomers gifted by oral noesis with the ability to interpret audio and physical cues call on their skills in interpretive listening, reading lips, and understanding body language to infer which word is on the page by looking not at the letters but at the teacher's lips, and to guess at the meaning of a passage not by being able to read it but by reading facial expressions, tones of voice, and gestures. Asked lilting tag-questions like, "An amphibian is a warm-blooded vertebrate, isn't it?" or simply, ubiquitously, "You see what I mean, right?" oral newcomers, intuitive, eager to achieve, dutifully respond in the affirmative, and this is overworked, undertrained teachers need to hear to make them believe that they have understood. It is quite astounding how often teachers ask the class as a whole, "Who finished your homework?" or "Who got only one or two wrong?" Up go the hands of students left and right—I see their papers, and, grinning, they see me looking—students who didn't understand the assignment enough to even start the homework, or got only one or two right, proudly identify themselves as winners in this obviously artificial academic game. Unlike Luria's subjects (1976) who complained how stupid it is to ask "What is a tree?" when everyone knows what a tree is and you can point to one right there, LESLLA students in American high school are not in their home environment but newcomers in a new environment, and they are not inclined to complain about what a silly waste of time so much of this is, not when they have the ability to make the teacher happy and act the part of the proper student. These alone are accomplishments in a foreign academic world.

In the absence of academic reading proficiency and texts that have lifeworld meaning in an oral world, students struggle to laboriously 'sound out' sentences of great lexical and syntactic obfuscation from the distant side of the abyss. What choice do they have? Here is the reading passage from a homework assignment in beginning high school ELL sheltered social studies:

> Benjamin Franklin, one of the most famous men in American history, had only two years of schooling. Franklin triumphed over his lack of education by reading every book he could beg, buy, or borrow. Frequently till long after midnight a candle burned in the room of the young man who was gaining his knowledge from the great writers of the past. Enjoying reading more than playing, never happy unless a book was in his hands or crammed into one of his pockets, Franklin was soon better educated than most Americans of his time.

Assisting a newcomer student with the phonetic reading of passages like this day after week after month, not to mention the true-false and multiple choice questions that follow, is for the sensitive educator an exercise in self-abnegation. And this is a modified curriculum version! How many times have we supported a student phonetically through these difficult passages, providing just enough but not too much help, just so they can *form the words phonetically*, as if that meant anything for understanding to students who do not have this English vocabulary? The hurdle of explaining the word 'schooling' alone is agonizing, and emblematic of the distance. And yet at the end of these gut-wrenching intervals, 'reading' is the name we give it, referring only to a jagged, halting phonetic excursion. Everyone is pretending at this point, pretending that if you can oralize some semblance of the word's surface phonemes that means you are reading, pretending that you can grasp the meaning of the sentence without knowing the meaning of most of its words, pretending that if you try hard like Ben Franklin did, you, too, will receive the amazing blessings of candle-lit literacy. Of course some preliterate high school newcomers progress beyond this stage—no one knows this better or celebrates this more than I. The ones I am speaking for here are the many, many, many who struggle mightily, for a much longer time than either governmental or ideological conceptions typically allow.

It is easy to understand why students become adept at all sorts of compensatory strategies, for instance, manipulating placeholders, a strategy often taught explicitly in reading instruction and test-taking support classes. Here is a passage incorporating obsolete English words that can illustrate the point for English-speaking literates:

> Filled with ug, the younghede Tenderis groped his way along the downsteepy path toward the cosh wherein dwelled the feared spirit-person. Squit-a-pipes that he was, Tenderis found negotiating his way through the eileber and venerated dway-berries very teenful in the nyle. He tripped over zuches spiss with maily malshaves that made him quetch at their touch. (Sperling, 1977, pp. 33)

Placeholder cues based on limited word knowledge can help us answer many questions: Where was Tenderis going? *Along* the downsteepy path, *toward* the cosh. What did he trip *over*? *Over* zuches spiss with maily malshaves. This kind of structural placeholder skill wears out its usefulness when questions inevitably turn to the definitional: Define these terms: younghede, teenful, maily. Now the student is left to ask a friend, copy, or resort to dictionary or textbook embedded definitions with the fantastic difficulty and unreality these present to the orally traditioned student. "Why this definition is no correct, teacher? I copy it from dictionary!" is the commonly heard refrain, and it does not help to explain that the numerated options under a dictionary entry refer to different contexts known to those who read and write dictionaries but, in the case of the more academically oriented terms, are hardly ever known to students of orality.

And let's talk about copying, perhaps the most pervasive scriptural form to be found in ESL classrooms and sheltered content courses. One of the first lessons preliterate newcomers learn is that there is good copying and bad copying. Sometimes the teacher requires it as a pedagogical exercise: 'Copy the vocabulary words and their definitions in your notebook' may be the most-repeated phrase in American education. There are also intermediary forms, such as copying portions of notes onto a special sheet that students are allowed to have with them on test day—this sheet, but not another. An unregulated form of copying occurs when on a normal lesson day newcomers take their pencils and, glancing furtively left and right, start copying whatever it looks like others are doing. Copying becomes bad when students do it without permission in order to get a good grade on complicated worksheets and tests they cannot otherwise complete. In one case a brand new student just arrived from refugee camp tried to copy an entire English proficiency placement test, bubble answer options and all, on separate sheets hidden in her hijab. This she took to lunch, where she got a variety of opinions on how to answer the various questions that were often miscopied, understandably. This particular case points to the idiocy of the articulation system—the whole incident was motivated by a desire to be placed in a higher ESL level, since this student, after all, was 21 years old, and did not want to be in the lowest level which would keep her from graduating "on time." The greater lesson to be learned from watching oral newcomers navigate the weakness of this literacy-evolved form is how much copying depends on prior literacy—students unaccustomed to reading and writing make constant grievous errors in copying that they are hard-pressed to recognize even when the errors are pointed out, which errors are replicated and expanded in future copyings. How unreal and random all this must seem to orally toned students, who sometimes bring a trusted teacher in on the subterfuge—how unreal, random, and cruel it ends up seeming to the trusted teacher.

Because, let's face it, what good are meaningless credentials? Given the senseless learning situations which so many older students without prior literacy face, it is easy to understand why many work so hard to acquire credentials at any cost, engaging in very sophisticated credit laundering maneuvers between various high schools and harried guidance counselors, leading to the not at all uncommon situation that a student can have seventy or eighty credits but extremely limited ability to read, write, and do basic math. Pretending is the fate of the sacrificial student, ghettoized to receive surface level, tokenistic standards-based content instruction that looks good only in curriculum guides and to outside evaluators of the content area, but is not meaningfully taught to students whose 'deficits' in language proficiency and cognitive academic preparation present an incredible abyss between their actual state and the subject matter we pretend to teach them and they pretend to learn.

Indeed, it is not only LESLLA students who need to make friends with pretending in the current secondary school context. Not long ago, high school teachers in a large urban district I am familiar with were astounded to hear from the district's ELL Director that the new Level One reading program to be launched in the fall was guaranteed to bring all beginner proficiency ELL students, including those without prior schooling, to grade level reading parity within one, or maximum two years. Teachers who want to remain in good standing in this district must now pretend to believe that such a preposterous claim is reasonable, and all students will now be held accountable against the standard of what is essentially a marketing ploy by the program's publisher, which will predictably lead to myriad new forms of pretending by students. Somehow the need to pretend that blindingly rapid progress can be made by students with vast instructional distances to cover continues to override the findings of the entire research base on LESLLA students, not to mention the long professional experience of countless teachers. Like the science teacher in the first anecdote, it can be easier just to pretend that tennis is an outdoor sport than to rethink the whole activity and its very validity. Like the math teacher in the second anecdote, willingness to pretend that *this* new curriculum is just what our LESLLA students need to make unprecedented learning gains, even as our entire understanding of research and practice screams in disagreement, can be a requirement for keeping one's job.

It is my contention that the basic telos underwriting all of this is not ultimately ascribable to the misdirected vision of administrators, nor to a failure of teacher quality or desire, nor to a handicap within students, but to the authority of Western education sponsored by epistemological supremacy assumptions and the weight of empire that compels teachers and students to participate in the faking. Authorized by versions of knowledge underwritten by Enlightenment scientific rationality and the authority of empire in its contemporary culmination, American education is having a one-sided conversation with LESLLA newcomers that forces the transformation from orality to literacy using ill-suited but mandated methods of standardization, and casts American schools as agents of neo-Hegelian Empire. The credit laundering, faking, and drop-out rates of older newcomers are not aberrations, but the logical consequence of Enlightenment rationality translated to school and instructional practices, and buttressed with an imperial myth of sacrifice which permits us to look upon oral newcomers as less evolved versions of Americans, who, if they do not succeed when given the same rigorous education our children receive, may and should be sacrificed in their culpable immaturity.

The consequences of the clash of oral and literate noeses constitute a compendium of compulsions: copy or fail, credit launder or fail to graduate. Some are more insidious, like the choice between embedded authentic relationships based on shared meanings, and "a better life," every immigrant and refugee's mantra, which can only be accessed through academic literacy. Or the deeper, less recognized abandonment of the intimate rapport between language and meaning that characterizes the passage from unmediated life in orality to represented life in literacy. Or the transformation from seeing people as relations to seeing others as means to my ends, which, as Mosha (2000) points out, is the hallmark of one who has truly acquired the highest level of the neoliberal globalization model. The encounter of orality and literacy inevitably engenders a sort of mnemonic plague, in which only written knowledge counts, and memories of elders and traditional knowledge become impediments to progress. The two ways of being are indeed difficult to reconcile.

In the neo-Hegelian empire of U.S. schools, words and concepts, and the discourse and pedagogy that surround them, are treated like specimens in formaldehyde, murdered and awaiting dissection. American education in its current manifestation as a product of Eurocentric scientism requires that ideas and words be immobilized in this way. Standardized tests are the ultimate expression of preserved, embalmed knowledge: the text booklets are their caskets, the schools vaults where they are locked for security are their vaults, the results are the students' and schools' academic epitaphs—published in newspapers for the public to decry and to mourn. The encounter of vivified, intimate, contextually charged orality with frozen, preserved, immobilized academic literacy is one that forces young adults who journey from orality to literacy to undergo the process of semiotic embalming while they are living. Just as subjugated, culpably immature primitives have always been sacrificed to the higher planes of progressive Enlightenment modernism, so the noesis of orality is sacrificed to academic literacy.

The moral outrage this situation provokes is great, as is the need for redress. Just as great as the West's complicity in the on-going suffering, though, is the West's need for the particular gifts of orality as a palliative to our own suffering.

Conclusion
From this perspective, we are all both endowed and deficient in different ways, and our gifts and handicaps have distinct-sources and consequences.

We might consider the matter in a global semiotic sense, following philosopher Ortega y Gasset's (1959) notion of exuberances and deficiencies. From this perspective, we are all deficient in different ways, and our handicaps have distinct sources and consequences. The Latin root of 'oral' refers to an opening, an orifice through which depths of understanding may be achieved, intimately linked with the sacred—the oracle imparts mysterious portents, *ora* means not only speech but prayer. Literacy (>Lat. for 'letter') is the letter of the law rather than its spirit, the externally accessible, knowable, translatable. If our reference point is modern American academic literacy, it is clear that LESLLA learners have a disability which inhibits participation in the vast workings of the literate world, but it must also be seen that literates, especially the highly literate, have a disability which precludes full participation in the vast workings of the oral world, the ways of people for whom meaning is embedded in proximal context with a known community. (For those who attended the 2011 LESLLA plenary by DeCapua and Marshall, just think back how many of us felt when Helaine Marshall asked us to put away all technology and writing material—the word 'panic' was used at my table.) Each way of living has its own lineage, its own way of being with its own rules and a completely different set of skills needed to navigate it successfully. Both ways are deficient in a certain *sense*, one governed by hearing, the other governed by sight, but one deficiency—illiteracy—puts people at a disadvantage for accessing power and privilege, while the other—illorality—puts people at a disadvantage for accessing relationship and belonging.

The Gift of Orality

The endurance of writing, according to Caputo, is inextricably a function of its mortification, awaiting like Cinderella the kiss of orality, what Gadamer calls the *Vollzug*: "the breath of the living subject, to bring it back to life" (Caputo, 2000, p. 52). I want to suggest that, considered against the psychoses of the literate occidental world — depression, alienation, anomie, suicide, school violence — the way of life in orality brings the possibility of a healing gift, in the sense that much of what we in the hyperliterate academic cultures lack is precisely what oral cultures possess. It is appropriate therefore to speak not only of the challenges of orality, but of the *gift of orality*, a gift that some in Eurocentric cultures have understood the value of, but the institution of American education has yet to position itself to receive.

A Pedagogy of Deep Reciprocity

I want to suggest that an understanding of the fusion of oral and literate horizons provides a new frame of reference, located in a recognition of the pragmatic and ethical imperative of a pedagogy of **deep reciprocity** in educational and societal relations with people and cultures of orality. By this understanding, the underside of modernist literacy, which is orality, is just that to which we of the Eurocentric cultures need to remain open in order maintain the possibility of our own transformation. By the same understanding, the reverse is also true.

This perspective allows us then to affirm that there is no responsible choice other than to teach literacy and academic knowledge to all who come to live in this and other societies of high literacy. Literacy ***is*** an enormously powerful tool in the world as it has come to be configured, the use of which needs to be powerfully tempered by an embrace of the way of living enacted in face to face relations with other people and the natural world. As I have argued, we must teach literacy to LESLLA students in ways that both make sense pedagogically in light of their specific orientations, as evinced for example in the excellent work of Andrea de Capua and

Helaine Marshall, and that recovers a heart of morality in global intercultural relations. The better angels of our nature call upon us to leave the mindset of political, economic, and cognitive imperialism permanently behind.

My work is driven by the conviction that we learn more about what makes *sense* for both oral and literate worlds by reflecting on the existential nature of oral cultural experience in its encounter with literacy. The gift of orality to our pedagogical transformation consists precisely in how much we stand to learn about the weaknesses and fallacies of our own instructional designs by noticing how they are received by those who are previously untouched by a cynical, distanciated relation with knowledge and experience. An intersubjective, valence-structured orientation of deep reciprocity in the context of literacy instruction to oral newcomers might be stated this way: On the one hand, we have a responsibility to teach in the most effective, humane way, so that high school age oral newcomers have a fair chance at ***practical survival*** in a world of hyperliteracy. On the other hand, we have the opportunity to cultivate our ability to be open and attuned to the ambiguous plenitude of relationships and the natural world through meaningful engagement with spontaneous, embedded, orally-toned ways of being, so that our hyperliterate selves may have a fair chance at our own ***ontic survival.***

The unfathomable abyss may turn out to be an image of both death and life: death to the lonely, bitter, know-it-all Western self, and life to… life.

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PRAGMATICS-BASED LESSONS FOR LOW-LEVEL ADULT ELLS

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Introduction

Having pragmatic ability means being able to understand or interpret the meanings of words or utterances beyond their literal meaning (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Yule, 1996). Developing pragmatic ability can be a challenge for any language learner, and especially so for low-literacy level learners who are thrust into a new speech community early in their language acquisition process. The field of second language (L2) pragmatics has focused largely highly literate and university-level students (Ishihara, 2006; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001; Yoshimi, 2001); however, researchers have stressed the benefits of instruction in L2 pragmatics for students at the very beginning stages of language learning as well (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Yates, 2004). In an effort to increase pragmatic ability and communicative competence for our low-level English language learners (ELLs) studying in an adult basic education (ABE) program we developed a series of pragmatics-based lessons that had a workplace theme. The learners for whom these lessons were designed were immigrants and refugees largely from east Africa and Southeast Asia, and most were either working in entry-level jobs or looking for employment. These pragmatics-based lessons and materials were intended to increase learners' awareness of pragmatic norms in the workplace, to help learners notice how certain speech acts are performed, and to help learners communicate more effectively earlier in their language acquisition process. This article will contextualize the need for early L2 pragmatics instruction by briefly discussing pragmatic failure, and then explore the literature on L2 pragmatics instruction and recommended instructional techniques in adult education, and finally explain the pragmatics-based lessons.

Pragmatic failure

If L2 learners are unaware of or choose to not use specific linguistic features in a given social context they may be perceived as being impolite, rude, awkward, or abrupt. Garcia (2004) defines pragmatic failure as a speaker's inability to produce utterances that match their intended meaning. Researchers have found that interlocutors are more forgiving of linguistic and grammatical errors, but tend to judge speakers on a more personal or social level if they make pragmatic errors (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Ishihara, 2010). A speaker can realize the effects of pragmatic failure in a highly personal manner. When L2 learners produce grammatically correct, but pragmatically inappropriate or awkward utterances, their "behavior can be interpreted as a manifestation of their individual character" (Ishihara, 2010, p. 939). This is of particular concern for low-level L2 learners who interact with their speech community early in their language acquisition process. In her discussion of the challenges that immigrants and refugees who have limited English-speaking abilities face, Bailey (2006) points out that, "Initial perceptions of individuals are often based on very brief speech samples" (p. 120). Explicit instruction in the pragmatic norms and expectations of a given speech community can help reduce pragmatic errors and increase effective communication.

L2 pragmatics instruction

The goal of L2 pragmatics instruction is to make learners

aware of norms and expectations in a specific speech community, and equip them with the knowledge of how to use the language in specific social circumstances if they choose to do so. Researchers (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Yates, 2004) agree that a combination of awareness-raising tasks and explicit instruction are necessary components of L2 pragmatics instruction.

Awareness-raising activities

The literature on L2 pragmatics instruction suggests raising learners' attention to linguistic forms and noticing language features in specific social contexts in a speech community (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Yates, 2004). These researchers have found that when learners observe, analyze, and practice how specific speech acts are performed in a particular context, they become more pragmatically competent. A speech act is an utterance that serves a certain social function in communication such as apologizing, offering a greeting or making a request, refusing things/invitations, or complimenting (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquistion [CARLA], 2012; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010.) Participating in awareness-raising activities help to develop learners' ability to analyze language and culture. Awareness-raising activities are supported by Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (1993) that claims one must pay attention to input in order for learning to occur. Essentially, once learners pay attention to certain elements in language, they begin to internalize and produce language as they have observed it.

Eslami-Rasekh (2005) states that the aim of awareness-raising activities is to "expose learners to the pragmatic aspects of language (L1 and L2) and provide them with the analytical tools they need to arrive at their own generalizations concerning contextually appropriate language use" (p. 200). Awareness-raising activities encourage the use of learners' first language as well as the target language to help learners identify differences in speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Either the L1 or the L2 can be used to facilitate "reflection, comparison and sensitive discussion of sociopragmatic values and pragmalinguistic resources" in languages and cultures (Yates, 2004, p. 15). Awareness-raising activities help learners become more cognizant of the language practices in a speech community, as well as those of their first language and culture.

In their book on teaching and learning pragmatics, Ishihara and Cohen (2010) offer a number of awareness-raising tasks that have either a social and cultural (sociopragmatic) focus or a linguistic (pragmalinguistic) focus. Some sociopragmatic tasks include:

- analyzing language and context to identify the goal and intention of the speaker;
- analyzing and practicing the use of directness/politeness/formality in an interaction;
- identifying and using a range of cultural norms in the L2 community

(Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 114)

Examples of pragmalinguistic tasks include:

- analyzing and practicing the use of vocabulary in the particular context, and
- identifying and practicing the use of relevant grammatical structures and strategies for a speech act

(Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 113)

Explicit instruction

Researchers (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Tateyama, 2001; Yates, 2004; Yoshimi, 2001) have found explicit instruction on linguistic forms and meaning to be more beneficial to learners than just being exposed to input without an analysis or direct instructional component. Explicit instruction, as described by Frank (2011), includes a thorough explanation of concepts, a model of proficiency, sufficient guided practice activities, and many opportunities for mastery and transfer. There is agreement among these researchers that learners need to be exposed to authentic input in contextually relevant settings. Explicit instruction makes use of direct instruction on form and meaning, and on noticing those forms in authentic situations.

Instructional techniques for adult ELLs

As stated earlier, the field of L2 pragmatic instruction has largely focused on students with highly developed language skills and less so on adult learners in the beginning stages of acquiring English. Therefore, the design of these pragmatics-based lessons drew upon recommended techniques for teaching L2 pragmatics, as well as techniques for teaching low-level adult ELLs. The lessons were designed for two levels of learners – high-beginner and intermediate – as defined by the ABE program in which we worked. While there was an emphasis on speaking and listening, all tasks and activities had a transcript or printed component to reinforce the connection between oral and written language.

Recommended teaching techniques for adult learners include creating interactive, communicative classes with a focus on language-awareness in real-world contexts (Bailey, 2006; Moss, 2005; Parrish, 2004; Savignon, 2001). Parrish (2004) suggests designing integrated and contextualized lessons that focus on meaningful classroom communication, by incorporating interactive-speaking activities, such as mingle tasks, discussions, and role-plays. In her discussion on creating interactive classroom activities, Moss (2005) offers ordering and sorting activities, including ranking and sequencing, and working in pairs to do problem-solving activities. Language-awareness components can be incorporated into lessons by focusing on language competencies and language functions (Parrish, 2004). Yates (2004) adds that learners need the "space to reflect upon and experiment with new ways of interacting in a safe and non-threatening environment" (p. 15). Speaking outside of the classroom can be intimidating and challenging for language learners. Tasks and activities inside the classroom should be designed to give learners the confidence to try new forms and phrases, to ask questions, and to discuss language features.

The learners

These lessons and materials were designed for two groups of learners, many of whom had low or limited literacy skills in their home language(s), limited or interrupted formal education, and many obligations outside of their studies such as work and family. The classes comprised of mostly women, aged 20 to 60. The highest level of education completed in their home countries ranged from eighth grade to high school. The ABE program placed learners in levels based on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test. The high-beginner group was considered level 2 and had CASAS scores ranging from 201-210 and the intermediate group was considered level 4 and had scores between 221-230.

Instructional materials development project

Five lessons and materials were developed that focused on five different speech acts within a workplace theme. Learners were given a pretest prior to the lessons and a post-test after the lessons to evaluate their learning. In developing the materials we gathered speech samples from native speakers (NS) in the local speech community through a discourse completion task (DCT) and then used those speech samples in creating conversations for analysis and guided practice. We relied on authentic speech samples to develop our material rather than our own intuition because we know that how we think we communicate is not always consistent with how we actually communicate (Ishihara and Cohen, 2010).

First, we identified five speech acts: *requests, refusals, apologies, compliments*, and *complaints.*

Second, we wrote scenarios to elicit speech samples from NS through a DCT. Example scenarios on the DCT included:

> "Your boss asked you to work extra shifts this weekend. You don't want to work, because you need to help your family. Tell him that you can't work this weekend."
> "You need a day off from work to go to a meeting at your child's school. Ask your boss for a day off."
> "Your friend at work is wearing nice clothes today. Tell her she looks nice."

Third, the NS responses were compiled and organized. This information was used to write five lesson plans with differentiation features for the two levels of learners.

The following lesson plan template was used for each lesson:

Objective: consider the social/cultural or linguistic goals of your lesson
Warm-up: questions, sound clip, video clip, print sources
Pre-teach vocabulary
Presentation of material for analysis: sound or video clip, print source
Discuss language analysis questions
Explicit Instruction on linguistic forms and meaning
Controlled practice/semi-controlled practice: reading conversations, matching activities, cloze activities, putting conversations into correct order
Communicative/independent practice: role plays, writing dialogs
Wrap up

While we were creating the lessons we administered a pretest DCT to learners. The pretest contained the same scenarios as the DCT administered to the NS.

Fourth, we delivered the five lessons over a five-week period.

Finally, we administered a post-test DCT to learners and compared responses to pretest DCT. (See Appendix A for the requests lesson plan.)

We presented audio clips and transcripts of the dialogs, so the learners could simultaneously see and hear the language. In order to scaffold the language analysis component of the lessons for our learners, we presented simple comparisons of language features as polite/impolite phrases, more direct/less direct, nice/rude, good/bad, and positive/negative. These categories created a framework for learners to identify the feelings or meanings or tone of specific phrases and language features in certain contexts. Often these categories were presented in a T-chart, or utterances or phrases were analyzed on a continuum on the whiteboard, which helped learners identify which phrases carried certain meanings in certain situations. These tasks followed the recommendations from Ishihara and Cohen (2010) for analyzing and practicing how directness, politeness, and formality are used in communication. By scaffolding the language analysis aspect of the lessons in this way, learners also developed some meta-language skills, which helped them talk about the language.

Discussion

In general the lessons and materials successfully made the learners more aware of specific phrases and pragmatic norms in the local speech community. The information in the lessons and materials was presented as examples they may hear in the local speech community, and never as a rigid, prescriptive norms that had to be followed. The students were responsive and enthusiastic when they noticed specific features or had certain phrases and contexts explicitly explained to them. We found that some learners still wrote very direct responses on the post-test DCT.

Example 1

Pre-test response- learner 1: "I'm sorry today I cannot work because I go to school my son."

Post-test response –learner 1: "I am sorry. I need a day off from work, because I have a meeting at my child's school. Can you help me?"

In Example 1 the post-test response still used, *"I need..."* which was presented as quite direct, but did offer a reason (a meeting at the child's school) and a modal verb *"can"* which was presented as a politeness marker. We speculated that they may have needed more frequent reviews of language features learned in previous lessons and that they might have responded differently to the post-test DCT items had oral recordings been available.

It should be noted that learners' responses to the DCTs were in written format, when the instruction was intended to increase learners' oral pragmatic communication skills. Many of our learners had stronger oral skills than written skills, so in some instances we felt that the DCTs did not fully capture their oral pragmatic skills. We were aware of this inconsistency when designing the project, but we decided to use the DCTs rather than an oral recording due to time and logistical constraints. Some of the learners in the high-beginning class orally dictated their responses to the instructor who wrote down their responses.

Conclusion

The adult ELLs who participated in this project, and others whom we have taught over the years, generally have a great sense of urgency about acquiring English language skills. They want and need to know the language in order to find and keep jobs, and to communicate with school officials and other community members. So many of them are called upon early in their language acquisition process to communicate in authentic settings, it only seems fair to incorporate pragmatics instruction in beginning-level classrooms. This practitioner report provides a framework for incorporating pragmatics instruction in low-level adult language classrooms in order to raise learners' awareness to the pragmatic norms of their speech community and to equip them with information that can help them communicate effectively.

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Appendix A

Pragmatics-based Lessons for Low-level Adult ELLs
Rhonda Petree

Requests Lesson Plan

Objective: Students will be able to make a request in a workplace environment.

Warm up:
Directions: Write or project these questions on the board. Have students discuss with partners or in small groups. Then discuss as a class. Write some of the answers on the board.

1. How do you get your boss's attention?
2. How do you ask your boss to change your schedule?

Vocabulary: Preteach *appreciate*

Presentation:
Directions: First, read the situation to the class. Then, listen to the conversation using an audio file link. Then display the conversation on the projector or write on the board and discuss as a class. Talk about "sure" to mean "yes" and "hmm" as a pause in the conversation and to show "thinking." Use the questions at the end as a guide for language analysis. For question 1, she gets his attention by saying, "Say, Daniel..." For question 2, the past continuous tense is used to soften the request so it's not so direct. Discuss "direct" vs. "indirect" language.

> *Situation*: Sue has been working the third shift (night shift) for the past 2 years. Now she wants to ask her boss if she can work the day shift. She wants to be home at night with her family.

Conversation:
Sue: Say, Daniel, *I was wondering* if it'd be possible to talk to you about my schedule.
Daniel: Sure. I'm free now.
Sue: *Well, I was hoping* you could change my schedule to the day shift so I could be home with my family more at night.
Daniel: Hmm…Let me think about it.
Sue: Okay. *If you could* get back to me soon I'd appreciate it. Thank you.
Daniel: All right. I'll let you know by Friday.

Discussion Questions:
1. How does the worker (Sue) get the boss's attention?
2. Why does she say "*I was wondering…*" and "*I was hoping…*"?

Explicit Instruction:
Directions: Discuss and write on the board the examples below which can be used to make a request. Then have the students add some of their own (ideas include: *would like to be considered, I am interested, I would like the position*).

1. I *appreciate* my position…..

2. I would *LOVE* to switch……

3. I'm *really* enjoying my job, but if there is an opportunity ...

Controlled Practice Lower-Level:
Directions: Project or write the situation on the board. First, students read the situation. Next, students read along as the teacher reads the conversation. Then, students read the conversation on their own. Last, students cut out the sentences on the dotted lines and put them in the correct order.

Situation: Sue needs a day off from work to go to a meeting at her child's school.

Conversation:

Sue	**Kia**
Excuse me, Kia ...	Yes, Sue.
I'm wondering if it would be possible to have Thursday off?	Hmm…possibly ...
I need to go to a meeting at my child's school.	Oh, okay. Just fill out the form for a day off.
Thank you Kia.	You're welcome.

Controlled Practice Higher-Level:
Directions: Project or write the situation on the board. First, students read the situation. Next, students read along as the teacher reads the conversation. Then, students read the conversation on their own. Last, students cut out the sentences on the dotted lines and put them in the correct order.

Situation: Sue needs a day off from work to go to a meeting at her child's school.

Conversation:

Sue	**Kia**
_____________ Kia.	___________.
_________________________ ______ have Thursday off?	Hmm ... possibly ...
________________to go to a meeting at my child's school.	__________. Just fill out the form for a day off.
____________________ Kia.	You're welcome.

Communicative Practice:
Directions: Project or write the situations on the board. Students should work individually or with a partner to create a dialogue for the situation. Then they role play the conversation for the class.

> *Situation 1:* You are applying for a new job. You need some references for the job application. You have been a good employee at your current job. Ask a co-worker or supervisor if you can use them as a reference.
>
> *Situation 2:* You want to take 3 weeks off this summer to visit your family in your home country. However, the summer is one of the busiest times of year at your job. Ask your supervisor for the time off.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS ACROSS LANGUAGES

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LESLLA-related research has demonstrated the crucial role of phonological awareness in the development of the ability to read and write in an additional language. This body of research has clearly demonstrated the role of alphabetic language organisation in the development of phonological awareness in both the first language and any subsequent language. The issues that remain are associated with the conflict between principles of effective bilingual development and principles of effective literacy development for alphabetic languages when the first language is either oral or has a non-alphabetic script. In this paper I explore a framework that might assist in guiding decisions about how to reconcile the conflict between otherwise sound principles.

Introduction[1]

In this paper I explore a complex ambiguity, potentially a tension in our understanding of how to approach the development of a 'first' literacy in a 'second' language. The ambiguity has three aspects, which together render problematic both the understanding of what is involved in 'second language literacy' and how to frame pedagogic responses for people without an established literacy in an additional language environment. I conclude by outlining a framework for addressing some aspects of that ambiguity.

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[1] I am grateful for feedback from two reviewers and from Donna Starks. Their comments have helped me to clarify the issues presented in this paper. They are not responsible for any remaining problems.

In responding to the needs of learners who already speak at least one language, but do not yet read/write any language with any degree of control, one of the key issues is knowing which of their languages offers the best basis for developing a first literacy. A fundamental tenet of bilingual education is that starting with the most familiar (i.e., the language over which the learner has most control) offers the best chances of success. However, if there is little to nothing in common between the reading (and writing) of two languages because of e.g., differences in scripts, then there is a strong temptation to plunge straight into working with the new (by definition less controlled) language. Pragmatic circumstances such as lack of resources and the teacher not knowing the language(s) of the students usually dictate a solution focussing on the additional language. However, in both theory and practice in relation to the delayed development of literacy, this is an unresolved dilemma and research does not yet offer teachers clear guidelines for desirable solutions.

The first aspect of addressing the ambiguity is clarifying what is meant by 'literacy' and particularly how language-specific literacy is.

Tarone, Bigelow & Hansen distinguish "print" literacy from other forms of literacy and restrict the scope of "print" to writing with alphabetic scripts:

> We will use the term "print literacy" to refer to the focus of interest of this book, and define it as the ability to encode and decode oral language units with an alphabetic script. (2009, p.1)

This use reflects the difficulties in knowing how to distinguish print literacy from other literacies (e.g., health literacy, information literacy, digital literacy), but this equation of print and alphabetic literacy is problematic since languages

can be printed in many different scripts. Alphabetic scripts are just one cluster among at least six script types (see Daniels, 1996). While there is extended debate about how best to classify the different systems and the relationships between them (Joyce & Borgwaldt, 2011), one way of doing this is as follows: Abjads (consonant-based systems) such as Arabic and Hebrew; Alphabets such as English, Cyrillic; Abugidas (syllabic systems) such as Khmer or Thai; Syllabaries such as Hiragana and Katakana in Japanese; Semanto-phonetic writing systems (character-based systems) such as in Chinese or Japanese and systems that are not yet fully understood, from ancient languages without current speakers.

(http://www.omniglot.com/writing/types.htm) [accessed January 28, 2012].

So, to the extent that literacy is language- or at least script-specific, there is a need to consider carefully the multiple possible literacy relationships between different languages. Further, while alphabetic scripts appear to have specific properties that are highly relevant for language learning purposes (see Tarone et al, 2009), the existence of abjads and abugidas demonstrates that there is not a binary divide between alphabetic and non-alphabetic languages (see also Abdelhadi, Ibrahim & Eviatar, 2011). Further, the debate about whether languages such as Hebrew and Arabic have alphabets or abjads indicates that the boundaries and criteria are open to discussion. The existence of languages such as Japanese, with at least three different writing systems also shows that there is no one-to-one relationship between languages and writing systems.

A second aspect of the ambiguity is the relationship between what proficient readers/writers do and how such proficiency is developed. What proficient readers/writers do is NOT a model of how they learn to do that – even if part of the process of becoming proficient is practising proficient behaviours. Learning to recognise parts and their relationships to wholes as well as the shapes that wholes take is part of the process of learning to read. Once these relationships are established, proficient reading can occur, but they must first be learned.

In describing what proficient readers do, Dehaene (2009, p. 20-21) points out that in alphabetic environments "global word shape does not play any role in reading" – if the word is not particularly long. However, the reading process involves a very rapid decision about whether a particular series of marks on a page/screen is something that can be recognised as a word in order to work out how to access the meaning, a so-called multi-pathway model. Dehaene points out that within a multi-pathway model of reading, proficient readers are rapidly able to decide whether they can recognise a word sufficiently to directly access its meaning or whether grapho-phonic analysis will be required in order to access meaning, such that:

> In adult expert readers, the time to read a word is essentially independent of its length. As long as a word does not have more than six or seven letters, its recognition takes an approximately constant amount of time regardless of length. (2009, p. 46)

This interpretation means that the reading process involves some rapid scanning for sight (or possible) vocabulary and a subsequent slower analysis of written stimuli that are not part of that vocabulary. Therefore, reading involves BOTH a sense of the whole and a sense of the parts in a dynamic relationship with each other. It is clearly NEITHER a process of letter-by-letter sounding out and NOR is it a process of only attending to the shape of an individual word.

Both Dehaene (2009), based on detailed psycholinguistic studies, and Kabuto (2011), based on her detailed ethnography of her daughter's emerging biliteracy in Japanese and English, recognise both macro- and micro-level analyses in the processes of learning to read and write. At the micro-level, Dehaene (2009, p.137) makes reference to "… a generic 'alphabet' of shapes that are essential to the parsing of the visual scene" as part of what underpins the reading process. An element associated with this sense of shape is a range of "proto-letters" (p. 137-140). The generic 'alphabet' is not an innate list, but one that is developed as a result of experience – it underpins a list of possible shapes that can be found in letters in alphabets and potentially in other writing systems.

Dehaene's notion of proto-letters is a construct that is designed to accommodate some of the shared features of symbols (directionality, relationships, relative size) across languages and writing systems. This notion suggests that there is the potential for shared processes in reading across widely-different writing systems. If there is a generic repertoire of shapes that we call on in reading, then the development of literacy in any particular language should have benefits for any subsequent literacy learning. This suggestion appears to be in stark contrast to the claims for the unique consequences of alphabetic literacy and raises issues about how to interpret understandings about relationships between different written literacies.

In a radically different style of study that nevertheless suggests something similar, Kabuto documented her bilingual daughter's development of biliteracy and commented:

> While Emma linked writing and drawing attributes together, she defined writing and drawing by actively generating attributes to redefine, or differentiate, writing and drawing forms. … After writing 'Mommy' and 'Emma,' on the bottom-left corner, she wrote an 'O' inside another 'O'. After she completed the sign, Emma said that an 'O' inside another 'O' looks like a doughnut. (2011, p. 47)

Kabuto's analysis revealed both elements of 'whole' and elements of abstract 'parts' intertwined in her daughter's analysis and control of the writing systems of English and Japanese. This learning involved the recognition of shapes across the modalities of 'writing' and 'drawing'. As part of learning to write each of her two languages, Emma went through a process that involved learning to recognise shapes and their similarities regardless of whether they were part of 'writing' or 'drawing' or 'life' (the letter 'O', a circle shape and a doughnut). She then had to learn what constrained the particular shapes in each specific context. For example, she would have had to learn to distinguish a 'doughnut' from a 'sticky bun ring', a lower case 'o' from an upper case 'O' and a circle from an oval.

So a proficient reader has access to a range of both sight vocabulary items and words up to six or seven letters in length (for e.g. alphabetic languages) that can be rapidly recognised, but also a range of other visual literacy skills such as recognising shapes, size and perspective. When a set of marks does not correspond to the repertoire of sight or potential vocabulary items, it is referred to a more explicit analytic process. In order to become able to read fluently, someone learning to read has to learn to distinguish and systematically relate disparate cues into their own cohesive and distinct systems.

A third aspect of the ambiguity for additional languages such as English is the potential tension between what appears to be a requirement to engage with alphabetic literacy in order to develop phonological awareness and a more humanistic view that, in order to empower minority group members, educational efforts should seek to develop the 'first' language in order to establish a foundation upon which to build the additional language (Garcia et al., 2009). If the writing systems of two languages are radically different, the process of building appropriate literacy awareness from one language to another is uncertain. Indeed the findings of de Gelder, Vroomen and Bertelson (1993) for literate users of Chinese whose alphabetic literacy learning was in Dutch suggest that seeking to work between or across languages is unnecessary.

The uncertainty about which language to begin with is increased if the learner has no literacy experiences in their first language and that language has a different writing system. As a consequence of this ambiguity, a theoretical challenge is balancing the attention that needs to be devoted to learning about what is involved in 'first' language literacy development (of children, in a variety of languages) with the question of how specific to the context of additional language learning 'second' language literacy development is. If developing literacy in any language can contribute to phonological awareness, then it will be possible to combine the humanistic endeavour of empowering minority members with development of skills and strategies useful for alphabetic literacy and phonological awareness. If phonological awareness only develops through engagement with alphabetic languages, the arguments for focussing on literacy learning in the 'second' language will have greater weight.

Framing a response

Literacy in any language involves some level of graphophonic analysis – because all written systems must be 'translated' into something that has sounds (words) via a process of recognising how the sounds and the written symbols are related. It doesn't matter whether those sounds are actually vocalised. The issue of which pedagogical approach to take for the development of literacy in an additional language is particularly problematic if the learner is a speaker of a language with a character-based writing system, who is not literate in that language since in such languages the role of graphophonic analysis is particularly unclear and the issue of which language to start with is highly problematic, particularly if the learner is an adolescent or adult.

Kabuto argues, "Writing is an act of discovery that requires perceptual rearrangements and physical representations and [is] always embedded in social and cultural contexts" (2011, p. 53). This description makes the act of writing sound like an unstructured process of exploration and experimentation and therefore equally accessible to everyone.

On the surface, this appears to contradict Dehaene's claim that

> … without explicit teaching of the alphabetic code, conscious manipulation of phonemes does not emerge. (2009, p. 203)

However, it is not inconsistent with his other point (p. 94-5)

> That neurons respond in the same way to the shapes 'g' and 'G' cannot be attributed to an innate organization of vision. It necessarily results from a learning process that has incorporated cultural practices into the appropriate brain networks.

In different ways, both views recognise the interaction between cultural experiences and shape-analysis. Dehaene's focus is more on the neural dimensions of the skilled reader's analysis of the code and how such skilful analysis is mediated by cognitive mechanisms. Kabuto's attention is directed more to the process of gaining that level of skill and how that process is mediated by social experiences. Based on his analysis of skilled reading across a range of languages, Dehaene concludes that

> The two reading routes [straight to meaning or via sound to meaning] exist in all cultures and reside in similar areas of the brain. The only difference consists in the way that each language makes use of the routes. (2009, p. 118)

So there are features of the reading process that are specific to particular languages, but the particular language seems to act more as a filter on common cognitive structures. If this is the case, then there is space to look for relationships in literacy awareness across different writing systems.

As Koda argues in her Transfer Facilitation Model: "… second-language competencies evolve from continuous interplay between transferred first-language competencies

and second-language print input" (2008, p. 79). Key to this model is the capacity to access language input, requiring a more detailed understanding of aspects of language awareness (Kuo & Anderson, 2008) such as outlined in the table below. The table shows two broad categories of phonological and morphological awareness in the left column. The 'Sound' awareness column contains the sub-components of phonological awareness (there are none for morphological awareness) and the 'Sound-writing' awareness column labels the relationships between the phonological, morphological and writing system awareness.

Focus of awareness	**'Sound' awareness**	**'Sound-writing' awareness**
Phonological awareness	Syllable awareness	Graphophonological awareness (involving all three aspects of 'sound')
	Onset-rime awareness	
	Phoneme awareness	
Morphological awareness		Graphomorphological awareness

Table 1: Aspects of 'word-level' language awareness related to literacy

The above table does not contain all elements of language awareness. For example, Kuo and Anderson (2008) also identify semantic and syntactic awareness and Tarone et al (2009) extend the list. However, the components in the table above specifically relate to the relationship between parts and wholes in relation to dimensions of sound and shape in writing systems. In thinking about how to read and write, these elements are crucial. However, even with the list identified above, there are issues about how much specific items apply to non-alphabetic languages. As Fang, Tzeng and Alva concluded some thirty years ago: “We simply cannot, or should not, lump data of different types of bilingual subjects together and attempt to come up with a general statement about the processing mechanism” (1981, p. 616).

However, if languages can be grouped (e.g. because their writing systems share the characteristic of being alphabetic), some level of consolidation can be achieved. As Anthony & Francis argue in relation to the process and sequence of development of phonological awareness in monolingual children across multiple (alphabetic) languages,

> Although phonological awareness development from large units of sound to small units of sound is universal across languages, the rate that populations of speakers of different languages progress through the sequence and the proficiency they achieve at each level vary. (2005, p. 256)

Similarly ‘lumping’ data, there appears to be a significant role for phonological awareness and potentially also phonemic awareness in reading different languages. Bialystok, McBride-Chang and Luk (2005) have demonstrated that the development of phonological awareness reflects exposure to and experience with alphabetic writing systems and leads to greater ability to analyse those systems. In consequence, for languages with a shared alphabetic writing system, there is likely to be transfer of phonological awareness from one language to another. However, actual recognition of written words is a reflection of vocabulary size in the language. To the extent that writing systems are not shared, Bialystok et al indicated that the ability to establish relationships between literacies is also varied.

> For phonological awareness, progress depends mostly on the structure of the language; for reading, progress depends mostly on proficiency in that language. (2005, p. 589)

Proficiency in a language is multi-faceted and what influences its development is similarly diverse. In reporting on influences on alphabetic reading in a first language and the relationships between diverse aspects of phonological awareness, Foy & Mann pointed out that after controlling for the potential influence of age, knowledge of words and of letters

> … speech perception was closely associated with rhyme awareness measures … and that children with a less developed sense of rhyme also had a less mature pattern of articulation ... (2003, p. 60)

In contrast, age, vocabulary and letter knowledge largely explained the relationships between phoneme awareness on the one hand and both phonological perception and production on the other.

In interrogating the nature of phonological awareness and influences on how it develops, Foy and Mann also point out:

> … rhyme and syllable awareness are more likely to develop spontaneously, in contrast to phoneme awareness, which most often depends upon formal reading instruction (for rhyme, see Dale, Crain–Thoreson, & Robinson, 1995; Johnston, Anderson, & Holligan, 1996; Smith et al., 1998; for syllables, see Mann & Liberman, 1984; Morais, 1991; Morais et al., 1979). (p. 61)

These findings suggest that there are different influences on the development of phonological awareness and that not all parts of phonological awareness require either explicit instruction or insight into the internal structure of words. In particular, rhyming behaviour and recognising syllable boundaries are skills that can emerge without explicit (schooled) instruction. Identifying another influence, Foy and Mann reinforce the role of vocabulary (see also Metsala, 1999). It has been estimated that in first language development for alphabetic languages such as English a vocabulary of some 2,000 words is available at the time that aspects of phonological awareness begin to consolidate and perhaps a further 2,000 – 3,000 words by the time that formal schooling commences (Biemiller, 2003). As Foy & Mann (2003) point out,

> … in our previous study (Foy & Mann, 2001) we found vocabulary to be a primary associate of phoneme awareness, which overwhelmed any direct effects of phonological perception and production. (p. 64)

However, in their 2003 study, as a result of path analysis that accounted for interactions between home literacy practices, age and phoneme awareness in monolingual preschool children, they downplayed the independent role of vocabulary knowledge. In Foy and Mann's (2003) study, the measure of vocabulary knowledge was a productive measure rather than the receptive measures used in studies that have claimed a stronger relationship between vocabulary and phoneme awareness. Vocabulary size was not an independent variable, its nature (receptive or productive) varied and its influence was constrained by a range of other variables, both cognitive and social.

Thus, in support of an argument that the development of different aspects of phonological awareness is supported by different experiences, they conclude (p. 83) that

> Where the aspects of the home literacy environment that appear to develop phoneme awareness build primarily upon the child's vocabulary and letter knowledge, those that develop rhyme awareness build more strongly upon speech discrimination.

In their findings, rhyme awareness develops as a consequence of experience with speech that reflects language familiar to the child. Consistent with the table of components of phonological awareness above, there is a division between phonemic awareness on the one hand and syllabic awareness and onset-rime awareness on the other hand in the extent to which explicit instruction is needed to develop the awareness. Phonemic awareness, which is the aspect of phonological awareness most discretely associated with literacy in alphabetic languages is the last to develop of the three and the one that appears to require the most explicit instruction. Other aspects of phonological awareness may not require the same kind of formal instruction to develop.

Does this mean, then, that children who learn to read in a non-alphabetic language (or a less alphabetic language such as Japanese) do not develop phonemic awareness and only develop other kinds of phonological awareness? The first answer appears to be "yes." Read, Zhang, Nie & Ding (1986) investigated the phonemic segmentation abilities of native speakers of Chinese whose literacy learning either did or did not involve experiences with the alphabetic pinyin script. They found a strong association between having learned pinyin and the ability to segment both words and non-words at syllable boundaries. Similar evidence was provided by de Gelder et al (1993), but this time based on evidence from Chinese speakers who had their experiences with alphabetic literacy in Dutch as an additional language. Nevertheless, more recent evidence seems to suggest that in the course of children learning to read and write non-alphabetic languages phonemic awareness also develops (though later and to a different extent).

Fletcher-Flinn, Thompson, Yamada and Naka (2011) have produced evidence that in L1 Japanese, children learning to read hiragana (the syllabary used for 'native' Japanese words) develop phonemic awareness as they learn to name the specific '*you-on*' that mark the palatalisation of certain sounds – a phonemic element in what is otherwise a syllabic writing system.

Further, Yan, Bai, Zang, Bian, Cui, Qi, Rayner and Liversedge (2012) offer evidence of two things. First, reading Chinese characters by first language Chinese university students involves recognition of the internal structure (strokes) of the character with different strokes having different significance. Second, the contributions of strokes to meaning parallel very closely the contributions of letters to meaning in alphabetic reading – a first letter and a beginning stroke are similarly significant with final strokes and letters less significant. Overall, different kinds of strokes (not location) also contribute to meaning differently. Third, the influence of stroke order was not a result of the stroke being either a semantic or a phonetic radical. Continuing the thread of sub-lexical (phonemic) awareness in non-alphabetic languages, Lin & Collins (2012) demonstrated that speakers of both Japanese and English reading Chinese as an additional language analysed the phonetic elements of characters. Even though learners with Japanese as L1 were overall more accurate, similar patterns of sub-lexical analysis applied whether learners had Japanese or English as their first language and these patterns resembled both those of readers with Chinese as a first language and those of first language readers of English.

Yan et al. (2012) show that for first language readers of Chinese, different elements within the character contribute in different ways to the readability of the character so that readers have to pay attention not only to the shape as a whole but also need to analyse the elements within the character. The general pattern of sensitivity to disruption of the characters was reported to be similar to the pattern in alphabetic languages, indicating that there are both differences and similarities in reading strategies.

Lin and Collins' (2012) findings show that there are effects of both the regularity (always having the character pronounced according to its phonetic element) and consistency (sharing the same pronunciation of a phonetic element across a group of characters) of Chinese characters on L2 readers of Chinese whether the learners were of Japanese or English speaking background.

Further, with growing evidence of the additional importance of morphological awareness to reading and also of its relationship to vocabulary (McBride-Chang, Tardif, Cho, Shu, Fletcher, Stokes, Wong & Leung, 2008; Kieffer & Lesauz, 2012), insights into the relationships between growth in vocabulary and growth in language awareness of various kinds is emerging. Kieffer and Lesauz' (2012) identification of three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge: breadth, contextual sensitivity and morphological awareness suggest channels for some of these relationships.

These diverse studies seem to indicate the following:

1. Phonological awareness is a multi-faceted construct, in which different aspects contribute differently to overall literacy
2. Some features such as onset-rime appear to contribute less directly to subsequent reading ability and appear to develop independently of alphabetic print literacy
3. Vocabulary size is connected with at least morphological awareness
4. Phonological awareness influences subsequent literacy (and vocabulary size is important at the time of initial literacy acquisition)
5. Phonemic awareness is a central construct in the development of alphabetic literacy, but appears to also develop (at least in part) as a consequence of the acquisition of literacy in languages with other writing systems
6. Phonological awareness is paralleled by morphological awareness
7. Reading of different scripts calls on different types and sub-types of awareness
8. Even entirely logographic scripts are not entirely read as 'wholes', but involve some analysis of their component elements
9. Size of vocabulary and phonological awareness are connected with family literacy practices in first language literacy development
10. For languages with alphabetic scripts, phonological awareness transfers from the first to the second language

> (at least when that awareness is well-established in the first language literacy)

But these are predominantly first language studies. Can the same mechanisms be assumed to apply in additional language reading? After all, the general SLA field has devoted tremendous energy to demonstrating that simplistic L1 transfer does not account for significant features of additional language development. As van Tubergen (2010) shows through statistical analysis of a survey of some 3,500 refugees in the Netherlands, there are features of some additional language populations, particularly refugee populations, which mark them as significantly different from those learning to read in their first language. Whereas for young children learning to read in their first language as well as for non-refugee migrants to the Netherlands in van Tubergen's study, where longer contact with the language is associated with higher reading skills, van Tubergen found

> … that for every year that a refugee stays in a reception center in the Netherlands, the associated odds of speaking Dutch well decreases about 10 percent, and the odds of reading Dutch well diminishes by 8 percent. (2010, p. 529)

These findings suggest that some of environmental influences that would normally be considered to support reading development may not be present in non-literate refugee populations. Nevertheless, as with Ross' (2000) research with adult ESL learners in Australia, van Tubergen (2010) found a strong relationship between levels of first language education and overall additional language proficiency.

These two studies indicate that general aspects of experience contribute to some aspects of literacy development, and that general education is a significant element in those experiences. Literacy is, of course, both reading the world and reading the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987) so part of this contribution of prior experience will be understanding the

world as well as general understanding of the role and purpose of literacy and of how institutionalised learning is organised. The studies discussed above suggest that phonemic awareness is only likely to transfer if the writing systems of the two languages involved are the same (see also Comeau, Cormier, Grandmaison & Lacroix, 1999), but this is not the sum of how previous experiences with/in one language might contribute to literacy learning in an additional language.

There are two broad issues that need to be addressed. The first of these issues comes in the form of a pair of questions. Are the prerequisites for literacy development available to the learners? Can the learners make use of input and feedback that relates to literacy knowledge? Schild, Röder and Friedrich (2011) compared monolingual German pre-school (beginning to read and non-reading) and young school children (beginning readers) in an ERP (Event-related Potential) study in which brain activity in response to particular cues is assessed by a series of electrodes placed on the scalp. They documented that "the newly established processing route for written words directly interacts with representations at the lexical access pathway in spoken word recognition" (p. 171). This finding suggests that learning to read (an alphabetic language) influences the way in which speech in that language is perceived. This result supports the claim that adults without literacy in any language will perceive spoken input differently from those already literate (at least in an alphabetic language). A bias to focus on whole words in non-literate adults is reported by Serniclaes, Ventura, Morais & Kolinsky (2005).

So, the next issue is whether the required insight into literacy can be fostered in adults learning an additional language when they do not already have parallel experiences in their other language(s). Landgraf, Beyer, Hild, Schneider, Horn, Schaadt, Foth, Pannekamp & van der Meer (2012) explored this issue in a quasi-experimental study involving adult learners of German, non-literate adult speakers of

German and literate speakers of German. The 47 non-literate adults were involved in a one-year long literacy program with weekly classes. Neither the length of the weekly classes nor the specific nature of the teaching methodology used in the program were described in detail, but the approach seems to have reflected a 'basic skills' approach (see also Landgraf, Beyer, Pannekamp, Schaadt, Koch, Foth & van der Meer, 2011). Landgraf et al. (2012, p. S135) reported that, as with children, phoneme association (phonemic awareness) was more strongly associated with improvements on reading and writing tests than years of education. But for the adults in the training program, ability in syllable segmentation was also associated with improvement in writing skills. However, Landgraf et al. (2012) point out that the phonological skills do not directly predict the course outcomes as they are mediated by a number of other life experience variables. So, while the course was able to achieve improvements in both diverse aspects of phonological awareness and in reading and writing scores, the level of performance of the non-literate second language learners did not reach the level of the literate control group (in which 3 of the 41 participants were second language learners of German).

Teaching implications

Taken together, the above studies suggest that while the learning of literacy is an urgent need, rushing into it for learners who have not yet experienced literacy may not be the best approach. Remembering that literacy has both the dimensions of reading the world and reading the word, there seems to be sufficient evidence that the acquisition of any literacy will develop enough initial capacity to read the world that is required to make a start in acquiring literacy in an additional language. However, when the first language writing system is not the same as that of the additional language, there will remain a need to provide explicit, focused instruction on the literate practices of the new writing system. For

alphabetic languages such as English, Dutch, German and French, a key component of that instruction will need to be phonemic awareness.

In this proposal, the fact that the teaching approach builds on established experiences with a literate world gives a basis for exploring the specific literate world of the new language, but it can hide the need for that life-based and experience-building to be a planned and coordinated element of the language learning program – after all, the literacy associated with the new language is part of a new cultural experience, one that can be both contrasted with previous cultural experiences and explicitly explored. This proposal assumes that learners with an established literacy already have *some* form of syllable awareness, onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness since the first two have capacity to develop independently of literacy and the last one seems to develop to a limited extent in the later phases of literacy development with other writing systems.

However, for learners who have not yet had literacy experiences, there may be a need to build more linguistic resources prior to explicitly focusing on alphabetic literacy. The role of vocabulary in building both a basis for phonological awareness across all three levels and in sustaining the development of skilled reading is essential in effective literacy instruction, but nothing would be worse than interpreting this as advocacy for endless wordlists. Both phonological and morphological awareness imply seeing vocabulary as part of webs of meaning and webs of form. Since size of vocabulary seems to play an important role at the commencement of literacy instruction (for children learning to read for the first time), it may well play a similarly important role for adults learning to read for the first time. This implies that exploring syllabic awareness and onset-rime awareness may be important aspects of building vocabulary knowledge orally prior to beginning to engage with new literacy in the new language. In this phase of learning literacy, 'reading the world' can be part of the knowledge that is brought into the classroom from earlier languages. Similarly, 'reading the word' practices from earlier languages at the level of rhyme, rhythm (songs and poetry) can also be brought into the additional language classroom and used to build connections between words (see Schmitt (2008) for an overview that builds on the work of, among others, Paul Nation and Paul Meara). A key feature of modern approaches to vocabulary teaching is the emphasis on depth and breadth of learning – part of a focus on establishing the web of connections between and around individual words. I will call these aspects of literacy 'pan-literacy' based on the argument that they can be seen to be features of all literate practices in all languages. The overlap between some of these aspects of graphophonic relationships and some alphabetic literacy skills is part of the pathway to a more specific and elaborated alphabetic literacy.

It may well be that a necessary preliminary step to building pan-literacy is building a new vocabulary and the explicit development of contrastive relations between the new language vocabulary and vocabulary from already established languages. This vocabulary widening should be seen as PART OF a wider approach that embeds vocabulary into wider (culturally-shaped) frameworks of use and interaction before the specific move into alphabetic literacy features and related awareness.

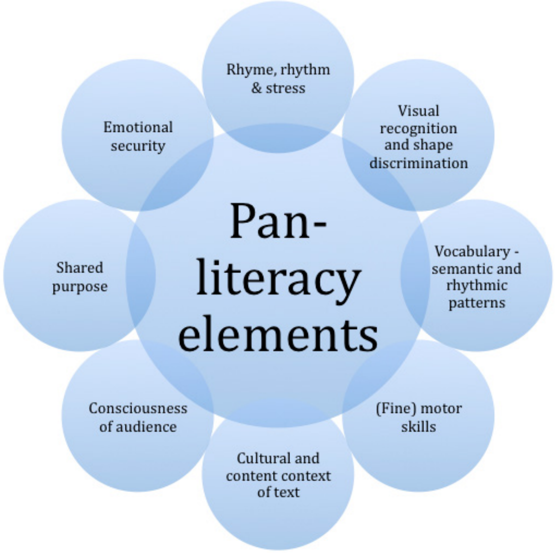
Pan-literacy elements
Rhyme, rhythm & stress
Visual recognition and shape discrimination
Vocabulary - semantic and rhythmic patterns
(Fine) motor skills
Cultural and content context of text
Consciousness of audience
Shared purpose
Emotional security

Figure 1: Elements of pan-literacy

This acknowledgement of pan-literacy may be a way in which what we recognise from general principles of bilingual development can be reconciled with the quite specific aspects of alphabetic literacy that are required for effective reading and writing in languages such as English. The following appear to me to be elements of pan-literacy – many of them are not associated with language directly.

In what follows, I will only elaborate on those elements that have not been considered in discussions above.

- *Rhyme, rhythm and stress - as part of shared activity*
  Rhyme, rhythm and stress have been shown to be accessible to all speakers of all languages, but seeing them as part of a shared class activity helps to extend awareness of different language patterns and builds experiences of finding similarities and differences between languages. Further, the shared activity prevents the otherwise threatening focus on an individual. Such activities will be part of the shared experiences of songs, poetry and language play that speakers of any language will have.
- *Visual recognition and shape discrimination*
  As the intertwined nature of recognition and discrimination of shapes, writing and drawing has indicated, understanding the written word (no matter in what language) is part of building up visual perception of shapes, elements in shapes and the space for variation within shapes. All cultures will have a repertoire of shapes and visual images that represent a non-verbal way of communicating.

- *Vocabulary – based in life experiences and as part of semantic and rhythmic patterns*
Words are not just lists of meanings – they have their own rhythmic patterns and these patterns help to create webs of form between words. Recognising rhythms is part of recognising syllable structures and provides insights into legitimate junctures in languages. As with rhyme and rhythm, words that can be linked by their rhythmic patterns are part of the poetic experiences of all cultures.
- *(Fine) motor skills*
Writing involves not only command of the vocabulary and grammar and text structure, but also control of the instruments of writing – either pens or keyboards. Control of both of these instruments requires the capacity to manipulate hands and fingers precisely within small spaces. These skills do not develop exclusively with writing but need to be honed in ways that will be relevant to the particular shapes that the new writing system will require. While not all aspects of fine motor skills will be evenly distributed (e.g. not everyone sews), there are practices in all cultures that involve fine control of motor movements.
- *Cultural and content context of texts*
In contrast to the element just discussed, reading and writing involves much more than motor skills – the wider understanding of what can be written and why is a vital element of becoming a literate member of society. Regardless of whether a language is spoken or written, there will be differences in the ways in which it is used (and what is communicated) in different situations. These practices will be accessible to all speakers of any language and form a basis for situating written texts.
- *Consciousness of audience for texts*
Linked to cultural purposes is an understanding of who may be reading text, what their expectations of different text types might be and what responsibility the writer must take for any particular audience. Experience of the difference between speaking to a child and speaking to an adult (or in some cultures speaking with a man or woman) forms a basis for moving beyond a view of written language as a set of abstract skills controlled by someone else to a view of writing as situated communication.

- *Shared purposes in literacy events*
Many of the above elements imply an understanding of how reading and writing are embedded in shared activities. For many people without literacy experiences, reading and writing are seen as things that other people do. However, there is an understanding that those activities connect people in particular ways. Similarly, experiences of song and poetry are also shared and so build a context for understanding that all language users can participate in shared uses of reading and writing.
- *Emotional security*
Learning to read and write cannot occur in contexts in which the learner experiences threat. Learning to read and write for the first time as an adult is both a liberating and an intensely threatening experience. For the experience to be successful, the learner must feel sufficiently secure to take what are perceived to be major risks where the evidence of 'failure' is recorded on an enduring basis. Previous experiences of success usually contribute to greater success in learning a second literacy.

These elements may provide a basis for the development of the 'proto' elements that both Dehaene (2009) and Kabuto (2011) referred to, while also acknowledging the intercultural learning that is an essential element of additional language acquisition and even more necessary for learners who have not yet experienced a key feature of the cultural organisation and meanings of societies who are claiming to receive refugee learners.

The notion of pan-literacy addresses some of the ambiguities identified at the beginning of the paper. Those elements of pan-literacy can be seen as the elements that are in common between languages and form the linking element that enables literacy in an additional language to be fostered via activities in a first language as part of a humanistic endeavour of empowering minority groups. The elements of pan-literacy can also be seen as providing the basis for the further development of elements of phonological awareness specific to alphabetic literacy. This supports the argument that there are specific aspects of alphabetic literacy that require formal, language-specific instruction, but provides a basis for supporting this activity through the development of literacy in the learner's first language.

The above comments should not be taken to imply that beginning literacy development with reference only to the additional language will not be successful. However, they offer ways of bringing together both the challenges of such a pathway and opening up routes of supporting both learners and teachers by identifying repertoires that could be shared.

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CONVEYING MEANING: ORAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF THE LESLLA LEARNER

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Introduction

Learning a second language and becoming literate for the first time is an exceptional challenge for learners who have never been to school. They are constantly trying to understand and be understood. In other words, they have to grasp the meaning of new words and interpret the meaning of pictures or gestures, while also trying to convey meaning. New ways of processing and conveying information are involved. These need to be learned in combination with learning to speak and read in the new language. In addition to learning to function in a new social environment, these learners who are attending classes for L2 literacy also have to adapt to learning in a school situation. Various characteristics influence their learning development. Next to personal characteristics such as age and length of residence, other characteristics are basic to the group as a whole and are of particular importance in a formal learning situation such as a classroom. Of these basic characteristics being non-literate in the first language is the foremost reason that these learners must be seen as a separate group in adult education. Written material cannot be used as a support in the learning process. Even if the basic decoding skills have been mastered, the skills to put them to use are insufficiently developed. Because these learners have had virtually no schooling experience, the lack of learning skills normally developed during the early years of schooling along with the learning to read and write, can seriously hamper the learning process in a formal school setting.

Apart from these impeding factors non-literate learners are also confronted with yet another difficulty – that of receiving instruction through the target language. Giving instructions for exercises and explaining vocabulary and grammar can be misconstrued or not comprehended at all. Outside the classroom, given the opportunity, the learner can experience the target language in use and, if she applies herself[1], can practice using it. It is known that hearing and experiencing the target language outside the classroom definitely can have positive effects on the learning process (Condelli et al. 2003). On the other hand, using the target language as the medium of instruction in the classroom can avert learning if the learner is regularly confused and messages are misunderstood. A final characteristic common to the literacy classroom is that of mixed cognitive abilities. All types of learners compose a language class: those that learn quickly as well as those that need more support in their learning process. Still classroom composition between regular DSL (Dutch as a second language) classes and literacy classes differ greatly. In regular DSL classes the learners are placed according to their cognitive abilities as seen by previous schooling experience or according to the results of an intake test. For the literacy classes this is not possible, resulting in pronounced differences in classroom composition in terms of general learning abilities. This forms a complex problem for the teacher which is too often neglected.

With the intent of getting a better understanding of these learners' spoken language development in a classroom situation, a study was undertaken in six adult DSL literacy classes.[2] The classroom processes were observed and the learners were pre- and post-assessed. This paper will report on the differences in gains made on the assessments and will look at learner characteristics to try to account for the differences that have emerged.

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[1] The learner is referred to with 'she' or 'her', because women are in the majority, but the comments also apply to male learners.

The study

Data collection

The data for this longitudinal study were collected at centers of adult education in the Netherlands. A varied range of literacy classes were selected on the basis of an extensive survey of the literacy programs. These classes differed in factors such as site, geographical location, available educational facilities, and learner population. Of the initial 68 learners, 41 were both pre- and post-assessed. The discussion in this paper concerns only these 41 assessed learners. In order to get an insight in classroom processes six different DSL literacy classes were observed during the practice of the oral skills. Each class was observed eight times, once a month in the period from November 2006 to October 2007. The recordings of the classroom sessions were transcribed and analyzed. In addition, in order to get a better insight into the oral L2 development of the learners, a pre- and post-assessment was applied. Both assessments were audio-recorded and later transcribed orthographically and analyzed. Learner characteristics were collected from school records, communication with the teachers, and information retrieved from the opening interview during the pre- and post-assessments.

Participants and classes

The characteristics of these participants are summarized in Table 1. Class 4 had on average the youngest learners, 27.8 years old, who had lived the least numbers of years in the Netherlands before starting DSL schooling, an average of three years. Classes 5 and 6 had the oldest learners with a respective mean age of 45.9 and 43.7 years and a length of residence (LOR) of 15.1 and 14.8 years respectively. All the learners in Classes 5 and 6 were from Morocco, while those in the other four classes were from various countries, next to a few from Morocco, also included those from Afghanistan, Turkey, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Burundi, Iraq, Kosovo, and China. In all the classes at least 50% had had no education in their country of origin and were non-literate in the L1. Previous DSL schooling experience was in all the classes very fragmented, except Class 3. All the learners in Class 3 had participated in an introductory DSL program of 600 hours. For the other schools the data reported in the school records for DSL schooling background was often incomplete or lacking. No levels of achievement had been noted.

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[2] Earlier Leslla publications have reported on this same study from different angles: feedback (Strube, 2008), classroom interaction (Strube, 2009), and telling picture stories (Strube, 2010; Strube, van de Craats & van Hout, 2010).

Table 1: Learner characteristics in the six literacy classrooms; LOR = Length of residence, DSL = Dutch as a second language.

Class	N	Mean age	Country of origin	Mean LOR (in years)	No L1 schooling	L1 non-literate	Previous DSL schooling
1	7	39.00	Various	8.10	71.43%	57.14%	42.86%
2	8	36.60	Various	10.10	62.50%	66.67%	74.00%
3	5	36.40	Various	3.20	80.00%	60.00%	100%
4	6	27.80	Various	3.00	50.00%	66.67%	50.00%
5	9	45.90	Morocco	15.10	77.78%	88.89%	44.44%
6	6	43.70	Morocco	14.80	100%	100%	100%

From the survey also surfaced three basic types of organization of the oral and literacy skills in terms of the time allotted to each skill. These types were subsequently labelled Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3. Table 2 gives an overview of the organization type for each class as well as the weekly schedule. Classes 1 and 2 were Type 1 classes. In Type 1 the oral and the literacy skills were regarded as two different learning processes. Each skill was taught in a separate class and the learners were placed in each class according to their specific skill level. This meant, for example, that a learner could be placed in a level 1 class for the oral skills and in a level 2 class for the literacy skills. Class 1 met in total nine hours per week and Class 2 twelve hours. Each class spent an equal amount of time on each skill. Classes 3 and 4 were Type 2 classes. The two skills were also separately practiced, but formed one class. The learners were placed in the class according to their level in one of the skills. This usually resulted in mixed level groups for the other skill. Class 3 had ten hours per week, spending an equal amount of time on the oral and literacy skills. Class 4 spent twice as much time per week on the literacy skills (5.50 hours) than on the oral skills (2.75 hours), totaling to 8.25 hours per week. Classes 5 and 6 were Type 3 classes. The time spent on literacy and oral skills were not set in advance. The teacher determined the amount of time and on which skill would be focused. This could vary from zero to 100% of classroom time. Class 5 met twice a week for a total of five hours and Class 6 met four times a week totaling to eleven hours. All the selected classes were at the beginning of their oral skills development.

Table 2: Organization type and weekly schedule for the six literacy classes.

		Scheduled lesson organization per week					
		Frequency per week		Lesson duration in hours		Total hours per week	
Class	Type	Oral skills	Literacy skills	Oral skills	Literacy skills	Oral skills	Literacy skills
1	1	3	3	1.50	1.50	4.50	4.50
2	1	4	4	1.50	1.50	6.00	6.00
3	2	4	4	1.25	1.25	5.00	5.00
4	2	1	2	2.75	2.75	2.75	5.50
5	3	2		2.50		5.00	
6	3	4		2.75		11.00	

Table 3 presents an overall summary of classroom hours for the oral and the literacy skills during the 30-week observation period. As the table shows four classes had separate oral skills and literacy skills classes – each class focusing on a specific skill. This does not mean that the learner only practiced and received feedback on her oral skills during oral skills classes. In both classes the instruction was in the L2 with constant oral L2 input and output. Most certainly the teacher gave feedback on the students L2 during both class sessions. For the other two classes, these skills were not strictly separated. As Table 3 shows, there is great variation between the classes in the total number of classroom hours. Class 2 had the most hours during this period, 360 hours. Class 5 had the least number of hours, 150 hours. Class 4 stands out in that it had only 82.50 classroom hours for the oral skills, but twice as much for the literacy skills, totaling to 247.50 hours. The rate of attendance was generally high, 80% or higher, except for Classes 2 and 3 with 66% and 75% respectively. The calculated mean number of classroom hours attended does not vary greatly, between 211.41 and 265.39 hours. Only Class 5, which had the least number of scheduled hours to start with, had in spite of the high rate of attendance, a very low mean number of attended classroom hours, 123.00.

Table 3: Classroom time during the 30-week observation period for the oral and literacy skills practice for the six literacy classes (in hours).

	During 30-week observation period				
Class	Total oral skills	Total literacy skills	Total classroom time	Rate of attendance	Attended classroom hours
1	135.00	135.00	270.00	0.86	232.20
2	180.00	180.00	360.00	0.66	238.72
3	150.00	150.00	300.00	0.75	225.60
4	82.50	165.00	247.50	0.85	211.41
5	150.00		150.00	0.82	123.00
6	330.00		330.00	0.80	265.39

Pre- and post-assessments

All the learners were pre- and post-assessed individually. The post-assessment, administered eight months after the pre-assessment, was a repetition of the pre-assessment. After a short interview to set the learner at ease, the actual assessment was started. The whole procedure was recorded and later analyzed. The purpose of the assessments was to get a better insight into the development of spoken language proficiency of the non-literate learner.

The assessments focused on vocabulary, verbal morpho-syntax, and aspects of relevance and coherence in discourse. In all, eleven variables were analyzed. The assessments were based on tasks using pictures as a stimulus for the extraction of language. Since the learner herself determined how she would respond, it was assumed that the responses were examples of semi-spontaneous language production within a preset context, the pictures. The tasks comprised three groups of pictures: 40 pictures of single objects, 14 pictures of episodes, and three picture stories each containing a sequence of four pictures. All the pictures depicted familiar objects, actions or episodes, each requiring its own vocabulary to tap as much language as possible. The episodes in each picture or picture story were increasingly more detailed making it possible for the learner to produce more complex utterances. Next to unraveling the role of the characters in the pictures, the learner also had to describe the pictured event by making the best use of his limited linguistic knowledge.

Analysis

The assessments were analyzed on two levels: meaning and form. An analysis of the form would give an impression of the learner's ability to manipulate certain linguistic elements during his DSL acquisition process. An analysis of meaning would show how the learner uses his knowledge of the DSL to convey meaning. To accomplish these aims, the analysis of the assessments focused on three components basic to language learning: vocabulary, morphosyntax, and discourse.

Vocabulary was analyzed on two points: knowledge of specific words and word count. Knowledge of specific words would give an indication of vocabulary growth in number of words learned. These words were preselected and presented in the form of pictures and tested on productive and receptive knowledge. For the productive task the learner named the object on a preselected picture. For the receptive task the learner selected the picture of the named object. Word count was applied to the responses given in the picture description tasks and was measured in tokens and types. The tokens pointed to the quantity of words in speech, whereas the number of types reflected word diversity. The unit of analysis for the vocabulary was the word. The given response was then either right or wrong. The unit of analysis for word count was the entire response given for the description of the picture episodes and the telling of the picture stories.

The analysis of the morphosyntax gave an impression of the learner's ability to manipulate certain linguistic elements during his DSL acquisition process. The unit of analysis for the morphosyntax was the utterance. An utterance was defined as a stream of speech having at least one of three features: less than one intonation contour, bounded by pauses, or forming a single semantic unit (Beheydt, 1988; Crookes, 1990). Because the length of a response for each described picture in the episodes and the picture stories varied from learner to learner, only one utterance in a response for each picture was chosen as the unit of analysis. This was the utterance that was deemed to be the most advantageous for the learner. Such an utterance usually contained a verb or had the most constituents. In this manner, all the learners – those with short responses and those with lengthy responses – could be compared on a relatively equal basis. All the utterances in which a verb was present were analyzed on the position of that verb in relation to a compliment or modifier. The position of the verb was marked correct, incorrect, or inconclusive when no complement or modifier was present. In total 26 utterances were analyzed for each learner.

The analysis of the morphosyntax focused on two features: the ability to combine words into units (syntax) and the ability to apply inflection to verbs (morphology). The analysis of the syntax was restricted to four features: the number of constituents, verb presence, verb position, and agent presence. In learning a second language it is necessary to know how words can be grouped. Correct formation of word groups, the constituents, aids communication and understanding, thus, an essential skill for second language learners. The number of constituents in an utterance may denote utterance complexity. The more constituents there are, the greater the complexity of the utterance could be. Correspondingly, a more complex utterance usually involves the use of a verb. In the tasks the learners were indirectly stimulated to use verbs in their descriptions of the pictures. All the pictures depicting episodes focused on an action. To describe these pictures adequately, the use of a verb was essential.

The analysis of the morphology centered on verb inflection. Determining verb inflection for the morphological analysis was not always without ambiguity. This particularly applies to the Dutch infinitive form of the verb. The infinitive is formed by adding the suffix *-en* to the root verb, as in, for example, *drink+en* (drink+INF). This form is identical to the finite, inflected form for the plural. Consequently, *drinken* could also refer to 'you, we or they drink'. Thus, the Dutch infinitive is a non-finite, inflected verb. In order to avoid random interpretation, certain criteria had to be created. All verbs of this form were initially marked as non-finite due to the fact that these learners were at the beginning of their learning process. Such an approach concurs with research on developmental stages in L2 acquisition (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Klein & Perdue, 1992; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 2005, 2007). The verb was only marked as finite if the pictures distinctly showed plurality. Nevertheless, knowing if the learner had applied inflection correctly can still be disputable. This meant that for the picture descriptions, utterances containing a verb with a *-en* suffix were often open to more than one interpretation. In such instances, the determining factor in deciding if inflection had been correctly applied was the utterance along with the respective picture. In those cases where an agent is expressed as a plural, the picture must also confirm this.

Discourse was analyzed in terms of relevance and coherence. Criteria of relevance concerned the learner's ability to produce responses that have a direct bearing on a particular picture and the words of the learner can be easily comprehended. Being able to produce descriptions that are relevant and appropriate for a picture reflects the learner's capability to use language in certain contexts. Criteria of coherence concerned the learner's ability to connect a series of pictures into a coherent story. Being able to produce a series of connected responses shows the learner's ability to produce a logically linked text. Relevance and coherence have already been discussed in a previous LESLLA publication (Strube, van de Craats, & van Hout, 2010) and will, therefore, not be discussed further in this paper.

Results

The assessment results

In the analysis eleven variables were examined in the areas of vocabulary, morphosyntax, and discourse. These eleven are: specific vocabulary, word count in tokens and types, constituents, verb presence, verb position, agent presence, verb inflection, relevance in the picture description tasks, relevance in the picture story tasks, and finally coherence in the picture story tasks. In order to identify more clearly patterns of similarity and difference resulting from the assessments, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was applied.

By applying Principal Component Analysis the underlying structure or dimensions of the correlations between all the proficiency assessments, the eleven variables, were revealed. Both for the pre- and post-assessment three factors emerged. After rotation (Varimax), the first factor represents lexical competence having high loadings for vocabulary knowledge of specific words and word count in number of tokens and types. The two relevance variables had high loadings as well, but they also had loadings on the other two dimensions and were consequently excluded. The second factor contains in both assessments three variables: constituents, verb present, and picture story coherence. These were subsumed under the heading syntagmatic competence. The third factor is morphosyntactic competence, as stipulated by the three relevant variables verb position, agent present and verb inflection. The three competences, which surfaced from PCA, concur, in general, with those assumed basic to language development: vocabulary, morphosyntax, and factors relating to discourse. These competences reflect the skills around which language acquisition seem to be centered.

In order to investigate the development over time and the differences between classes, z-scores for the three underlying competences were calculated. This was done by computing the z-scores of the three most relevant variables for each competence, taking into account both assessments. The z-scores for the three most relevant variables were summed and transformed into new z-scores. These final z-scores give an indication of the initial state of the participants and classes at the pre-assessment. The difference between the pre- and post-assessment gives the gain scores, indicating the progress made by participants and classes. From the gain scores it can be discerned whether a class had improved, stayed constant, or even regressed during a certain amount of time. Table 4 gives the z-scores for the pre- and post-assessments and the gains within each competence by class.

Table 4: Z-scores for the pre- and post-assessments with the relative gain score within each competence by class.

Class	Lexical competence			Syntagmatic competence			Morphosyntactic competence		
	z-score		Gain	z-score		Gain	z-score		Gain
	Pre	Post		Pre	Post		Pre	Post	
1	-0.68	-0.17	0.51	-0.70	0.22	0.92	-0.05	0.23	0.28
2	0.13	0.35	0.22	0.24	0.36	0.12	0.12	0.07	-0.05
3	-0.69	0.26	0.95	-0.52	0.10	0.62	-0.43	-0.29	0.14
4	-0.12	0.64	0.76	0.04	0.90	0.86	-0.05	1.37	1.42
5	-0.76	-0.44	0.32	-0.87	-.065	0.22	-1.00	-0.27	0.73
6	0.87	1.13	0.26	0.44	1.00	0.56	0.12	0.61	0.49
Mean gain			0.50			0.55			0.50

As the z-scores in Table 4 indicate, Class 5 had for all three competences negative scores in both assessments, while the other classes had generally positive scores. However, the situation changes when looking at the gain scores. The least amount of gain for all three competences is made by Class 2. Class 1 made the most gain for syntagmatic competence, 0.92, while Class 3 made the most gain for lexical competence, 0.95. Class 4 made remarkable gain for morphosyntactic competence, 1.42.

The graphs in Figure 1 illustrate the pre and post assessment scores for lexical, syntagmatic, and morphosyntactic competence for each class. In these graphs the differences in gain between the classes become more distinct. The most obvious result is the great variation at the point of the first measurement in time. For all three competences Class 5 is the lowest and Class 6 the highest. For the second measurement in time, Class 5 and 6 maintain their relative positions for the lexical and syntagmatic competences, but not for morphosyntactic competence. In that competence the relationships between the classes change. Class 4 has the steepest slope (gain) and surpasses all the other classes. Class 5 shows notable gain, and in the end just barely surpasses where Class 3 began.

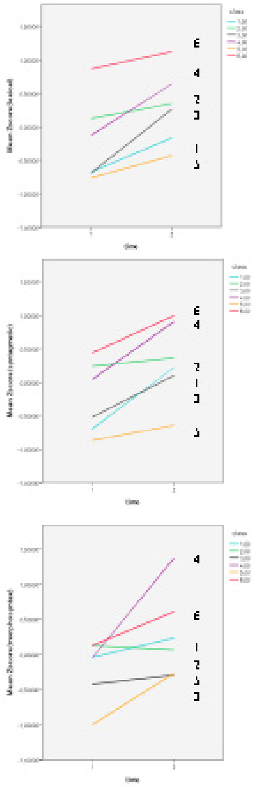

Figure 1: Pre and post assessment scores for lexical, syntagmatic, and morphosyntactic competence for each class.

Results learner characteristics

Many factors influence processes of language learning. In this paper a closer look is taken at learner characteristics to see if an explanation for learning differences can be found. Various learner characteristics were described above. Of these, seven, plus two personal characteristics, were selected as factors of possible influence on learning results. The nine variables are: work, care for children, age (at time of assessment), L1 literacy, L1 schooling, LOR, previous DSL schooling, classroom hours, and classroom hours attended. In addition, the age of entrance was also calculated from the age and LOR of each learner and added as a tenth variable. Subsequently, the Pearson product-moment correlations were run to determine the relationship between these variables and the three competences: lexical competence, syntagmatic competence, and morphosyntactic competence. The correlations reveal that only three factors have any significance: classroom hours, hours attended, and age of entrance. Table 5 presents the results of these correlations.

Classroom hours and hours attended have a positive correlation for all three competences, meaning that the more hours a classroom was scheduled, the higher the competence score. The same is true for the attended hours; the more hours a class was attended, the higher the competence score. These two effects are surprising, as they are found at the stage of the pre-test. We return to these effects in the conclusion.

The factor age of entrance is only significant for lexical competence and has a negative relationship. This means that the older the learner is at entrance, the lower the score for lexical competence. The reverse also applies: The younger the learner enters the country, the higher the lexical competence score. Figure 2 visualizes in a scatter gram the relationship for each learner between lexical competence and age of entrance, differentiating between recent and long term residents of the LOR. Even though the number of learners is small and the gains are limited, the results point to a valuable conclusion. It shows that all the higher achievers, those with a z-score greater than 1.00, had entered at a relatively young age, around 20 years old. While the low achievers, those with a z-score of less than -1.00 were older than 35 years at entrance. As the scatter graph in Figure 2 shows the two highest scores were obtained by long term residents who had entered the country at a relatively young age.

Table 5: Pearson product-moment correlations for the variables of classroom hours, attended hours, and age of entrance in relation to lexical competence, syntagmatic competence, and morphosyntactic competence at the pre-assessment.

		Lexical competence	Syntagmatic competence	Morphosyntactic competence
Classroom hours				
	Pearson correlation	.359*	.386*	.394*
	N	41	41	41
Attendance hours				
	Pearson correlation	.337*	.382*	.470**
	N	38	38	38
Age of entrance				
	Pearson correlation	-.567**	-.194	-.057
	N	41	41	41

*Significant (2-tailed) at $p<.05$; **Significant (2-tailed) at $p<.01$

We computed correlations between learner characteristics and the gain scores as well. No significant results were found. In addition we applied the technique of mixed models, in which the pre- and post-assessment were defined as the time variable. We found no new effects, even not when interactions were included.

Conclusion and discussion

Many SLA studies have investigated learner characteristics

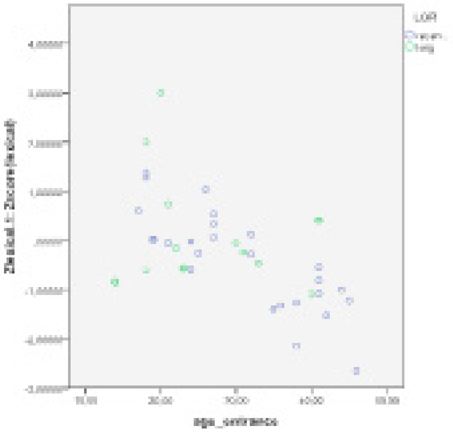

Figure 2: Scatter gram of age of entrance and lexical competence for recent and long term residents.

in connection to second language learning development, but only a few were concerned with that of the non-literate learner. The most extensive study in the United States was the "What works" study by Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon, Cronen, & Seburn (2003). Two other studies on the acquisition of literacy skills were carried out in the Netherlands (Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009; van de Craats & Kurvers, 2007). On the factor of age the Kurvers & Stockmann study showed that age had a significant negative correlation with reading and writing scores. The same was found in the Condelli study for reading: the older learners need more time, while the younger learners seem to learn in less time. In the van de Craats & Kurvers study age and LOR correlated negatively with vocabulary growth, but not significantly. It is interesting to note that this present study takes a different approach concerning the impact of age and LOR, i.e. along that of age of entrance (the age of the learner minus LOR). The age of entrance was correlated to the lexical competence, indicating that learning a new lexicon is easier the younger the learner begins, as a kind of head start that is not compensated by a longer LOR. This is nicely illustrated by Figure 2 which shows that the correlation applies to both learners with a recent and a long LOR. No correlations were found between any age factor and/or LOR and the other two competences. This may partly be due to the low level of proficiency obtained by our learners. Progress goes slowly, particularly in the more structural domains of relationships between meaning and form elements.

The number of classroom hours was also examined in two of the above studies. In the Condelli study the weekly classroom hours correlated negatively with reading skills and were found to be significant. This was also the case in the Kurvers and Stockmann study for gain scores on reading competence. In other words, learners in classes with more scheduled hours showed less growth than those with fewer hours per week. We found no correlations for the gain scores, or with classroom hours or with attendance measures. Using mixed modeling did not result in any significant results implying that we did not find classroom or learner characteristics that would explain the size of progress between the pre- and post-assessment.

Surprisingly, we found significant correlations at the pre-assessment for all competences and classroom and attendance hours. This effect can be reduced to the relatively low competences of Class 5 that coincides with a comparatively low level of classroom and attendance hours. We have no explanation in terms of classroom hours of the learners in the past. What we can add is that Class 6, performing much better, had a comparable group of older Moroccan women. The crucial difference between Classes 5 and 6 seems to have been the motivation of the learners. Although both classes had a high rate of attendance (.82 and .80 respectively), only in Class 6 did several learners show a keen interest in increasing language ability for future employment. Those in Class 5 had not expressed such learning goals. On the other hand, literacy classes are characterized by great diversity.

This study has made one step towards understanding what happens in the second language classroom by looking at learner characteristics, but more steps still have to be taken. During a time span of approximately eight months there was moderate development in language learning, but the processes involved are still elusive. The factor of duration probably plays a role as well. More time over a longer period seems to be required to measure more major steps forward in learning Dutch. Another reason for not finding effects seems to be the relatively large variation between the learners in their characteristics, including some probably essential characteristics that we could not measure, for instance their language aptitude, (non-verbal) intelligence and motivation. The overall level of motivation was probably high in our study, given the attendance rates found. Definitely these and other more process-related characteristics still need to be investigated.

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