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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

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

in syllable strings like 'fa fe fi fo fu' or 'ba be bi bo bu.' (See Figure 3)

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

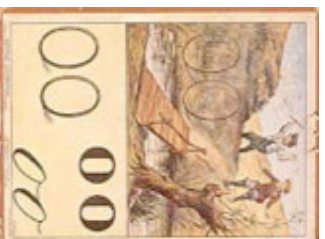Figure 4: Mnemonic aid to remember the sound of a letter (Gray, 1969: 95).

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 (codifi-cations) 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

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

groups: methods that emphasize code, methods that emphasize meaning and methods that from the very beginning empha-size 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 empha-size *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, particu-larly in the relationship between letters and sounds.

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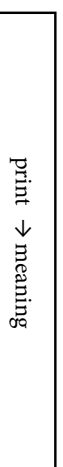
print → meaning

Figure 6: From print to meaning

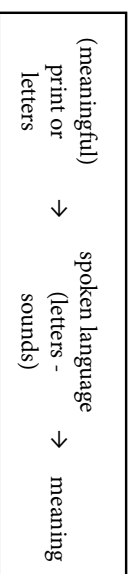(meaningful) print or letters → spoken language (letters - sounds) → meaning

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 letters² 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

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 haès 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 opera-

Step 1.	Phrase:	*Sanan moòs.* (The pan is clean.)
Step 2.	Key word:	*sanan*
Step 3.	Syllables:	*sa-nan*
Step 4.	Letter & number:	s̩. S̩ 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 s̩ e s̩ i s̩ o s̩ u s̩ 1 11 2 11 3 11 4 11 5 11
Step 7.	Phrase & numbers:	S̩ a n a n m o ' o s̩ . 11 1 7 1 7 … 4 4 11
Step 8.	Repetition syllables and numbers:	s + a = sa, etc. sa se si so su a s̩ e s̩ i s̩ o s̩ u s̩ 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

tions, 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.

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**)

numbers

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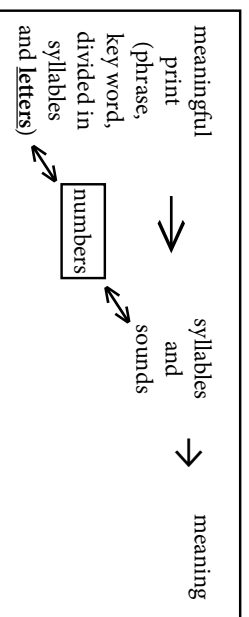
Figure 10: From meaningful print, letters and numbers via spoken language to meaning.

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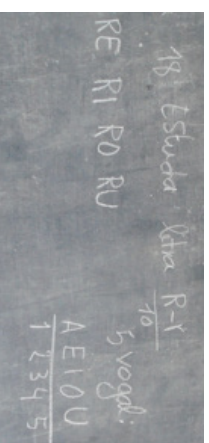
Figure 11: Letter *r* and five vowels connected to numbers, and syllables with *r*.

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*).
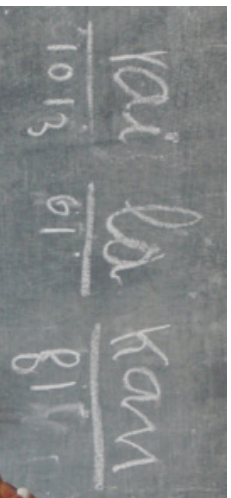

Figure 12: Numbers written under the key word *railakan* (lightning).

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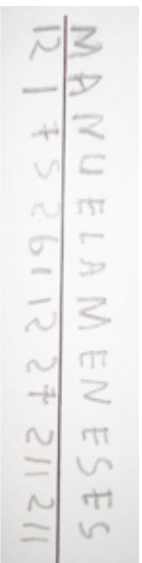
Figure 13: Name written by one of the learners, with each letter combined to a number.

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).
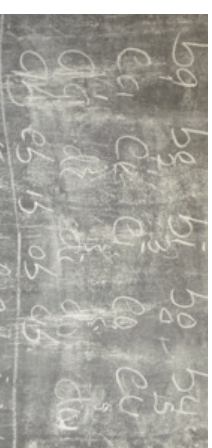

Figure 14: Syllables with *b, c, d* and the five vowels

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* = house³, *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.
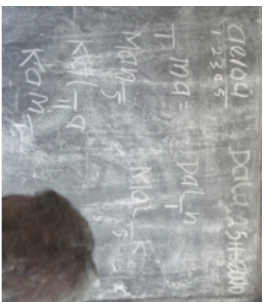
Figure 15: Words with letters missing but numbers given.

Finally, the teacher showed how to read these words by spelling and blending: *uh emi a uma, emi a eri uh mana*, 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.
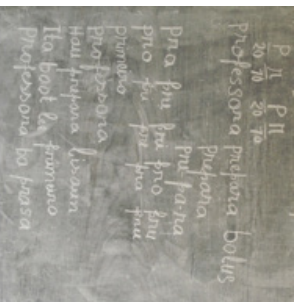
Figure 16: Text on the blackboard about letter combination *pr*.

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.
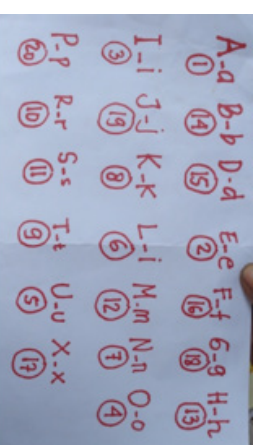

Figure 17: Self-written paper with the 20 letters and numbers of *Los Hau Bele*.

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).
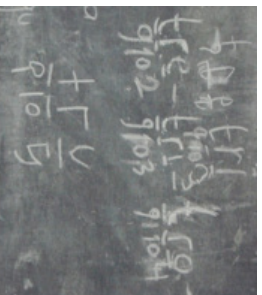

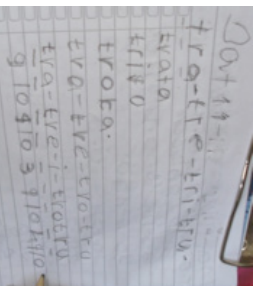Figure 18: The writing of syllables and numbers on the blackboard.

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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Literacy materials described:

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