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The Academic Language Learning Experiences of One LESLLA Learner: A Constructive Developmental Study

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Abstract

Academic literacy is a challenging yet increasingly essential skill for Adult Basic Education (ABE) English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) learners. Related to academic language learning is an adult's developmental perspective. Developmental perspectives vary in adulthood and shape qualitatively distinct ways of reasoning and learning experiences. Using Kegan's Constructive Developmental Theory (CDT), which derives from Western psychology but has been implemented cross-culturally, this research highlights the academic literacy learning experiences of one LESLLA learner in the context of a larger qualitative case study. The data include two semi-structured qualitative interviews per participant and class observations. Analysis includes the dual lenses of grounded theory and CDT. Findings suggest that developmental perspectives made a qualitative difference in how learners experience academic literacy learning. The LESLLA participant, from her "instrumental" perspective, describes what looks like struggle in learning to summarize, but from her developmental perspective, represents a logical pathway toward success.

Introduction

Academic language skills are increasingly important for Adult Basic Education (ABE) English Language Learners (ELLs). Academic language objectives feature prominently in the new federal College and Career Readiness Standards (Pimentel, 2013), and as of 2014, passing the Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) test requires the ability to write logical, cohesive arguments with claims supported by evidence (GED Testing Service, 2013). As more ABE learners aspire to post-secondary education, academic language preparation is also vital to minimizing or avoiding remedial reading or writing classes (Pimentel, 2013).

While the stakes for developing academic language skills are high for some ABE ELLs, diverse factors complicate this learning journey. Academic language skills, distinguished as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiencies (CALP) (Cummins, 1979), are cognitively and linguistically complex, taking longer for ELLs to acquire than everyday Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1979; Zwiers, 2008). Combined with ABE learners' relatively high situational barriers to persistence (Mellard et al., 2013), this can mean prohibitively long pathways. Also impacting academic language learning and experiences are English proficiency level (National Institute for Literacy, 2010), impact of first language (Gholamain & Geva, 1999), culture, cultural traditions of academic writing, (McKinley, 2015), and age (Bigelow & Watson, 2014).

Another, more "hidden" diversity found to shape literacy learning experiences is that of adult development. Research in developmental psychology over the past 40 years has found that adults do not stop growing after adolescence but can continue developing toward increasingly complex ways of knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; Perry, 1970). While child developmental stages correspond roughly to age, adults develop in response to the challenges and supports in their lives, or their "holding environments," and not according to any one factor such as age, education or IQ (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Developmental diversity, therefore, exists in adulthood, and has been found to shape qualitatively different learning experiences, including among ABE/English Language Learners (ELLs) (Kegan et al, 2001). A large-scale study of ABE/ELL learning experiences found that depending on developmental perspective, "the very same curriculum, classroom activities, or teaching behaviours can leave some learners feeling satisfied and well attended while others feel frustrated or lost" (Drago-Severson 2004, p. 15) depending on the "match" between learners' developmental perspectives and the nature of the supports and challenges in the classroom.

The "match" between developmental perspective and classroom supports and challenges may be particularly important for academic language learning, because development has also been found to impact the reasoning employed in academic language learning (Kegan 1982, 1994). Reasoning during summarizing, a

baseline requirement of post-secondary writing and the genre focused on in this study, includes constructing logical relationships between abstract ideas (Jitendra & Gajria, 2011) and recognizing how primary and subordinate ideas are organized (Leki, 1998; Zwiers, 2008). These abstract ways of reasoning are described in Kegan's (1982, 1994) Constructive-developmental theory (CDT) as developmental capacities. Kegan (1982) suggests that depending on developmental complexity, some learners will understand summarizing as relating one event after the next, rather than abstracting individual incidents into an overarching theme.

While CDT has proven helpful in understanding learning experiences among culturally diverse adults (Bridwell, 2013; Kegan et al, 2001; Lindsley, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 1996), some scholars have noted the potential risk of investigating adult learners, particularly those who have been economically or educationally disadvantaged, through a developmental lens, which may favor growth and higher stages of development often afforded by resource-rich environments and access to privileges such as formal education and time for reflection (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). Popp and Boes (2001) point out that a danger of a constructive-developmental lens for understanding competence is that it can be interpreted as a deficit model, as if it were "focusing on what the adult *cannot* do" (p. 627). It is important to note that both non-Western and educationally disadvantaged adults have been found at higher stages of development in CDT research (Kegan et al., 2001; Lindsley, 2011). Perhaps more importantly, this study is concerned not with what learners can *do*, but how they *experience* learning, through their own logically coherent developmental perspectives, and what their experiences can teach educators about how to help them reach their academic language learning goals.

The purpose of this qualitative case study, therefore, was to understand the academic language learning experiences of ABE/ELLs, in light of their constructive-developmental perspectives, to help educators more effectively reach developmentally diverse learners building academic language skills. Among the learners in this case study, one LESLLA learner emerged. This paper presents her experiences in the context of the larger study.

ABE/ESOL Academic Language Learning

Written language extends from oral language; therefore, as Rubin (1987) states, "no one is a native speaker of writing" (p. 3). Even more, no one is a native speaker of academic writing, which makes distinct linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural demands.

Linguistically, academic text contains distinct characteristics (Cummins, 1979; Kucer 2014; Schleppegrell, 2004) that reflect its primary function, to understand and communicate abstraction (Fang, 2008, 2012; Zwiers, 2008). Academic text contains distinct features on the levels of vocabulary, syntax, and text organization (Derewianka, 2011). In addition to technical, discipline-specific vocabulary (Fang, 2008), academic texts rely heavily on "often untaught, yet integral words that hold complex ideas together" (Zwiers, 2008, p. 22), including text connectives, pronouns, and prepositions, cross-disciplinary words, and potentially confusing figures of speech such as *boils down to* (Zwiers, 2008). Common features of academic syntax include long sentences with multiple clauses; passive voice, and *nominalizations*, or condensing sometimes lengthy adjective and verb phrases into a single abstract noun (Schleppegrell, 2004; Zwiers, 2008). While narrative writing is temporal, or time-ordered, much expository writing is based on presenting a main point and supporting it with evidence, requiring the ability to analyze, explain, and show relationships between abstract concepts (Zwiers, 2008).

Cummins (1979) describes the linguistic complexities of CALP, as "strongly related to overall cognitive and academic skills" (p. 198) and argues that learners proficient in CALP in their first language (L1) can more quickly and successfully acquire CALP in a second language (L2). While cognitive load can prevent higher functions of the writing process from being initially accessible at full capacity for L2 writers (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Leki, 1996), Cumming (1989) found that after an intermediate English level, L2 language did not impact L2 writers' ability to engage in effective writing process strategies (Cumming, 1989). Leki (1996) similarly argues that use of cognitive strategies during academic writing is not impeded by lower English levels, and that struggling writers do not gain access to more complex writing strategies by virtue of greater English proficiency alone.

Some sociolinguists caution against interpreting ELLs' failure to comprehend linguistic complexity as cognitive in nature (Gee, 1990; Schleppegrell, 2004). When diverse learners, including ELLs, enter academic discourse communities, where valued patterns of language use reflect discourse patterns of the majority culture,

they are often unprepared for the literacy demands they will encounter (Kucer, 2014). Sociolinguists emphasize that learners who acquired literacy use patterns outside of the majority culture, including ESOL learners, need to explicitly learn the rules of academic discourse communities in order to succeed in them (Gee, 1990; Schlepppegrell, 2004).

LESLLA Academic Language Learning

Of all ELLs, LESLLA learners may be the most removed from academic discourse communities' values and expectations. With low or interrupted formal educational backgrounds, LESLLA learners are also unlikely to be familiar with academic language conventions in their first languages (L1), making it harder to develop CALP the L2 (Cummins, 1979; Zwiers, 2008).

Bigelow and Watson (2014) suggest that limited L1 literacy and formal education have not only linguistic but cognitive implications, arguing that adults with significantly limited educational and literacy backgrounds may not have had the necessary experiences to stimulate the levels of cognitive stage development characteristic of highly literate societies, concluding that "it may be instructionally useful to consider the extent to which non-literate people may be lodged in preoperational or early concrete operational thought" (p. 469).

Adult Constructive-Development

Kegan's CDT, which informs this study, belongs to a family of theoretical models including Kohlberg's (1981) and Gilligan's (1982) models of moral development; Loevinger's (1976) theory of ego development; Perry's (1970) stages of ethical and intellectual development in the college years; and Belenky's (1986) stages of women's development. Each of these theories extend through adulthood the principles of Jean Piaget's (1952) childhood developmental stages and is based on empirical, longitudinal research. Kegan's CDT takes the constructivist view that we actively *construct*, rather than merely passively receive, meaning from our experiences, and that the ways in which we construct meaning *develop* in the direction of greater complexity over time. While CDT derives from western psychology, it has been tested for cross-cultural validity (Villegas-Reimers, 1996) and has been used successfully in research with non-Western populations, including ABE/ELLs (Kegan et al., 2001; Lindsley, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 1996).

In Kegan's (1982, 1994) CDT, a concrete, or *instrumental* thinker makes meaning with the same black-and-white logic that characterizes Piaget's concrete operational thought. At this stage, the world is seen in black and white, and adults orient toward concrete rules and consequences. The epistemological structure of instrumentalism is *categorical*. That is, instrumental learners think through one concrete category at a time, cannot yet cross-reference categories, and therefore are "not capable of abstract thinking or making generalizations" (Drago-Severson 2004, p. 25). Instrumental learners have been found to orient to concrete aspects of learning and to equate learning with "doing" (Kegan et al., 2001). From this developmental perspective, knowledge is seen as a possession to be acquired, or "given" by authorities (Kegan et al., 2001). One instrumental ABE ELL described his preference for writing about concrete topics, explaining that while writing about abstract concepts like "openness" is difficult, "...when you can write about the sport, you can write" (Helsing, Broderick & Hammerman 2001, p. 162). Taylor (2006) describes the writing that instrumental learners are likely to produce as "a brain dump," of disconnected and unedited thoughts (p. 207).

Kegan (1982) explains that at the next *socializing* way of knowing, the underlying epistemological structure is *cross-categorical*, making these learners capable of cross-referencing information to make abstractions, inferences and generalizations. Being able to look through more than one category at a time, makes it possible to take another's perspective (Kegan, 1982, 1994); in fact, socializing knowers define their own success by how well they measure up to expectations set by valued others (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Socializing ABE ELLs have been found to measure success by how well they meet the expectations of the teacher, a valued expert (Kegan et al., 2001).

At the next, *self-authoring* way of knowing, adults think systemically and are better able to manage contradictions (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Rather than living up to the expectations of others, they rely on an internal authority, and can examine and take responsibility for their own thinking, feelings and patterns, which Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler (2000) describe as "the mainspring of adult development" (p. 30). Self-authoring ABE

ELLs have been found to demonstrate competence by reasoning through multiple perspectives (Popp & Boes, 2001). One ABE ELL transitioning toward self-authorship described his writing as having several layers (Popp & Boes, 2001).

Method

Research Design and Questions

To understand academic language learning experiences from learners' constructive-developmental perspectives, this study investigated: 1. What constructive-developmental perspectives do ABE/ESOL learners bring to their academic literacy learning experiences? 2. How do they experience academic literacy learning, especially in a recent summarizing unit? 3. How do learners' academic literacy learning experiences relate to their constructive-developmental perspectives?

This study employed a qualitative case study design, appropriate for gaining a deep understanding of the meaning of an experience from the perspective of those involved (Merriam, 1998). It employs Kegan's (1982, 1994) CDT as a lens because of its prior success with understanding learning experiences of non-Western adults, including ABE/ESOL populations (Kegan et al., 2001; Lindsley, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 1996), and its valid and reliable measure, the Subject Object Interview (SOI) (Lahey et al., 1988).

Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in an ABE/ESOL college and career preparation class delivered through a non-profit educational organization under Minnesota's ABE system. As an employee of the organization delivering this class, the researcher had access to it, a longstanding, trusting relationship with the teacher, and a baseline familiarity and friendly rapport with some of the learners; therefore, this class was both a convenience sample, and was conducive to developing "productive relationships" with participants (Merriam, 1998).

The ABE/ELLs in this study hailed from different countries, had different language backgrounds, different formal education backgrounds, and had been speaking English and living in the U.S. for different lengths of time. Learners who had been attending class regularly for a minimum of two weeks were invited to participate. Participants were selected by teacher recommendation based on a minimum English reading level of High Intermediate ESL and her evaluation of strong English verbal skills relative to reading skills, increasing the likelihood that they would be able to successfully complete conversational-style interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection methods included two in-depth qualitative interviews per participant, and class observations during a three-week summarizing unit. Demographic information and English reading levels were also collected.

Subject-Object Interview

To understand participants' constructive-developmental perspectives, the SOI, a valid and reliable measure created by Lahey et al. (1988) to assess the complexity of an individual's meaning-making, was administered. To help understand participants' learning experiences, the SOI was situated within that class as much as possible. During the SOI, the interviewer regularly offers a recap of what they heard a participant say to invite corrections; this was used as an opportunity to frequently invite corrections of misunderstandings due to participants' ELL status.

Each SOI transcript was read and independently coded and scored by the researcher and a co-scorer using the method described in the guide to administering and interpreting the instrument (Lahey et al., 1988). Both were certified raters and achieved 100 percent agreement upon discussion. Where there was a lack of clarity on a participant's meaning, that data was not included in the analysis.

The SOIs were also analyzed for information that helped answer how participants experienced academic language learning. In that process, a grounded theory interview analysis (Charmaz, 2006) was employed. First, units of text were identified in the transcriptions that answered how participants experienced academic language learning. Then, in order to reduce the likelihood of projecting assumptions or theoretical bias onto participants' meanings, the researcher conducted line-by-line coding of actions and processes in one third of the interviews (Charmaz, 2006), before developing tentatively focused codes. As each subsequent interview was analyzed, the codes from previous interviews helped inform the parsing of the data in the grounded theory process of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965). The codes were re-reviewed at several stages to assess the soundness of the distinctions, with changes made as necessary. Finally, the interviews were re-read toward saturation of each category (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), any initially missed supporting data was coded, as was any data that was in dissonance with the developed themes. While a theoretical lens was purposely brought to this study, grounded theory analysis allowed academic language learning themes to arise from participants' own words and experiences.

Class observations

To contextualize participants' descriptions of their learning experiences, class observations were conducted during a three-week summarizing unit. In-depth field notes were taken and focused on how participants may be experiencing learning, such as interactions and conversations between learners, and noted what did *not* happen (Merriam, 1998), for example, when a learner did not write anything after the teacher instructed the class to write a summary. Hand-written notes were typed shortly after completion of each observation (Erickson, 1986), and in analysis, grounded theory's constant comparative method was employed to generate analytical categories for incidents (Charmaz, 2006), such as "responding to a question."

Learning Experience Interview

To understand participants' academic literacy learning experiences, a one-hour LEI was conducted with each participant. This open-ended qualitative interview was adapted from the Adult Development Project Experience of Learning Interview (Kegan et al., 2001) and from similar studies investigating learning experiences through a constructive-developmental lens (Boes, 2006; Bridwell, 2013; Lindsley, 2011). The interview protocol included questions organized into three categories: *expectations of the class*, with questions including, "What were you hoping to learn in the class?"; *learning "take-aways"* with questions including, "What are the most important things you're learning in the class?" and *process of learning* with questions including, "How do you think you learned these things?"

Data from the LEIs was coded using the same grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2006) described in the second analytical step of the SOI, beginning with line-by-line coding of processes rooted in participants' words and meaning, grouping codes by similarity of learning experiences, and constantly comparing and refining codes (Charmaz, 2006).

To understand learners' academic language learning experiences in relation to their constructive-developmental perspectives, the interviews were separated according to similar developmental perspectives and repeated the grounded theory analysis process to allow new codes the opportunity to emerge within specific developmental categories.

Demographic Questionnaire and Standardized Assessments

To contextualize the findings and consider factors other than epistemological development that might explain learning experiences (Yin, 2009), demographic information was collected via questionnaire and follow-up questions during LEI. Recent English reading scores measured by the standardized Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) or Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) were also collected.

Trustworthiness, Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

A constructivist approach to grounded theory explicitly recognizes that the researcher's interpretations are also a construction of reality rather than objective, and, therefore, places a strong emphasis on reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006). During data gathering, a field log and reflex journal were maintained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), in which initial interpretations of interviews and observations were noted, along with assumptions and theoretical biases that may have been informing them (Merriam, 1998). Reflexive steps during data analysis included sending memos several times per week to track the researcher's own process of theorizing and to reflect on theoretical bias and assumptions. Initial findings were also discussed during the research process with an experienced colleague not connected to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), inviting alternate interpretations (Krefting, 1991).

Findings

Findings from this study suggest that diverse developmental perspectives were held by participants and those developmental perspectives made a qualitative difference in academic literacy learning experiences. The LESLLA learner in this study, Sofiya, described academic literacy learning in themes that from an educator's perspective may look like struggle, but which were consistent with her constructive-developmental perspective and definition of success.

Introduction to Sofiya

According to her school records, Sofiya was a 73-year old woman from Somalia, although she clarified, "in American number... it's not a real number (laughs)" (LEI). She had never attended school until she was an adult living in America, but describes having taught herself to read as a child:

"Always I like to write almost every night, so when I go back to sleep, before the sleep I read the book. I don't know, I got not go in school, but I like to read something. So... I'm like student. I read like student. (LEI)."

When the study began, Sofiya had been enrolled in the college and career preparation class for two weeks, but at the learning center for about two years. She stated that she wanted to go to college someday, but seemed to see that as a long way off: "I still ESL, you know" (SOI).

Sofiya's English reading level at the time of this study was High Intermediate ESL. Analysis of the SOI indicated that Sofiya was constructing meaning primarily from an instrumental perspective, with a socializing perspective beginning to emerge. Her SOI score was 2(3).

Sofiya's developmental perspective in context

Sofiya was one of two learners with a dominantly instrumental developmental perspective, with an SOI score of 2(3). Four learners had socializing perspectives, indicated by an SOI score of 3, and three were transitioning from socializing to self-authoring, indicated by the SOI scores 3/4 and 4/3.

Developmental perspectives did not consistently correspond to other demographic data including reading level or educational background. For example, the participant constructing meaning from the most complex perspective, Salazam, had only an eighth-grade education in his rural hometown in Ecuador, before obtaining a GED in the U.S., while the other participant with a dominantly instrumental perspective, Illyas, had also completed an eighth-grade education along with some post-secondary training. Two of the three participants transitioning toward self-authorship had the same high intermediate ESL reading level as Sofiya. Table 1 displays participant demographics, reading levels, and SOI scores.

Table 1
Demographics, English Reading Levels and SOI Scores

Participant	Age (years)	Country of origin	School in home country (years)	First language(s)	Years in the United States	School in the United States (years)	ESL/ ABE reading level	SOI score
Sofiya	73	Somalia	0	Somali	13	2	High Int. ESL	2(3)
Illyas	45	Somalia	10	Somali	2	>1	Advanced ESL	2(3)
Leticia	30	Mexico	12	Spanish	10	1.5	Low Adult Secondary Ed.	3
Louam	40	Eritrea	12	Tigrigna	17	1+	Beginning Basic Ed.	3
Nabil	26	Kenya	11	Somali	1	>1	High Int. ESL	3
Teresa	23	Mexico	8	Spanish	11	3	High Int. Basic Ed.	3
Maria	40	Mexico	13	Spanish	1	>1	High Int. ESL	3/4
Masha	30	China	11	Khazak, Uzbek, Kurgis, Chinese	4	1	High Int. ESL	3/4
Salazam	42	Ecuador	8	Spanish	25	7	Low Adult Secondary Ed.	4/3

Note. SOI = Subject Object Interview; ABE = Adult Basic Education; ESL = English as a Second Language. ABE/ESL reading levels included scores within the following National Reporting System level range, from low to high: High Intermediate ESL; Advanced ESL; Beginning ABE Literacy; Beginning Basic Education; Low Intermediate Basic Education; High Intermediate Basic Education; Low Adult Secondary; High Adult Secondary.

Sofiya's Developmentally Distinct Academic Literacy Learning Experiences

Depending on their developmental perspectives, learners described qualitatively distinct academic literacy learning experiences. Sofiya described her academic literacy learning experiences in themes consistent with Illyas, the other dominantly instrumental learner.

In academic language learning, Sofiya and Illyas oriented to clear-cut learning successes, consequences and rules. In her writing, Sofiya wanted quantifiable evidence of success: “Sometimes she [the teacher] circle. Now she circle three or four or five. But when my goal is, she have to circle one” (SOI). Just as she focused on concrete successes, Sofiya oriented toward concrete consequences, especially when she missed class, “because I know I missed sentence” (SOI). However, as a rule-oriented meaning-maker, she also identified a clear-cut solution: “I missed yesterday the class, next I have to... get more. Double class... Example, I missed yesterday the sentence or class, so I have to take that class today” (LEI).

In the summarizing unit, while learners (constructing meaning from socializing perspectives and beyond) described understanding the text as the first step in a larger process, Sofiya and Illyas described understanding as the end goal itself. Sofiya explained: “Sometimes I read something before I didn’t know. But now I know what the meaning. That’s my successful, period” (SOI).

Just as Sofiya and Illyas described understanding the text as the end goal, they described summarizing as first and foremost understanding the text, then “writing something.” Sofiya, in describing what she would do in the summarizing unit after understanding what she had read, explained, “Then you can... memorize something or you can write something” (LEI).

All learners expressed that finding the main ideas in readings was challenging, and those constructing meaning from socializing perspectives and beyond described using strategies such as asking themselves the “wh” questions about the text or comparing ideas to determine which was most important. Sofiya and Illyas, by contrast, described looking for ideas that were important in an absolute or concrete way. For example, Sofiya, when asked about the main ideas she had highlighted, explained:

“I think it was, hundred and thousands of people, that number I highlighted.”

WHAT MADE YOU HIGHLIGHT THAT NUMBER?

Because it’s a big number. A big number. (LEI).

Sofiya and Illyas at times appeared to respond to questions about a summarizing activity by free-associating with the text read in that activity. In response to a question about having summarized a short article in class, Sofiya listed characteristics of the word “product,” which appeared within it, then concluded, “It create something new, that’s product. I told you, if you remember, I like to help people. So, I like something product. So of course,” (LEI).

When encountering activities requiring abstract reasoning in class, Sofiya and Illyas showed signs of disengaging, or “otherwise engaging.” When working in small groups to decide on the best of four summaries, a group member posed the question, “Which one is better?” Sofiya repeated, “We have to know which one is better.” As the other group members continued that discussion, however, rather than engaging, Sofiya sat back, re-reading the article and underlining seemingly new words. When a group member made a case for “summary three” being the best, Sofiya leaned in briefly, saying, “okay, okay.” As their conversation continued, however, she put her pencil on the table, checked her cell phone, and began talking with a classmate in Somali. While the class regrouped and debriefed on which summary was best, she checked that she has the same answer as the rest of the group, then polished her nails on her skirt, looking down.

Discussion

The developmentally distinct ways in which Sofiya and the other instrumental learner in this study described academic language learning are consistent with what might be predicted by their developmental stage descriptions in Kegan’s (1982, 1994) CDT, and the theme of orienting to concrete successes and challenges and conceptualizing learning as a “thing” that could be “doubled” was consistent with findings with other instrumental ABE/ESOL learners (Kegan et al., 2001).

Sofiya’s academic literacy learning experiences, on one level, appear to represent struggle. However, when viewed together from the internally coherent perspective of her instrumental worldview, these themes describe a logical pathway toward success as she defined it. If understanding the text is in fact the end-goal, it is logical that summarizing could be understood as first and foremost understanding the text, then simply “writing something.” If reality is absolute and concrete, it follows that what is important from a text would be that which

is important in an absolute way. If abstract reasoning is not yet accessible, it is also logical that Sofiya would not have a direct point of entry into abstract summarizing activities, and that during such activities she might instead pursue success as she understood it – understanding the text – by re-reading the article and underlining unfamiliar words. Sofiya's apparent tendency to free associate echo Taylor's (2006) description of instrumental writing as a "brain dump," of disconnected and unedited thoughts, logical because from this perspective, adults are still developing the capacity to take a perspective on, and, therefore regulate their own thinking (Kegan, 1982; Kegan et al., 2001). Sofiya's concrete orientations to learning and apparent struggles with abstraction are described in Kegan's CDT, and appeared among instrumental learners in a previous study examining adult ELL experiences (Kegan et al., 2001).

The fact that instrumental learners described a distinctly concrete but logically consistent orientation to summarizing is consistent with Cummins' (1979) and Leki's (1996) argument that academic language learning conceptions are related to cognitive skills. In the larger study, however, even learners transitioning into self-authoring perspectives expressed challenge in learning a new genre in a new language, supporting the sociocultural argument that academic language challenges should not be interpreted as cognitive limitations.

Limitations

As a small qualitative case study, the findings in this study on how development appeared to mediate academic literacy learning are not generalizable or causal. While developmental stages appeared to mediate learning experiences, participants brought many types of diversity to their learning experiences, including age, gender, ethnicity, first language(s), educational backgrounds, and, within a range, levels of English. Learning experiences may also have been influenced by culturally influenced thinking patterns (Vorobel & Kim, 2011) or cultural identity as influenced by social, historical and cultural factors (McKinley, 2015). None of these diversities were explored in systematic depth in this study, and all surely informed learning experiences.

Finally, while grounded theory analysis provides a rigorous method to ensure that themes arise from learners' words and meaning, as constructivist grounded theorist Charmaz (2006) argues, the notion of researcher objectivity in any study, including this one, is a misnomer. Other researchers analyzing the same data using the same methods may have found other valuable interpretations of these nine learners' academic literacy learning experiences.

Implications

These learners appeared to bring distinct learning needs to the experience of academic language learning. To find success in academic discourse communities, instrumental learners would likely need scaffolding over time. Taylor (2006) describes developmental scaffolding as the distance between what a learner can do independently and with support, likening the concept to Vygotsky's (1978) notion of proximal development, "the space between" what a learner can do alone and with help. Perhaps one of the most organic strategies for scaffolding summarizing with instrumental learners would be to start with their already strong focus on understanding the text, which is indeed a first necessary step in summary writing (Swales & Feak, 2012). Understanding the text can be addressed through answering comprehension questions. As Illyas put it, "...if you are understanding well, you know paragraph and reading, you can easy, easy to answer. A, B, C, you can choose easily" (LEI). Comprehension questions can be framed as the wh-questions that many of the learners with socializing perspectives and beyond found helpful in identifying the main ideas in their readings. In their book on culturally responsive teaching, Marshall and DeCapua (2013) describe strategies to bridge western classroom expectations to the "immediate relevance and pragmatic tasks" more familiar to learners with informal learning experiences (p. 3), which may likewise benefit instrumental learners.

While adult ELLs, like all adult learners, bring hidden developmental diversities and developmentally distinct learning needs to the academic literacy classroom, most educators will not know the developmental perspectives of their learners. However, just as adult ELL educators draw on their awareness of diversities such as ethnicity, culture and language to inform instructional decisions, educators can be cognizant of different developmental perspectives in the classroom, striving to support not only linguistically, culturally and educationally, but developmentally diverse adult learners.

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Building the Letter-Sentence Bridge: Approaches to Teaching Early Literacy to LESLLA Adults

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This paper is an extension of a six-hour professional development training for adult ESL instructors, originally developed by Shelley Lee and taught by both of the authors.

When we first started teaching ESL over 15 years ago, the student population was much different than it is today. In the early 2000s, most students were Spanish-speaking immigrants seeking employment in the United States. The community college classes on life and work skills met their needs at the time. Starting in 2008, the number of LESLLA (Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) students in our ESL classrooms increased, and we realized that some of our traditional methods of teaching ESL were becoming less and less effective. LESLLA learners were not benefiting as quickly from the mainstream ESL classes as other, more educated students who were familiar with Western-style education and the Roman alphabet. At the same time, many of our fellow ESL instructors were not prepared to teach LESLLA students. Oftentimes LESLLA students would drop out of beginner classes, usually because they were designed for students who already had literacy skills in their first language. LESLLA students struggled to learn to read in English and quickly fell behind their classmates. It is because of these disparities and the desire to include all students that we began to adjust our focus in the classroom.

Our classes are held at a community college in Raleigh, North Carolina, which, like many places in the U.S., has become home to a growing number of immigrants and refugees. Shelley taught for five years at the New Arrival School, designed especially for non- and semi-literate refugees. Her experiences working with newly-arrived, low-literacy adults served as a springboard for developing a new curriculum that brings explicit literacy instruction into the ESL classroom. Jaimie taught traditional ESL classes at both a non-profit and the local community college. When both organizations began to see an increasing number of LESLLA students, creating a new combined class of varying literacy levels, explicit phonics instruction became necessary for all students to participate actively in class. Both authors note that since significantly changing our approach to include systematic literacy instruction, we have noticed rapid growth among *all* students in class, not just LESLLA students. Our goal is to integrate the best ESL practices into literacy instruction and the best literacy practices into ESL instruction so that all students, LESLLA and traditional ESL students alike, can receive equal access to language and literacy acquisition.

Here, we summarize current research in ESL literacy instruction, note the guiding principles we use in class, and describe in detail some of the teaching techniques we use. The lessons included, can be used in classes made up entirely of LESLLA students, or in combined classes. Usually, we focus on direct literacy instruction for 45-60 minutes of each three-hour class and dedicate the rest of the time to ESL life skills, speaking, and listening. Individual teachers can determine the timing that works in his or her own classroom.

Research Base for Balanced Literacy Instruction

The debate about whole-language and phonics instruction seems to be over, as research increasingly supports a balanced literacy approach when working with beginning readers (Vinogradov, 2008, 2009). The core components of reading include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000), but many LESLLA students have limited decoding skills and are not able to advance to the last, and most important, stage of understanding what they read.

To quickly summarize the two schools of thought, the whole-language/top-down approach focuses on *meaning*, while the traditional phonics/bottom-up approach mainly offers decontextualized acquisition of *letters and sounds*. While both have their place in the classroom, teachers cannot expect their students to pick up one without the other. All ESL students need to learn English within a context (Florez and Terrill, 2003), but

LESLLA students need context and more. As Wrigley (2003) states, “Mere exposure and continued acquisition of English” is not enough for LESLLA students to pick up literacy, just as only learning letter sounds and shapes cannot give students a full understanding of English. Rather, emergent readers need a balance of both methods, so that instruction is “both meaning-based and explicit” (Vinogradov, 2008).

When phonics instruction is contextualized, using both top-down and bottom-up approaches, the students’ needs are better met. For example, instructors can work on sounds and spelling patterns during a vocabulary lesson about a certain topic, allowing students to receive phonics instruction within a meaningful context. Literacy and language are intrinsically connected, and the teacher should provide opportunities for students to practice each one.

Guiding Principles

Guided by the research, our teaching style is motivated by these principles:

Progression from oral language to print (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010): Speaking practice comes before literacy skills. Students need to be able to say and understand the words before they can read them.

Daily, systematic instruction in foundational literacy: During each class, students should be exposed to the components of early literacy: print concepts, phonemic awareness, phonics, letter formation, and blending sounds into words.

Contextualized instruction: Learning to read doesn’t occur in a vacuum. Teachers should use engaging topics that capture students’ attention as a catalyst for phonemic instruction (Vinogradov, 2008).

Opportunity mindset: When teachers offer their students an opportunity for literacy (Gunn, 2003) instead of communicating a deficiency mindset, the students’ affective filter (Krashen, 1982) is lowered. Students feel more confident when they see that their teacher believes in their ability to learn.

Variety of practice activities: Having a balance between routine and variety (Wrigley, 2003) keeps the class interesting and the students motivated. Andrea Echelberger, in the New American Horizons video series, exemplifies this practice with her LESLLA learners.

In the sections that follow, we describe personal classroom-tested lessons that reflect our guiding principles and help students move from letter-sound recognition to reading whole sentences.

Literacy Lessons

I. Letter-Sound Connection.

In order to learn the building blocks of the Roman alphabet, LESLLA students need explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and English phonics. Many teachers give LESLLA students the whole alphabet at once and teach the letter names but not the letter sounds. This approach is not the best one for LESLLA students (Vinogradov, 2008), as it is more effective to focus on a few letters and sounds at a time, teaching each of them to mastery. This lesson comes from *At the River* (2016), Unit 1.

We begin with teaching the letters a, m, p, s, and t in both uppercase and lowercase. This lesson starts with letters, the smallest unit of meaning, and builds up to words, a larger unit of meaning. It can be used as an introductory literacy lesson on the first day of class or can be broken down into separate lessons for several hours or days. In our experience, we saw a class of low-literacy Spanish speakers master this lesson in 30 minutes, while a group of non-literate students who spoke non-Roman alphabet languages needed six hours of instruction to reach mastery.

The objectives of this lesson are:

- 1) to identify the letter name and sound for short Aa, Mm, Pp, Ss, Tt;
- 2) write the uppercase and lowercase forms of each;
- 3) connect the target sounds with whole words;
- 4) blend the sounds into CVC words; and
- 5) write the CVC words from dictation.

The lesson starts by presenting flashcards that display both the uppercase and lowercase forms of the letters as well as a picture of a keyword for each letter (for example, apple, /a/; map, /m/; pencil, /p/; sun,

/s/; table, /t/. The teacher begins by leading students in saying the letter name, the name of the item pictured, and the letter sound. Students repeat until each letter is mastered.

It is important to teach students that the uppercase form and lowercase forms both make the same sound. To illustrate, the teacher can point to the uppercase and lowercase letters, saying the same sound for each letter. Students are encouraged to repeat the letter sounds, the name of the item pictured, and the words “uppercase” and “lowercase.”

The next step is recognition of uppercase and lowercase letters while connecting them with the letter sounds. Displaying the five flash cards on the board, the teacher provides a simple matching exercise on the board: the five uppercase letters written in a column on the left, and the five lowercase letters written in a column on the right in a different order. Individual students volunteer to draw a line matching the two letters.

A	p
M	s
P	a
S	t
T	m

Another exercise to promote letter recognition is a letter scramble. The teacher writes several rows of lowercase letters, uppercase letters, or uppercase and lowercase letters mixed. Students chorally produce the sound as the teacher points to each letter. Examples of the three variations:

a	m	p	s	t	A	M	P	S	T	A	m	P	S	t
t	s	a	m	p	M	T	S	P	A	T	P	s	M	a
m	a	s	p	t	P	S	A	M	T	a	T	S	p	m

Once students are familiar with the sounds, they are ready to practice writing and connecting the sounds to whole words. The teacher shows students how to write each letter on a whiteboard or on paper.

Aa
Mm
Pp
Ss
Tt

For students who struggle to control the pencil or marker, the teacher can write the letters as a model and the student can copy. Or, the teacher can write the letters using a highlighter and the student can trace. Three-lined paper can be helpful when learning letter shapes as well. As each student finishes writing, the teacher asks him/her to produce the sound for each letter.

As students become comfortable with the sound and the two forms of each letter, they can participate in Whole Language Connection. As the teacher calls out words that begin with the target sounds, students move a small object like a bingo chip or paperclip on their written AMPST column to correspond to them. Words may include: Monday, Saturday, Tuesday, Sunday, paper, student, teacher, marker, pencil, apple, pen, mother, table, avenue, map, sister, ambulance. Students are encouraged to repeat the words several times as they move the chip to identify the initial sound.

Teachers can extend the Whole Language Connection by providing pictures and objects that begin with the target sounds. The visual support helps students connect with initial sounds, connect with whole words,

and learn new vocabulary. Additionally, the pictures and realia can be used for sorting activities and other games later in the lesson.

After students become comfortable recognizing beginning sounds, they are ready to be taught explicitly how sounds blend to form words. Using the target sounds only, the teacher presents visuals and realia for the decodable words *map*, *mat*, *sat*, *pat*, and *tap*. Students will receive oral language and visual support before trying to read the whole words themselves.

While displaying the visuals, the teacher encourages students to talk about them in any way that is useful to them. When showing a map, for example, teachers may find that students want to find their own country or countries they have visited. A student who spent 15 years in a refugee camp in Nepal enthusiastically shared a personal connection with a tap: she used to share one outdoor tap with three families, but now in the U.S., has three. When students are able to create connections between words and their lives, that meaning-making helps the language stick.

After spending sufficient time with the five new vocabulary words and their accompanying visuals, students are ready to blend the sounds they just learned into words. One effective technique is word building. First, the teacher writes *m*, *m*, *s*, *p*, and *t* (doubling the *m* is intentional) in a column on the board, points to each letter, and asks students for its letter sound. Next, the teacher adds *a* to each consonant and models blending the two sounds. The column now reads: *ma*, *ma*, *sa*, *pa*, *ta*. To elicit a single sound, the teacher taps under each letter; to indicate blending, the teacher runs a finger under the two letters, left to right. If students are fluently producing the two blended sounds, they are ready to add the last unit. The teacher adds *p*, *t*, *t*, and *p* to each word, making the column now read: *map*, *mat*, *sat*, *pat*, *tap*. Running a finger under the first two sounds, then tapping under the third, the teacher leads students in reading, *Ma...p*. *Ma...t*. *Sa...t*. *Pa...t*. *Ta...p*. Then, running a finger left to right under all three letters, the teacher models blending the whole word as students repeat. Constant reference to the pictures and realia ensures that phonics instruction is contextual, relevant, and easily understood.

Writing is the final step in this sequence. Students identify the picture or object as the teacher holds it up, then write the word on paper or a whiteboard. Consider this teacher's demonstration:

(Said while patting a student on the shoulder)

T: What am I doing?

Ss: Pat.

T: Yes, I can pat my friend's shoulder. Maybe she is sick. I can say, I hope you feel better. Pat, pat, pat. Please write pat. /P/.../a/.../t/. Pat.

Students should be encouraged to produce the sounds as they write. The teacher circulates, offering gentle corrections. For students who struggle to write the words, the teacher can write the word on their board for the students to copy. After going through each word and writing them down, students practice reading and pointing to the words in pairs.

This lesson allows students to learn the alphabetic principle of connecting letters and sounds through modeling, repetition, oral language, ample practice, and finally, reading and writing relevant words that are presented in context of daily life.

II. Decodable Words: CVC lesson

After students have mastered some letters and their sounds, they are able to participate in more complex decoding activities. This literacy lesson integrates oral language and phonics instruction through simple games and ample practice activities. Throughout the lesson, the teacher alternates top-down and bottom-up activities which give students practice in both oral language and direct phonics. Students achieve automaticity in decoding and blending nine single consonants and three short vowels which are presented contextually through objects that are relevant to daily life.

The teacher starts by reviewing the target sounds with flashcards: short vowels /a/, /i/, and /o/; consonants /b/, /d/, /g/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /r/, /t/, /x/. Cards should include a picture of the keyword plus the uppercase and lowercase form of each letter. After sound review, the targeted vocabulary is presented with realia: a map, a mat, a rag, a bag, a pad, a pan, a pin, a tin, a pot, a top, and a box. The students look at, hold,

and pass around the items as the teacher asks some discussion questions. Some example questions include: What is this? Do you have this at home? Do we have this in the classroom? What can you do with this?

When students are confident in saying the words and identifying the objects, the teacher writes the initial sounds in a column on the board: *m, m, r, b, p, p, t, p, t, b*. Students produce each sound as the teacher points to the letter. Next, the vowel sound is added (all vowels are short): *ma, ma, ra, ba, pa, pa, pi, ti, po, to, bo*. The teacher models blending the two sounds and leads the group in practicing the sounds in order.

When students are comfortably producing the blended sounds, the teacher adds the final sound and leads the group in blending the three sounds in order. To provide blending practice, the teacher can produce three separate sounds, tapping once for each sound or holding up one finger for each sound: “/b/.../a/.../g/.” Students listen and say the word “bag”. At this point, it may be helpful to lead students in segmenting as well: “Bag. What are the sounds in bag? /B/.../a/.../g/.” Students can tap or hold fingers up as they segment the word.

LESLLA students need ample practice as well as a variety of practice activities. One way to practice word recognition is to write all the vocabulary words on the board in random order and ask a volunteer to circle the word the teacher says. Students can help the volunteer by providing directions in English: up, down, left, right. This game continues until all of the words have been circled by different students. Another variation is to number the words 1-11 on the board. When the teacher says the word, the students say the corresponding number. Word cards provide yet another way to practice word recognition. Each student receives an index card with a vocabulary word written on it. Then students match the card to the correct item or picture on the table.

While phonics work is foundational for LESLLA learners, oral language development is also crucial. Games such as “What’s Missing?”, the Yes/No game, and TPR (Total Physical Response) provide students with opportunities to speak.

In What’s Missing? a volunteer closes his eyes while another student removes an object from the table. The volunteer opens his eyes and guesses the object that is missing. Classmates may help in English by giving prepositional hints (“next to the box”) or hints about the object’s purpose (“cooking” for pan or pot).

In the Yes/No game, the teacher holds up each object and makes a true/false statement about it: “This is a mat. Yes or no?” If it is a mat, the students say “yes.” If it is not, the students say “no” and provide the correct word. The teacher continues with all of the items. An effective TPR activity involves the teacher giving commands to a volunteer such as, “Put the top on the pot” or “Put the pad in the bag” while the student follows the instructions. More advanced students may volunteer to give the commands to another student. Alternating explicit phonics instruction with oral language activities provides the variety and the repetition that LESLLA students need to make the language comprehensible.

A culminating activity for this CVC lesson is simple dictation. The teacher holds up each item and elicits the name from the students, who are encouraged to repeat the word and segment the sounds as they write, for example: “Pad. /p/.../a/.../d/. Pad.” After students have written all eleven words, the teacher can lead a quick fluency exercise: The teacher says the words in random order while students circle the words on their whiteboard or paper. Then students can read the words individually for the teacher or a partner. Another extension is to use the Language Experience Approach, in which students dictate sentences about the objects to the teacher, who writes what they say on the board for later reading practice.

Because short vowels in English are often hard for learners to distinguish, ample practice is needed. Teachers may need to review and recycle using these practice activities in order to help students reach fluency and automaticity in decoding.

III. Initial Sounds and Word Recognition Using the *Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary*

How can you teach emergent readers who are successfully decoding *pan*, *box*, and *pin* to read words like *broccoli*, *spinach*, and *cucumber*? It is a significant sign of progress when LESLLA students are able to read decodable words, as illustrated in the previous two lessons. However, daily life also requires them to read words which contain a variety of sounds and spelling patterns which have not yet been explicitly taught, such as consonant blends, digraphs and long vowels. In the following technique, embedded in a “mainstream” ESL vocabulary lesson on vegetables, students use initial sounds and their knowledge of other single consonant sounds to help them recognize the names of vegetables in the *Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary*, 2nd edition. This

lesson can be used in a homogeneous or combination class of traditional ESL students and LESLLA students. The technique can be applied to any beginner vocabulary lesson.

After students warm up with a review of the consonant sounds /b/, /c/, /g/, /l/, /m/, /p/, /s/, /t/ that they will encounter in today's lesson, the teacher introduces the target vocabulary: broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, corn, garlic, string beans, tomato, pepper, cucumber, potato, onion, carrot, mushroom and peas. The introduction can be done through a variety of oral language activities: talking about pictures of the vegetables, passing around real or realistic vegetables, and asking questions such as, "Do you like ____?" or "Do you cook with ____?" Students may want to share the names of the vegetables in their L1, or talk about the ones they grew in their native country.

After students are comfortable saying the words, they are ready to connect oral language to print. The first step is to recognize each word's initial sound. The teacher displays the eight flashcards for b, c, g, l, m, p, s and t on the board and numbers them 1-8. A sample conversation could be:

(Holding up a picture of a tomato)

T: What is this?

Ss: Tomato.

T: What is the first sound in *tomato*?

Ss: /T/.

T: What number is the first sound?

Ss: Eight.

Continuing in this fashion, the students become aware of the connection between initial sound and letter for each vegetable. The teacher then refers students to the picture dictionary page that shows vegetable illustrations at the top and a list of words at the bottom. After several rounds of practice with the pictures and words on the page, the teacher writes 1-15 on the board along with the first sound of each vegetable, in the same order as in the book. Students produce the letter sound as the teacher points to each in order.

Next, students turn their attention away from the visuals and realia to the whole word. Referring to the pictures and/or the words in the book, students tell the teacher each word as he/she writes it on the board. The list looks like this:

broccoli	9. pepper
cabbage	10. cucumber
lettuce	11. potato
spinach	12. onion
corn	13. carrot
garlic	14. mushroom
string beans	15. peas
tomato	

First, the teacher asks students to repeat the words in order. Then, he/she asks, "What number is mushroom?" Some number of students will say, "Number 14." How did they know? They used their connection with the initial sound to scan the list and identify *mushroom* as number 14. The teacher continues to ask, "What number is lettuce? Garlic? Broccoli? Tomato?" Because there is only one item on the list with those initial sounds, students can identify those words easily using the initial sound strategy. As students identify the correct number, the teacher underlines the first sound.

This kind of list can also be used for further discrimination of sounds within the word. When the teacher asks, "What number is corn?", students using the initial sound strategy may answer with number 2, 5, 10, or 13. Imagine the following scenario:

T: What number is corn?

Ss: Number 13.

T: Ok, let's check number 13. (*running finger under each sound or syllable*): c...arr...ot. Carrot. Carrot. Is this corn?

Ss: No.

T: Ok, let's try again. What number is corn?

Ss: Number 2.

T: Let's check number 2. Ca...bb...age. Cabbage. Cabbage. Is this corn?

Ss: No.

T: What number is corn?

Ss: Number 5.

T: Let's check number 5. C...or...n. Is this corn?

Ss: Yes.

Using this process, students discover how to use the consonant sounds they already know to identify words. Recognition is a step on the road to independent reading. If the teacher uses this strategy consistently, then students will internalize it and apply it independently with new words. The initial sound strategy is an important scaffolding tool that builds strong connections for students with Roman alphabet letters and sounds.

IV. Scaffolded Reading with Comprehension Checking Questions

Once students are familiar with the alphabet and its sounds, decoding CVC words, and using initial sounds to recognize words, they can begin reading short passages. The following lesson is taken from the *Ventures Basic* (2010) health unit. Comprehension is emphasized first, so the teacher introduces the topic using plenty of oral language, pictures and realia. The teacher can act out the text or ask student volunteers to do so. Once students are familiar with the vocabulary, the teacher reads the text once or twice while the students listen. Afterwards, the teacher asks a series of yes/no comprehension check questions to make sure that the students understand the text. Then, the scaffolded reading of the text itself can begin. The ultimate goal is for the students to read the text on their own. The text is:

Tony and Mario are at the doctor's office. They are patients. Tony's leg hurts. His head hurts, too. Mario's arm hurts. His hands hurt, too. Tony and Mario are not happy. It is not a good day. (p. 50)

After reading the text twice, the teacher asks the students to respond *yes* or *no* to the following statements:

T: Tony and Mario are at the restaurant.

Ss: No.

T: Tony and Mario are at the post office.

Ss: No.

T: Tony and Mario are at the doctor's office.

Ss: Yes.

T: Tony and Mario are doctors.

Ss: No.

T: Tony and Mario are patients.

Ss: Yes.

The teacher continues in this fashion for the remainder of the text, checking comprehension.

Next, the teacher distributes the text to the students and asks them to follow along, either with their finger or their eyes, as he or she reads. After listening to the text several times and connecting the words to the print on the page, the students are ready to try echo reading. Here, the students repeat chunked passages after the teacher, chorally. Next, the students practice sentence recognition. The teacher shows the text, either written on the board or projected on a screen, with each sentence numbered 1-8. The teacher reads a sentence at random and asks the students to identify which number the sentence is. The students continue to call out the number of each sentence as they hear it.

As the students develop more confidence with the text, they can transition into sentence completion: reading the second half of the sentence after the teacher reads the first half. For example, the teacher reads,

“Tony and Mario . . .” and the students say, “. . . are at the doctor’s office.” As the students respond, the teacher can see which students are able to track with the words and which ones will need more practice. Other methods of practicing literacy with a whole text are:

1. *Reading in pairs*: Students read a sentence at a time with a partner as the teacher circulates and makes suggestions.

2. *Round robin reading*: Either in a small group or as a whole class, students read one sentence at a time.

3. *Sound identification*: The teacher makes the initial sound of a word from the text, such as short o. Looking at the text, students read a word from the text that has that sound (/o/...office). The teacher continues with 8-10 initial sounds from the text.

4. *Word identification*: Students dictate sentences to the teacher, who writes the sentences on the board. Students come to the board and circle the words/phrases the teacher or another student calls out. Or, students circle words on their paper that the teacher calls out.

5. *Sentence strips*: Students work in pairs or in groups to reorganize the text, which has been written on separate index cards, and put it back together in the correct order. This activity helps students with both word recognition and word order.

These activities are only a few of the methods teachers can use when helping LESLLA learners read beginner texts with better fluency and comprehension.

V. Connecting Oral Language to Meaningful Print

In this last lesson, students are exposed first to listening and speaking practice with whole sentences, which is then followed by scaffolded phonics, reading, and writing exercises. Offering ample speaking and listening practice before moving to print helps students learn new vocabulary and understand whole sentences.

The topic for this citizenship lesson is George Washington. The teacher begins by showing a picture of Washington and saying, “This is George Washington. He was the first American president.” Then, the teacher asks, “Who is this?” Students respond by saying “Washington” or “George Washington.” The teacher turns the one-word answer into a whole sentence: “Washington was the first president.” The class repeats the sentence. The teacher can ask again, “Who is this?” and cue the students to answer in a complete sentence.

The teacher continues by showing pictures or realia of a dollar bill, a quarter, a calendar of the month of February, and a map showing Washington D.C. The teacher models a complete sentence about each item, and cues students to repeat the full sentence, breaking it down into chunks as needed. The entire series is:

Washington was the first president.

Washington is on the dollar bill.

Washington is on the quarter.

Washington is the Father of Our Country.

Washington’s birthday is in February.

Washington, D.C. is the capital of the United States.

More or fewer sentences can be used, depending on the level of the students.

After the students have said the sentences several times, the teacher passes the pictures and realia one by one around the class. Each student holds an item, says the corresponding sentence, and passes it to the next student. That student repeats the sentence and passes the item to the next student, and so on until everyone has had a chance to say the sentence individually. This activity is repeated with all six sentences. The teacher should circulate the classroom to encourage each student to say the entire sentence correctly.

After discussing the pictures and realia, the teacher displays and reads the first sentence, which the students repeat. As the class practices, the teacher can use any of the guided/scaffolded reading strategies from the previous lesson to help students with fluency and oral/print connections.

After the students have read the sentences several times, they complete a dictation exercise, which can be differentiated according to each student’s level. Some students will only focus on a few initial sounds (/w/, /f/, /p/, /d/, /b/, etc.), while others will write entire missing words.

Another activity that involves the whole class is a sentence-scramble/line-up. Each student receives a card with a word from the sentence written on it, and must stand in front of the classroom in order, forming the entire sentence correctly. Individual or pair sentence scrambles give students the opportunity to use manipulatives as they practice word recognition techniques. Culminating activities include asking students to read the passage with a partner and individually for the teacher. Some students will enjoy reading out loud in front of the class.

This lesson provides multiple opportunities to interact with the text, which helps the students read independently and understand what they are reading. Ultimately, we want all students to become so familiar with a decoded text that they are able to demonstrate comprehension.

Conclusion

Our LESLLA students have taught us a great deal. We have come to recognize the crucial role of explicit phonics and literacy instruction in the ESL classroom. Teachers can meet the needs of all students by adapting traditional ESL approaches and adopting the balanced literacy approach. The lessons illustrated here have been effective with our classes, but teachers should alter them to best serve their particular groups of students. Our goal is clear: to integrate the best literacy practices with the best ESL practices so that all students, especially those with limited formal education, can acquire language and literacy for their lives in their new countries.

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