

THE TRADITION CONTINUES: SHARING KNOWLEDGE TO SERVE LESLLA LEARNERS

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In September of 2009, Bow Valley College hosted the Fifth Annual LESLLA Conference in Banff Alberta, Canada. For five years now, researchers, teachers, administrators and policy makers have come together to share and discuss their work in order to best serve students who have become known as LESLLA learners. Since the initial conference held at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, successive conferences have been held in West Virginia in the United States, Newcastle in the UK, and Antwerp in Belgium.

The term LESLLA was coined at the inaugural meeting in 2004, standing for Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition. This term is now used to describe a group or demographic of adult learners who have had limited or no access to education in their country of origin, who have limited literacy in their first language, and who are now learning to read and write for the first time in a language they are learning to speak as well.

LESLLA research is essential to help us understand the needs of this group of learners. The conference proceedings are divided into three sections 1) practice and instruction; 2) research; and 3) a personal reflection.

In the section on practice and instruction, Patsy Vinogradov discusses a balanced approach to literacy instruction using both top-down and bottom-up processes and offers practical suggestions on how to use learner-generated texts to accomplish the balance. Alan Williams and Denise E. Murray outline their *Get Wise* project, a series of materials developed for young adult LESLLA learners in Australia, and highlight the value of and methods for developing materials for a content-based approach, specific to the needs of local learners. Heide Spruck Wrigley discusses the challenges faced by low literate immigrant and refugee youth. She then highlights promising programs and practices in serving this demographic. Janet Isserlis examines the impact of trauma on learning, something many LESLLA learners and teachers face in the classroom. Isserlis explores ways teachers, administrators and policy makers can understand to create an effective learning environment and considers the impact this might have on instructional practice and policy.

In the section on research, Susanna Strube, Ineke van de Craats, and Roeland van Hout discuss the complexities of reading picture stories for non-literate L2 learners and note that the 'simple' tasks taught in class are perhaps not at all simple for a LESLLA learner. This has implications for all involved in LESLLA education. Jeanne Kurvers, Willemijn Stockmann and Ineke van de Craats discuss the challenging question: how long does it take an adult learner to learn to read and write for the first time in a second language? This question is important to funders, policy makers and teachers alike. To further narrow the research, Martha Young-

Scholten and Rola Naeb study Non-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (NESLLA) learners. In their paper, they explore whether it is possible for learners with no education at all in their first language to become fully literate in a second language. In her paper, Gunna Funder Hansen uses the connectionist model to contrast processes required for reading fluency in English and Arabic, and the possible implications for teaching pre-literate adults to read in a second language.

The proceedings conclude with a personal reflection by Ruth J. Colvin, who describes her work with LESLLA learners.

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