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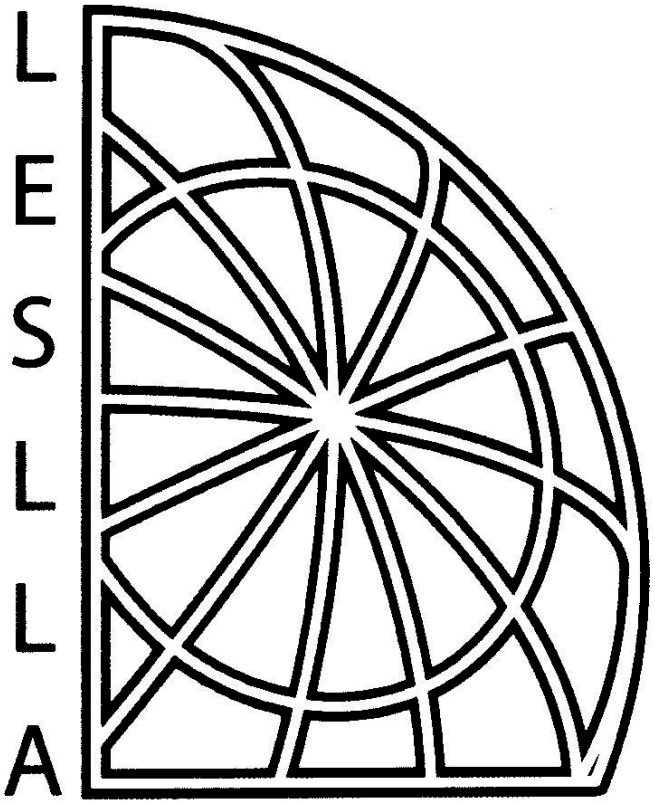
Taina Tammelin-Laine, Lea Nieminen, and Maisa Martin (eds.)

Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition

Proceedings of the 8th Symposium



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Editors
Taina Tammelin-Laine, Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä
Lea Nieminen, Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä
Maisa Martin, Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä

Pekka Olsbo and Sini Tuikka
Publishing Unit, University Library of Jyväskylä

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URN:ISBN: 978-951-39-5310-2
ISBN 978-951-39-5310-2 (PDF)

ISBN 978-951-39-5309-6 (nid.)
ISSN 1459-4323 (nid.), 1459-4331 (PDF)

Jyväskylä University Printing House, Jyväskylä 2013

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*= Originally published in the Special issue on second language and literacy acquisition of low-educated adult immigrants (volume 7, issue 1) of Apples - Journal of Applied language Studies (www. apples.jyu.fi).

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, over 775 million people over the age of 15 are non-literate. When these people for one reason or another move to societies based on written language, they encounter many difficulties. Motivated by this fact, the first Low-educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) annual symposium was held in 2005 in Tilburg, the Netherlands. The main aim of the symposium was to establish an international forum on research and classroom issues concerning the second language acquisition and literacy development of adults with little or no native language schooling and literacy skills. Since then, the symposium has rotated between an English speaking country and a non-English speaking country, and it has been held in the UK, Belgium, Canada, Germany, and the USA.

In 2012, the 8th annual LESLLA symposium was hosted by the Language Campus of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. In Finland adult non-literacy has been virtually non-existent until recently when immigration from countries with low literacy rates has increased. Now approximately 1300 non-literate immigrant adults participate in language and literacy training every year. The number is rather small when compared with many other Western countries but it is predicted to grow in future, due to the immigration from countries like Somalia and Afghanistan with very low literacy rates. Consequently, research-based knowledge and experiences of adult literacy education are much in demand.

From August 29 to September 1, LESLLA symposium brought together nearly 90 educators and researchers from 10 countries. Plenaries, workshops, paper sessions, poster sessions, and research projects on display, as well as pre-conference visits to LESLLA classrooms in Jyväskylä, took place over four intensive days. The main themes of the symposium were 1) learner placement and assessment of progression, 2) instructional methods and techniques, and 3) teacher professionalization.

The articles in this collection, reviewed and accepted by anonymous scholars in the area of literacy acquisition, second language development and language testing, and the editors of this volume, are mainly based on studies presented at the LESLLA 2012 described above. They have been grouped under three headings. Teachers and teaching are naturally in the centre of the daily life of the LESLLA learners as well as that of many LESLLA researchers. Teachers are also crucial in the development of literacy education. For this reason we have placed the two articles focusing on the needs of the teachers first in this volume, followed by two articles on what the learners need. The second section takes us into classrooms, discussing the learning processes. The final section leads into a wider perspective: policy and assessment provide the framework for teaching and learning. Policy makers are responsible for the resources and teaching arrangements which largely define the quantity and quality of literacy teaching available for LESLLA learners. Assessment also

determines teaching due to washback effect: teachers teach what learners are tested upon.

The first section, Teachers and Teaching, is opened by Patsy Vinogradov. The main goal of her article is to present a framework of LESLLA teachers' proficiency. Even if the article is written from L2 English point of view, the ideas can be adapted worldwide. Vinogradov also describes the unique characteristics of teaching and learning in LESLLA context, and summarizes the limited number of studies that exist on teaching LESLLA learners.

Raichle Farrelly bases her study of the teaching worlds of literacy teachers on Engeström's Activity Theory. She explores the relationships and tensions the teachers experience in their working context. The study brings forth the need of in-service training and highlights the necessity and benefit of promoting professional collaborative learning opportunities for LESLLA teachers.

In her contribution, Jean Marrapodi evaluates the teaching methods traditionally used in English speaking countries in relation to LESLLA learners' cognitive and educational foundation. She explores the pros and cons of these methods in instruction of this particular group of learners. Using task analyses, Marrapodi suggests some existing gaps between the predictions embedded in the methods and the realistic skills of LESSLA learners. She also makes some recommendations to benefit the literacy instructors in their work.

Stefan Markov and Christiane Scheithauer discuss the role and need of counselling for L2 literacy learners. Their context is the German integration courses with a literacy component but their findings apply to any classroom with low-educated learners. To learn one must learn to learn, making the teaching of strategies of utmost importance. The study also provides examples of ways enhancing learning skills.

The next section then takes us inside the classrooms. Learning to read and write is based on oral skills – it hardly makes sense to read words or phrases one does not understand. Developing oral skills is the theme of Susanna Strube's, Ineke van de Craats', and Roeland van Hout's article. They focus on differences between classes, not between individual learners. They find notable differences between the classes in achievement on many areas of language learning and look for explanations by comparing learner characteristics, classroom hours and attendance, and classroom practices between the classes. The age of arrival and the use of the computer prove to be of significance.

Learning the basic technical skills of reading such as decoding is not easy for people with no earlier experience of written language. However, when these very basic skills are learned – although not yet fully mastered – the next step is to make them so automatized that most of the cognitive capacity needed in reading can be directed to benefit reading comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading. In their article, Ineke van de Craats and Mark Peeters discuss the role of speed in the path to reading comprehension. They introduce a method of reading a tailored list of words against time as a training method in reading speed. For the learners it is a motivating method for several reasons: practicing outside the lessons is easy, each learner's list can be tailored

according to personal needs, learners can set their own goals in terms of reading time and the progress is very concretely seen as a shortened time needed for reading the list.

The last section of this collection leads us to issues of policy and assessment. The problems of testing the linguistic and communicative achievement or proficiency of low-educated learners are the topic of Jane Allemano's article. She addresses the fundamental and difficult-to-solve issue of testing a skill which itself is involved in the testing process. At very low levels of literacy, reading the instructions and test questions may involve a higher level of reading skills than reading materials in the test itself. Even when test writers are aware of this dilemma and do their best to overcome this problem, the test taking situation itself may not be familiar enough for the test takers. The test tasks are of necessity decontextualized: the test takers are not functioning in their real-life role and environment where the same text might make sense to them and they could actually function in a relevant way, while in the test situation they often answer in a inappropriate way, basing their answers on their knowledge of their own situation, rather than the content of the texts.

In their critical article concerning the Dutch language test which is used as an entrance criterion Jeanne Kurvers, Ineke van de Craats, and Danielle Boon provide us with a scary picture of how the decisions done in the test planning crucially affect especially the lives of low-educated and non-literate people planning to build a new life in the Netherlands. The authors show, how the implementation of the new language test and the practicing material designed for it has decreased not only the number of test takers but also the proportion of those who have actually passed the test.

The last article in this volume, by Mirja Tarnanen and Eija Aalto, leads us to the Finnish school system and to immigrant pupils with low writing skills in the Finnish lower secondary school. The authors are concerned about how these pupils can show their knowledge and skills in a school, which is very much based on literacy skills as a medium of both learning and demonstrating learning. However, a closer look at writing tasks written by these poor writers suggests that the CEFR scale (Common European Framework of Reference) does not fully acknowledge the pupils' writing skills, since their texts seem to include varying combinations of properties mentioned only on higher CEFR levels. This obviously calls for further discussion of assessment methods. What is highly promising in this final article is that despite the low ratings on the CEFR scale these pupils did use their writing skills in various ways in out-of-school contexts.

The writers of this issue are concerned about the people whose language learning they describe and explain. This is true of people working in applied linguistics in general: not only the theoretical issues but also the connections and applicability of the results in real life are in focus. Research questions, albeit expressed within a theoretical framework, often arise from the experiences of the researchers or their students. This is visible also in this book: the writers

care. This may show as more space given to practical applications than is customary in research articles, or as an overall attempt to make the theory-based reasoning behind the decisions concerning the reaserch design, data and materials accessible also for the practitioneers who might benefit of the results in their work.

Publishing the book would not have been possible without the unpaid labour of all the anonymous reviewers. We cannot list here your names but nevertheless want to entend you our warmest thanks for your valuable contribution! Many reviewers, albeit principally concerned about the scientific quality of the articles, as they shoud be, also called for improvements in ways the design, data and methods were described and the results presented, with the less academically experienced teacher-reader in mind.

Finally, the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies deserve thanks for making it possible for the LESLLA symposium 2012 to take place. The University not only provided the human resources for planning and organizing the event but also supplied the meeting rooms free of charge and accepted these proceedings in its series Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities. The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies grant payed for the costs of the invited speakers and also helped to fund the publication of the proceedings. The LESLLA core group and the organizers of the previous LESLLA symposium in Minneapolis in 2011 were most helpful, lending us their knowledge and experience. We hope that we can help out the future symposium planners in a similar way where needed.

We hope that this book will be useful for both researchers and practitioners in their important work for the benefit of all those who did not have a chance to go to school and learn to learn as children and who for many reasons find themselves in a society where their language(s) and skills are not enough. This book is dedicated to all the adults struggling to gain access to the world of reading and writing while acquiring the language of their new environment. It is not easy but as members of the worldwide LESLLA community we hope to ease it, step by step.

Jyväskylä, June 12, 2013

Taina Tammelin-Laine
Lea Nieminen
Maisa Martin

I TEACHERS AND TEACHING

1 DEFINING THE LESLLA TEACHER KNOWLEDGE BASE

Patsy Vinogradov, Hamline University

Abstract

The following article summarizes the complex knowledge that LESLLA teachers need to do this unique and challenging work. The author asserts that LESLLA teachers tap into four main domains of knowledge in the classroom: knowledge of teaching, knowledge of the refugee and immigrant experience, knowledge of language and language acquisition, and knowledge of adult learning. As LESLLA learners are new to print literacy, a critical fifth area of knowledge seeps into every aspect of this work: early literacy instruction. The author begins with a brief summary of what has been previously published about the LESLLA teacher knowledge base before outlining her proposed model as supported by current research. She concludes with suggestions for building adaptive expertise in LESLLA teachers.

Keywords: LESLLA, teacher knowledge, professional development

1.1 Introduction

What do LESLLA teachers need to know and be able to do? Teacher educators and professional developers continue to grapple with this important question, as the LESLLA context is unique and complex. LESLLA learners are distinct from other adult L2 learners[1] in that they are learning to read for the first time. Therefore, LESLLA practitioners focus much of their efforts on literacy

[1] L2 learner = second language learner

development. However, the knowledge base for LESLLA cannot stop with early literacy instruction. As Vinogradov and Liden point out; this is but one area of importance in LESLLA work (2009). While early literacy instruction is at the core of this work, I propose that it necessarily interacts and finds its way among four additional areas of knowledge: 1) teaching, 2) the immigrant and refugee experience, 3) language and language acquisition, and 4) adult learning. Figure 1 below illustrates how we might conceptualize the overarching role of early literacy and the four domains of the LESLLA teacher knowledge base. This article works to unpack and define this model for the LESLLA teacher knowledge base.

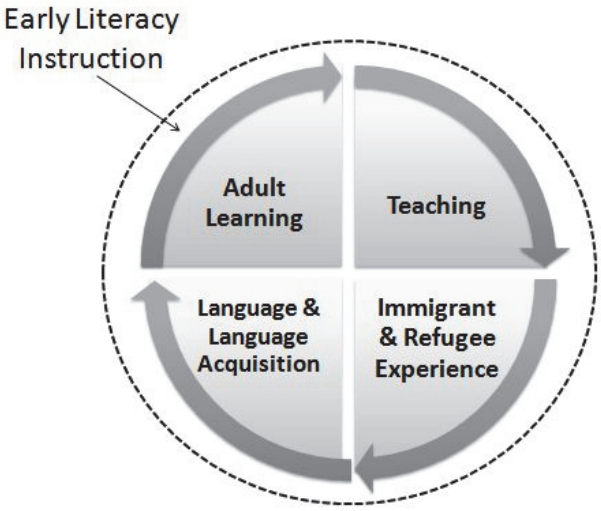

FIGURE 1 Knowledge base for LESLLA teachers.

First, a brief definition of early literacy instruction is provided as it is viewed in current scholarship. Next, this early literacy knowledge base is connected with four critical areas of knowledge for LESLLA: teaching, the immigrant and refugee experience, language and language acquisition, and adult learning.

We begin with what has already been put forth in the literature that is specific to LESLLA teachers' knowledge. However, as this area of research is quite limited, the discussion broadens to draw from the larger scholarship in education, literacy development, language acquisition, and adult learning.

1.2 Current LESLLA Teacher Knowledge Base

In response to the growing but still limited research on LESLLA teaching and learning across relevant disciplines, a recent source of new knowledge for

LESLLA educators is an academic symposium (see www.leslla.org), where LESLLA scholars from around the world come together to share their work. However, even in this scholarly community, LESLLA teacher preparation and professional development (PD) have not been a focus in the symposium's eight year history. LESLLA presenters have taken it upon themselves to produce a body of literature, refereed articles from presenters at the symposia that are important and valuable, but not widely distributed. In the seven published symposia proceedings to date, only three articles have directly addressed PD for LESLLA teachers, and none of these has reported on research specific to LESLLA teacher preparation. In the inaugural LESLLA symposium proceedings volume, Faux describes the range of knowledge and skills LESLLA teachers should possess (2005). The following year, Peyton and her colleagues describe a statewide systemic process in planning and implementing professional development for adult ESL teachers that may assist in identifying and meeting LESLLA teachers' needs, although it does not concentrate on them specifically but rather PD for adult literacy professionals in general (Peyton, Burt, McKay, Schaetzel, Terrill, Young, & Nash 2007).Vinogradov and Liden later build on Faux's initial outline and describe a specific workshop they designed for LESLLA practitioners (Vinogradov & Liden 2009). They outline, based on their experiences with LESLLA learners and teachers (but not based on empirically grounded research), the knowledge base of effective LESLLA instructors in ten key elements, as listed in Table 1. Regarding skills that LESLLA teachers require, Vinogradov & Liden (ibid.) place LESLLA classroom skills into three areas: assessment, course design, and materials development.

TABLE 1 Knowledge base for LESLLA teachers (Vinogradov & Liden 2009)

1. The refugee experience	6. Key research
2. Types of literacy-level learners	7. Components of reading
3. Literacy in childhood vs. adulthood	8. Balanced literacy
4. Emergent readers	9. Approaches to teaching literacy
5. Second language acquisition	10. Connections L1/L2 literacies

The knowledge base described by Vinogradov & Liden (ibid.) in Table 1 is a place to start thinking about what LESLLA teachers know and what areas of knowledge inform their practice.

1.3 Enveloping Teacher Knowledge for LESLLA in Early Literacy Instruction

While schools, curricula, and individual teachers may vary greatly in their exact approaches to developing early literacy, there is much agreement in the field around what should be included in effective early literacy instruction, at least for children. In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) released its large and

influential report, emphasizing five areas of reading instruction: *phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary*, and *comprehension* (National Reading Panel 2000). While there is widespread agreement that these five elements are indeed essential, "they are by no means a magic bullet that will lead to successful literacy achievement by all students," (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni 2011: 15). Reading scholars Morrow & Gambrell argue for a more comprehensive literacy framework that pays attention to *motivation*; opportunities to read and write; differentiated assessment and instruction; and reading, writing, listening, and speaking for wide, authentic, and varied purposes (Morrow & Gambrell 2011). Early literacy instruction forms the grounding layer of the LESLLA teacher knowledge base proposed in the model on page 1. Early literacy instruction and specific strategies for teaching the five NRP components are readily available for teachers of children and enjoy a vast research base (see Pressley 2006 for summary).

LESLLA teachers require complex knowledge for their work, and a defining role they play is that of early reading specialist, albeit often without a formal credential. No other adult L2 instructors have to teach alphabetic print literacy from square one. However, adult educators are not always prepared to provide the early literacy instruction that is paramount in their daily lives in the classroom. In addition to this knowledge of early reading instruction that LESLLA teachers require, they must also have a general knowledge of teaching. Knowledge of the components of reading and instructional techniques for literacy does little good in the hands of an incapable teacher. We move to the pedagogical knowledge LESLLA teachers need next.

1.4 Knowledge of Teaching

A strong assumption about teacher knowledge undergirds the proposed model: teachers possess a strong and evolving knowledge base that encompasses their prior experiences, formal knowledge, and personal beliefs and thinking. This assumption represents current thinking in the field and is the result of many years of development. Research in aspects of teacher knowledge emerged in the mid-1970's as scholars explored what had come to be known as *teacher cognition*, the thought processes that teachers engage in as they plan and deliver lessons (Borg 2003; Freeman & Johnson 1998). In the 1980's, more and more attention was given to teachers' prior experiences as students (Lortie 1975). Teachers were now thought to have 'mental lives' (Walberg 1977) that guide their work as constant decision makers in the classroom. The field began considering classrooms as unique and powerful social contexts where teachers work (Clandinin 1986). The work of Shulman (1987) teased out the distinction between content knowledge and teaching knowledge and introduced the concept of PCK, or pedagogical content knowledge. Also in this same time period, reflective practice (see Schön 1987) came to be seen as a crucial part of teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. Complex

frameworks for observing and evaluating teaching became widely used in the mid-1990's, largely in response to the Danielson framework (1996). In the U.S., a similar movement has led to the compilation of standards for adult educators' teacher effectiveness as well (American Institutes for Research 2012). This evidences the field's turn toward a more nuanced understanding of how classrooms operate and how teachers vary in how they plan for and implement instruction, assess learning, and grow as professionals. Attempts at isolating and strengthening the act of teaching date back to the previously mentioned work of Lee Shulman and the concept of PCK. This discipline-specific teaching knowledge lens is one way to explore the 'knowledge of teaching' LESLLA teachers require.

Moving more specifically to adult second language learners, TESOL, the international professional organization of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (www.tesol.org), created set of standards for adult ESL teachers. TESOL's list is specific to the teacher knowledge required of adult ESL practitioners, and specifically those working with adult learners (TESOL 2008). These eight standards are listed in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2 Standards for ESL/EFL teachers of adults (TESOL 2008)

1. Planning
2. Instructing
3. Assessing
4. Identity and Context
5. Language Proficiency
6. Learning
7. Content
8. Commitment and Professionalism

TESOL's standards include much of the general standards and frameworks, but they also give special attention to language proficiency. Additionally, the TESOL standards cast a separate standard for 'learning,' which focuses attention on tenets of *adult* learning and *adult* language learning. These differences underscore the more specific knowledge and skills needed for teachers of adults and for teachers of language. It should be noted that while the TESOL standards appear thorough and have ample vignettes and research-based references to support their choices, this is the work of a handful of professionals; the standards are not the result of original research and impact on student learning and teachers' possession of these practices have not been studied. One notable study from Ontario is quite possibly the only published work on the preparedness and self-efficacy of graduates from a TESOL program specifically for teachers of adults. The program in question is TESOL-accredited through the provincial TESOL affiliate specifically for teachers of adults. Faez & Valeo (2012) conducted a mixed-method study that included an online survey with 115 graduates of this program and interviews with eight focal participants. The focus of the research was to pinpoint teachers'

preparedness immediately after completing their TESOL course of study and after three years' teaching experience, and to explore what aspects of their preparation program were the most useful. Findings show that the practicum experience and 'real' teaching experiences had the most impact on their preparedness, a result that while not new for K-12 contexts had yet to be determined for adult ESL teachers. This adult ESL teacher research from Ontario faced some limitations: the use of an online survey for participants to self-report their preparedness upon completion of the program and currently, and much depended on their memories, self-perception, and cohesion between their preparation and subsequent teaching assignment. Even so, this is important new research that indicates that knowledge of teaching develops in similar ways across teaching contexts.

The fourth TESOL standard listed in Table 2 above, identity and context, describes the adult ESL teacher's need to understand learners and their communities, backgrounds, goals, and expectations for learning, all of which inform planning, instruction, and assessment. As adult immigrants and refugees, LESLLA learners' backgrounds and communities are particularly diverse and distinct and play a pivotal role in how teachers might approach instruction. Teachers need a deep understanding and appreciation for learners' experiences before coming to the U.S. and of their current lives in our communities. The impact of these factors is further explored in the next section.

1.5 Knowledge of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience

This article has already presented two areas of the proposed LESLLA teacher knowledge base: early literacy instruction and knowledge of teaching. The next area is knowledge of our learners as newcomers to our communities. Many LESLLA learners are refugees who have fled extreme violence or long stays in refugee camps with little or no access to schooling (Vinogradov & Bigelow 2010). They come from many countries. In Minnesota, U.S.A., for example, LESLLA learners are commonly (but not exclusively) from Ethiopia, Laos, Liberia, Mexico, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, and Thailand. In several cities in Belgium, immigrants from Morocco fill adult Dutch as a Second Language classes; and in Finland, large numbers of Somali and Iraqi refugees have resettled and are acquiring literacy for the first time in Finnish (Tammelin-Laine 2011; van de Craats, Kurvers, & Shöneberger 2011). Across the globe, political, social, and economic circumstances drive families from their homes to continue their lives in far off places, often in communities where literacy is paramount to daily living. While their home languages and cultures are extremely diverse, LESLLA learners do share some common characteristics (Burt, Peyton, & Schaetzel 2008), and they are present in adult education programs across the globe.

Serving LESLLA learners well requires serving immigrants and refugees well. Refugees and immigrants are managing a great deal of personal upheaval

as they adjust to a new country and city, find work and schools, and take care of daily personal and family needs. All of this adjustment happens for LESLLA learners as they acquire the local language and begin to acquire print literacy. Of the eight standards for adult ESL teachers, established by TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), one is devoted to identity and context:

> Teachers understand the importance of who learners are and how their communities, backgrounds, and goals shape learning and expectations of learning. Teachers recognize how context contributes to identity formation and therefore influences learning. Teachers use this knowledge of identity and settings in planning, instructing, and assessing. (TESOL 2008: 65)

TESOL elaborates on the role of learners' identities and cultures in the learning of English, and they describe how teachers must be savvy about cross-cultural differences to establish an equitable, respectful learning environment. In K-12[2] contexts, issues of culture are equally prominent in teacher-preparation and are considered paramount in the know-how an ESL teacher requires (Staehr Fenner & Kuhlman 2012). While there is much more to share about culture and context that affects adult L2 teaching and learning, the scope of this article allows only this brief reminder of their importance.

Issues of language and language acquisition cannot be divorced from LESLLA teachers' work as literacy instructors, and the following section explores this crucial aspect of LESLLA teaching: LESLLA teachers as language teachers.

1.6 Knowledge of Language and Language Acquisition

> A major part of research in language teaching and teacher learning over the last 15 or 20 years has involved the rediscovery of the basic truth that in language teaching, it is the teaching that is most important, not the language: that language teaching is first and foremost an educational enterprise, not a linguistic one. (Johnston & Goettsch 2000: 439)

Following the scholarship that established a *general* teacher knowledge base, language educators and language teacher-educators worked to clarify the knowledge base of *language* teachers in the 1990's and early 2000's. While previous to this period the knowledge base may have prioritized an in-depth knowledge of the target language and linguistics, the scholarship of the 1990's and 2000's moved the language teacher knowledge base to be re-conceptualized (Freeman 2002; Freeman & Johnson 1998; Johnston & Goettsch 2000; Woods, 1996). Freeman and Johnson, in what they call their "professional position" (1998: 405) propose that the language teacher knowledge base needs to address three main areas: the teacher-learner, the social context, and the pedagogical process (ibid.). This view moves away from the binary of 'subject matter' and

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2 K-12 refers to Kindergarten – 12th grade in the U.S., the public school system for children.

'learners' with methodology as the means from one to the other. Departing from this transmission view of language teaching, the Freeman & Johnson model sees the three domains (teacher-learner, social context, and pedagogical process) as interdependent (ibid.). 'Teacher-learners' are individuals with prior experiences as teachers and students, and their practice of teaching changes and develops over time. The 'social contexts' of language teaching vary greatly, and schools and schooling contain powerful currents of socialization, power, and access that cannot be ignored. The 'pedagogical process' draws from second language acquisition theory, but Freeman and Johnson suggest that it is in fact *not* at the core of language teaching: "Teaching is an activity cannot be separated from either the person of the teacher as a learner or the contexts of schools and schooling in with it is done. Each domain is contingent on the other" (ibid.: 410). Language teaching is much more than a matter of knowing a language and knowing a bit about teaching.

Using general education teacher knowledge as a starting point, the language teacher knowledge base recognizes that "learning to teach is affected by the sum of a person's experiences, some figuring more prominently than others, and that it requires the acquisition and interaction of knowledge and beliefs about oneself as a teacher, of the content to be taught, of one's students, and of classroom life" (Freeman & Johnson 1998: 401). Each language teacher brings a great deal of him/herself to the language classroom, including, as unpublished Borg's 1997 model points out, his/her schooling and professional coursework (as cited in Borg 2003). These experiences interact with the teaching context and the classroom practice itself in complicated ways, all contributing to how teachers think and act as language teachers (ibid.). He states, "Teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choice by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs," (ibid.: 81). A key research study by Woods (1996) was conducted with ESL teachers in Canada and explored their planning and decision-making processes. Woods found it difficult to divorce belief and knowledge in his findings, and instead proposed the concept of BAK: beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge. BAK, he writes, "seemed to underlie everything that the teachers did and said," (ibid: 282). Such empirical findings suggest that teaching is a deeply personal endeavor, as it is work conducted by individuals with varying beliefs, assumptions and knowledge.

In addition to findings such as Woods' (1996), much has been written specifically about language teachers' previous experience as language learners as paramount in their practice. As Borg writes, "Teachers' prior language learning experiences establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives," (2003: 88). This fact, that a teachers' own language learning experience is paramount to his/her teaching, presents a complication for LESLLA teachers. LESLLA instructors (unless they themselves were once LESLLA learners, which is unlikely) enter the language teaching endeavor as

literate adults. Even if a LESLLA teacher is multilingual and learned an additional language as an adult, he/she cannot know what it is to learn that language and at the same time be acquiring first time alphabetic literacy as an adult learner. LESLLA teachers are necessarily guessing at what will work best for their learners based on how their students respond to their instruction, their own language learning experiences, and what they know of early literacy instruction. Their memories of learning to read reach back to their childhoods, and likely to learning to read a language they already knew how to speak, and in a school and with teachers who spoke their home language. For LESLLA instructors, there is less 'common ground' with her students that with other language teachers. It is possible that this disconnect of experience blurs and perhaps hinders how literacy and language development is implemented for learners.

Building L2 literacy is a formidable task. Given the dearth of available materials and research for LESLLA students specifically, LESLLA educators often reach to resources developed for young new readers. As argued above, a person, regardless of age, must still develop the same five components of reading (phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension), progress through common stages of readers, develop oral skills, and be sufficiently motivated to read in order for reading to grasp hold. LESLLA educators are not wrong to look to the years of experience and expertise in the field of early literacy development in children. But how we teach phonics to a five year old may look different than how we might teach phonics to his 55 year old grandmother. Furthermore, the motivation present in a nine year old as she devours the Harry Potter series will differ from and call for different instruction for a 40 year old father looking for work to support his children. While the components of reading and the stages of becoming a reader may hold their consistency across age groups, knowledge of adult learning provides a vital piece of the LESLLA teacher knowledge base.

1.7 Knowledge of Adults as Learners

In 1968, Malcolm Knowles altered the playing field for adult educators by offering "a new label and a new technology" of adult learning (1968: 351). Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy, defined as the art and science of helping adults learn. While this term is not widely used, Knowles was instrumental in causing adult learning theory to emerge as a distinct field of study. Many adult educators join the field after first working with children, and much of the work of adult learning theorists has centered on contrasting adult learners with younger learners. *Does age matter, and if so, how? How does the nature of learning change over the lifetime? Is teaching adults inherently a different task than teaching children? How can teachers best approach their work with fellow adults?* These questions have caused much debate and discussion in the field in the past thirty years. In this section, first the basic tenets of adult learning

theory are presented. Then I connect this scholarship to literacy instruction, as the work of LESLLA is the specific work of teaching adults who are new readers.

Knowles' early work in andragogy has persisted, as have the pillars underlying his theory. Drawn first from his 1980 text and then evolving through his work in the 1980s, Knowles contends that the adult learner is someone who 1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning, 2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, 3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles, 4)is problem-centered, interested in immediate application of knowledge, and 5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Knowles 1978). These assumptions of adult learning have not persisted without encountering criticism, particularly as to how they constitute a 'learning theory' and to what extent these pillars really differ from working with children (see Merriam 2001).

In the early 1990s, Knowles and his colleagues continued to tweak and re-package the basic assumptions of adult learning. The most current way of presenting them is duplicated below in Table 3, along with a brief explanation of each assumption (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson 2005).

TABLE 3 Assumptions of adult learning (Knowles et al. 2005: 64–68)

1. The need to know.
   Adults need to know why they need to learn something before setting out to learn it.
2. The learners' self concept.
   Adults believe they are responsible for their own decisions and lives. They need to be seen by others and treated by others as capable of self direction.
3. The role of the learners' experiences.
   Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths. Teachers can expect a wider range of individual differences among adult learners than among younger learners.
4. Readiness to learn.
   Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
5. Orientation to learning.
   Adults are life-centered, task-centered, and problem-centered in their orientation to learning. They are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with real problems. They learn best in the context of application to real-life situations.
6. Motivation
   Adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, for example), but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, etc.)

The assumptions of adult learning above describe a context that prioritizes contextualized, responsive, respectful learning environments where instruction is transparent, intentional, and relentlessly relevant to learners. These tenets refer to all adult learners, and they have informed the work of teaching adults in settings as varied as corporate training, community education, and preparing professionals across any number of fields.

In the next section, focus is narrowed to adult literacy instruction, a fairly young and underresearched area. Highly informed by research and professional wisdom in teaching young people to read, adult literacy scholars draw heavily from colleagues in K-12 contexts.

1.7.1 Connections between Adult and K-12 Literacy Instruction

While there is much more research and attention paid to children learning to read, two recent reviews of research have focused squarely on adult literacy. The first is from the National Institute for Literacy: *Adult Education Literacy Instruction, A Review of the Research* (Kruidenier, MacArthur, & Wrigley 2010). The second is from the National Research Council: *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction, Options for Practice and Research* (National Research Council 2012). Both groups of scholars found far more research with children than with adults improving their literacy, and in the end both groups drew from this body of research when compiling its recommendations. The National Research Council writes:

> In the absence of research with adults whose literacy is not at high levels, the committee concluded that it is reasonable to apply finds from the large body of research on learning and literacy with other populations (mainly younger students and relatively well-educated adults) with some adaptations to account for the developmental level and unique challenges of adult learners. (National Research Council 2012: 2.)

Almost in chorus, the National Institute for Literacy writes:

> Those practices based on a strong, carefully synthesized K-12 research base may provide the best source of promising ideas for instruction with adults. The skills necessary for successful reading are the same or, at least, very close to being the same in adults and children…A priority for research with AE learners should be to evaluate the use of promising approaches developed at the K-12 level with adults. (Kruidenier et al. 2010: 14.)

These statements support the idea that as adult educators, we indeed we have much to learn from the work of literacy instruction with young learners, and adaptations are absolutely necessary. Early literacy instruction with young learners has promise for older learners, but LESLLA instructors need to first identify and adapt these practices before taking them into their classrooms.

This act of learning about and carefully and thoughtfully adapting practicing from one teaching context to another is not an endeavor to be undertaken lightly. It requires what has been termed "adaptive expertise," an objective for teaching practitioners that has gained recognition of late and is one

of the central pieces of teacher education efforts nationwide ("Teacher Education Redesign Initiative, University of Minnesota" n.d.). *Adaptive experts*, as opposed to *routine experts*, are teachers who have high levels of both efficiency and innovation and are flexible and responsive to their learners (Hatano & Inagaki 1986). They are lifelong learners who continually expand the breadth and depth of their expertise (Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2007). Because of their high level of innovativeness, adaptive experts can "move beyond existing routines and…rethink key ideas, practices, and even values in order to change what they are doing" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald, & Zeichner 2005).

For LESLLA teachers, adaptive expertise is critical; LESLLA learners are unlike any other group of adult ESL students, and previous teaching experience and preparation are insufficient. LESLLA teachers need to not only understand a great deal about language, literacy, pedagogy, and adult learning, but they must also be able to act on this knowledge in a complex learning environment. This expertise can develop only when LESLLA teachers know the 'whether and why' of what they are teaching and have moved beyond 'knowing that' and 'knowing how.' In 1981, Elbaz conducted an in-depth one-teacher case study of a high school English teacher (1981). While Elbaz does not use the term "adaptive expertise" it seems the initial seeds surrounding today's term are planted here. Elbaz uses the term "practical knowledge" (ibid.) almost synonymously with how Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2007) would talk about "adaptive expertise" 20–25 years later. In her case study, practical knowledge is "the autonomous decision-making function of the teacher in adopting, adapting, and developing materials appropriate to his or her situation" and "complex type of action and decision making" stressing that teachers are "decision makers" and problem solvers (Elbaz 1981: 43). While Elbaz's study was quite limited and only described her one participant's adaptive expertise and decision making processes, her case no doubt echoes that of many teachers' experiences.

LESLLA teachers who are adaptive experts address the dearth of published materials available specifically for this level as well. While there is certainly more available now than 10 years ago (see CAELA: ESL Resources n.d.), LESLLA teachers still have to hunt for good, appropriate books and classroom aids. But an adaptive expert is able to work with what's available and respond with efficiency, flexibility, and know-how to make materials meant for other contexts work for her students. LESLLA teachers use materials originally meant for children, for English-speaking new readers, and for literate adult ESL students and may find that they can be adapted creatively and used effectively in LESLLA classrooms. Instead of despairing at the lack of available materials for our LESLLA learners, adaptive experts can respond with innovation.

1.8 Conclusion: Building the LESLLA Teacher Knowledge Base

LESLLA learners are adult second language students who are learning to read for the first time in a new language, a process that follows the same general path for a child learner but with some important differences for an adult. As Durgunoğlu & Oney (2002: 247) point out, "Adults have more experience and background knowledge about the world and have proficiencies that enable them to function in a society even though their literacy skills may be limited. However, experience and background knowledge may not be very useful in the initial stages of literacy acquisition". New readers begin with emergent skills and move through beginning and transitional stages of literacy before becoming able readers and writers. Teachers assist in the process by providing a motivating learning setting for instruction in alphabetics, vocabulary and academic language, fluency, and comprehension. In the case of L2 learners, effective instruction includes a great deal of support of oral language and general English development while building background knowledge that makes texts comprehensible. LESLLA learners need all of these components as well, and they bring to the endeavor vast life experience, as well as a need for literacy to be relevant to their lives outside of the classroom. Researchers continue to uncover how LESLLA learners are similar and different from other new readers, as such students are acquiring literacy in a particularly complex cultural, social, linguistic, and educational context. But with time and dedicated teachers, literacy in English can ease learners' resettlement, and LESLLA learners can participate more fully in their communities.

LESLLA learners offer educators a rich constellation of qualities. They are new readers, and they are (im)migrants and refugees. They are adult language learners, learning to read for the first time in a language that many do not yet speak well. While they are learning to navigate a new community and discovering the alphabetic principle, they are also acquiring a new language. LESLLA educators must pull together knowledge from many areas to do this work well. The LESLLA teacher wears many hats; she is a teacher, a resettlement worker, an adult learning expert, and a language instructor. These four areas of expertise all interact with her critical role as reading specialist, as early reading instruction is at the core of LESLLA education. To balance these many roles gracefully is no small feat. To date many teacher preparation programs have ignored these learners, and few professional development opportunities are available (Vinogradov & Liden 2008; Vinogradov 2012). How does a LESLLA instructor learn what she needs to know to carry out her work effectively? How can teacher educators address these specific needs? While there are no easy answers, and the field of LESLLA continues to explore these topics to improve LESLLA teaching and learning worldwide.

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2 CONVERGING PERSPECTIVES IN THE LESLLA CONTEXT

Raichle Farrelly, American University of Armenia

Abstract

There has been a surge in Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) learners in adult language programs. In response to the growth of this learner population in language classes, there has been increased interest in the professionalization of the field of adult education specific to work with LESLLA learners. As researcher and practitioner awareness and understanding of the LESLLA context continues to expand, necessary and qualitative transformations of second language (L2[3]) teaching and L2 teacher education are taking place.

This article provides a glimpse into a larger ethnographic case study that explores the teaching worlds of two LESLLA teachers working in community-based language programs for adult learners in the United States. Guided by an activity theory framework (Engeström 1991, 1999), this article highlights the relationships and tensions between the teachers and the tools available to them within their teaching activity systems. This particular discussion relies on the shared experiences of the teachers to highlight the necessity and benefit of promoting professional collaborative learning opportunities for LESLLA teachers.

Keywords: second language teacher education, adult language learners, literacy education, activity theory, LESLLA

[3] L2 refers to any language learned after the native language.

2.1 Introduction

In the United States, increasing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) who have not yet developed literacy skills due to interrupted or unavailable formal schooling in their home countries are being enrolled in community-based adult English language programs. In addition to adding rich diversity and often newfound vitality to their new communities, newcomers with immigrant or refugee status have an impact on various systems within their local community, including public schools, workforce services, housing and community-based English as an Additional Language (EAL) service providers. In addition to the basic need to acquire English to live in the US, newcomers are often required by resettlement organizations to participate in EAL programs until they have secured employment in the local community. Many of the community-based service providers have long waiting lists of ELLs who are seeking EAL classes or a one-to-one tutor.

In many programs, there are not enough English language teachers to serve the growing number of adult student populations. The community-based teachers that are available often experience a general sense of helplessness related to providing instruction that is appropriate and effective for LESLLA learners. Many L2 teacher education programs focus on techniques and strategies that have been successful with literate learners and those with formal education experience. While some of these strategies, such as Total Physical Response (TPR), are successful with LESLLA learners in promoting oral language development and building vocabulary, the majority of the strategies have been developed based on research with literate learners. They are often not effective in the LESLLA context. In addition, many EAL instructors in community-based contexts are volunteer teachers who are trained for their work in the classroom through brief, often one-shot workshops.

One aim of this study was to create a space to share LESLLA teachers' perspectives in an effort to shed light on the relationships and tensions that impact their day to day lives as teachers. The overarching goal was to contribute to what we know about teacher education, professional learning and program management within the context of community-based adult language programs. This article is part of a larger study that uncovers several tensions within the activity of teaching, as experienced by teachers while they interact with others (e.g., students, colleagues and administrators), expand their knowledge base through experience, and attempt to adapt teaching materials for teaching in the LESLLA context. The discussion provided by this article centers on the challenges and tensions that necessitate professional learning opportunities for work in this context.

2.2 Teacher Learning

Teacher learning is considered a domain within teacher cognition that attempts to connect the important psychological and social factors involved in becoming a teacher with the processes involved in learning to teach (e.g., lesson planning, classroom management, mastering subject matter knowledge, examining learner characteristics, etc.) (Borg 2008; Calderhead 1988). Viewing teacher learning as a strand of teacher knowledge inquiry has strengthened the connection between teacher knowledge and teacher education (Borg 2008). Teacher learning involves the sense making that teachers employ when mapping their knowledge to their practice while continually reflecting on the interactions between them. Teacher learning is not a process that ends with the culmination of a teacher education program or training session but is an on-going endeavor that spans the length of a teacher's career.

2.2.1 Contextualizing Theory and Practice for Pre-Service Teachers

Language teacher preparation often depends too heavily on using methods that are separated from their theoretical underpinnings and from the context for which they are most appropriate (Tedick & Walker 1994). Methods are often presented in a vacuum and methodology courses are treated like a "pedagogical catch-all" for teacher preparation programs, with an emphasis on a selection of particular accepted approaches (e.g., the Natural Approach or Structured Input/Output) (Tedick & Walker 1994: 307). In a best-case scenario, theory may be tied into the methods course at the surface level with an introduction to prominent theories such as Comprehensible Input, Schema Theory, Interaction Hypothesis, and Noticing. Course designers, assuming the goal is to impart expert knowledge to the teacher-learners, often decide which theories to teach prior to meeting their students. In this way, course design takes place without consideration of teacher-learners' previous teaching and learning experiences or the teaching contexts in which they have been or will be working (Johnson 1996). Consequently, it is rare in L2 teacher education programs that teachers are prepared to teach L2 literacy level classes for adults, thus this professional knowledge base often develops through the act of teaching.

2.2.2 Honoring and Building Upon Teachers' Existing Knowledge

Teacher educators must take into consideration the various types of knowledge that teacher-learners will need to be successful in their respective contexts and provide them with the tools for theorizing practice in an effort to make obsolete the perception of a theory-practice gap. "When students predict, criticize, and analyze their mentor's teaching, they start to 'theorize practice'. This is the starting point for connecting theory to reality" (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt 2003: 200). They will regularly tap into this 'theorizing practice' skill set

throughout their careers as they move through various teaching contexts, encounter diverse learner populations, attempt to explore emerging theories on teaching and learning, and all the while, attempt to find their voice and shape their identity as teachers.

In considering what type of knowledge is integral within the context of language teacher education, Freeman & Johnson (1998) propose a reconceptualization of the knowledge base. It is now widely acknowledged in both general and language teacher education programs that practicing teachers and the professional knowledge they possess are the cornerstone to improving teaching and, thereby, teacher preparation programs (Burton 2000; Clarke 1994; Gore & Gitlin 2004). Additionally, teacher-learners' prior knowledge and beliefs should not be extracted from the teacher preparation process (Burns 1996; Gatbonton 2008; Tsui 2003). Rather than solely transmitting 'expert' knowledge and educational theory, teacher educators should focus on the ongoing development of practical knowledge and highlight the existing knowledge that teacher-learners have available to them through prior educational experiences.

If teacher educators accept the value of teachers' knowledge in teacher development, teacher education programs must be reformulated to integrate and balance theory (conceptual knowledge) and practice (practical knowledge) (Freeman & Johnson 1998; Laursen 2007). In addition, programs should actively promote honoring the importance of teachers' practical professional knowledge (Gore & Gitlin 2004) and give more credence to the beliefs, assumptions and values that they bring to the teacher education experience. Freeman & Johnson (1998: 405) argue that "for the purposes of educating teachers, any theory of SLA, any classroom methodology, or any description of … English language as content must be understood against the backdrop of teachers' professional lives, within the settings where they work and within the circumstances of that work". Building on the L2 teacher education piece, however, we must also consider the development and integration of teacher knowledge for those who completed their L2 teacher education programs long ago and now face new challenges and new learner populations in the classroom.

2.2.3 Community-Based Adult Education – Framing the Context

Adult education programs in the US (e.g., Adult Basic Education (ABE) and adult EAL programs) offer classes to both native English speakers and ELLs to help them achieve goals related to literacy, job skills, family, transportation, and further education (Young 2009). Entities that provide adult literacy and EAL services include "…local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, libraries, public or private nonprofits, public housing authorities, correctional agencies, family literacy providers, or consortia of for-profit agencies" (Sabatini, Ginsburg, & Russell 2002: 19). The growing demand to professionalize the field of ABE in the face of limited funds presents a conundrum for these organizations, yet, they persevere with the strength of dedicated program administrators, staff, and teachers who are all committed to providing educational services to adults within their communities.

The changing learner profiles of adults acquiring L2 oral and literacy skills has resulted in an increase in students who have little to no formal education experience and in many recent cases (e.g., certain newly arrived refugee populations), no first language literacy skills to build upon when acquiring English oral and literacy skills (Young 2009). Teachers must not only be aware of the challenges faced by the ELLs, but also a host of other components that comprise the overall knowledge base that LESLLA teachers rely on to inform their practice (Vinogradov & Liden 2009; see Table 1). Developing this knowledge base is a process that demands prolonged and meaningful exchanges with learners, engagement with the emerging research within this context, collaborations with peers and mentors in the field, and continued involvement in context specific professional learning opportunities that support sustained teacher growth.

TABLE 1 Knowledge base for LESLLA teachers (Vinogradov & Liden 2009)

1. The refugee experience	6. Key research
2. Types of literacy-level learners	7. Components of reading
3. Literacy in childhood vs. adulthood	8. Balanced literacy
4. Emergent readers	9. Approaches to teaching literacy
5. Second language acquisition	10. Connections L1/L2 literacies

2.2.4 Promoting Professional Learning for Practicing Teachers in Adult Education

As teachers transition into their careers, develop their identities as practitioners, and increase their knowledge base, it is imperative that they are given ample opportunities for professional development through on-going teacher learning. Britzman (2003) honors the challenges faced by mainstream teachers, which mirror those of language teachers across contexts. They all bring their own stories and trajectories of teacher learning to the teaching experience. Britzman explores the 'struggle for voice' that teachers undergo as they face the unexpected tensions of the teaching profession. She notes,

> teachers are confronted with a difficult existential truth about education rarely discussed and, more often than not, actively avoided: trying to teach is deeply unsettling and conflictive because experience itself – […] 'practice' – is a paradox, an unanticipated social relation, and a problem of interpretation (Britzman 2003: 3).

As teachers embark into their new professional world, their take on the theories and propositions from their teacher education programs will continue to grow and morph alongside their practice, through their interactions and in negotiating the contradictions they encounter in their professional reality. They may be faced with the unsettling reality that their L2 teacher preparation was only the beginning and their professional knowledge base needs a lot of shaping.

When considering the best approaches to professional development for teachers in general and teachers of adult ELLs in particular, it is widely accepted that they should be collaborative and teacher-directed. According to Johnson (2009), situating professional development in communities of practice allows for peers to scaffold one another's learning. This chapter demonstrates through an ethnographic lens how a lack of professional, collaborative learning opportunities can stifle teacher development and isolate teachers, especially those working in the LESLLA context wherein extensive resources are not readily available.

2.3 Activity Theory

This study is influenced by the sociocultural perspective of human learning and, therefore, embraces the epistemological stance that cognitive development can only be explored and understood in relation to the context, culture, and communities within which the development takes place (Vygotsky 1978). This perspective also takes into account that all human action is mediated through the use of cultural artifacts and tools. The present study explores teachers' situated practices through the lens of activity theory, investigating how they use and develop their knowledge bases as tools for mediating activity and negotiating meaning in the classroom and within the larger macro structures that comprise their teaching context. Activity theory allows for richer conceptualizations of individual experiences, acknowledging that human activity takes place in collective practice, communities, and institutions and, therefore, is shaped and influenced by multiple viewpoints, relationships, tensions, and histories.

2.3.1 Foundations of Activity Theory

Activity theory is a theoretical framework that can be applied to make sense of human practices within a given culture and context. Human practices or actions are revealed through their interactions with their environment and explored through the basic unit of 'activity' or 'what people do' (Engeström 1987, 1991, 1999). Activity theory is often viewed as an evolved theory with contemporary variants grounded in the early work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky posits that humans interact with their environment through the use of tools and cultural artifacts that mediate efforts to achieve certain goals or objectives. This notion has come to be known as the mediational model, which stresses that interactions between humans and goals are not direct, but rather require the mediation of tools.

Leontiev (1978) expanded on the mediational model to incorporate human activity and the interactions within practical activity, which arguably influence the choice of meditational tools. Leontiev viewed all activity as being comprised of actions carried out by a subject through the use of tools, which result in

particular operations aimed at a certain goal or motive, represented as the object (Engeström & Miettinen 1999). To give an example from education, the teacher (subject) uses a Think-Pair-Share exercise (tool) in order to help her students achieve certain learning objectives (object).

Engeström (1999) viewed early versions of activity theory as lacking the potential to represent actions as elements of a collective activity system. Activity theory, according to Engeström (2001) can best be understood in light of five key principles: 1) the prime unit of analysis is a collective object-oriented activity system mediated through the use of tools; 2) activity systems are multivoiced; 3) activity systems have historicity; 4) contradictions are central to transformation and development; and, 5) long term expansive cycles of transformation are possible in activity systems. In this discussion, the central principles include the (1) object-oriented activity system mediated through the use of tools and (2) the inherent contradictions. I will expand upon those two principles to foreground the findings and justify the choice of activity theory as the analytical framework.

2.3.2 Activity System as Prime Unit of Analysis

A key principle to activity theory specifies that a specific object-oriented activity system must be the prime unit of analysis. The minimum core components for an activity system must include subject, object, mediating tools, rules, community and division of labor, represented by Engeström's Triangles (Cole & Engeström 1993; Engeström 1987) (see Figure 1).

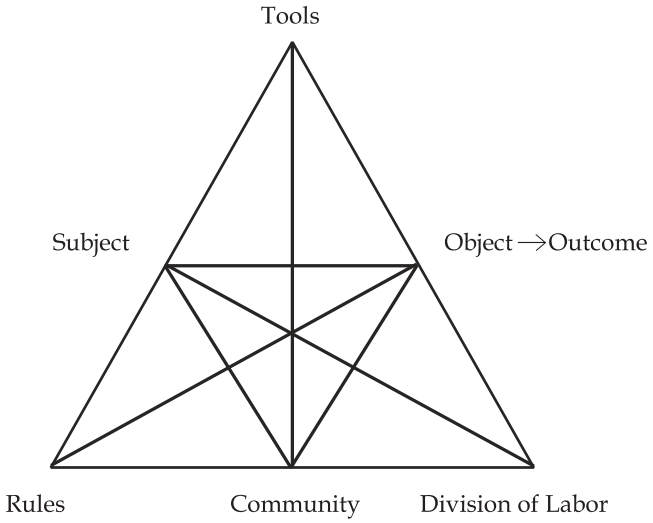

FIGURE 1 Engeström's Triangles (Engeström 1987: 78). Reprinted with permission.

Modeling the activity system (see Figure 2) requires identifying the elements that constitute the various components of the activity system. For example, the tools component in the activity systems of this study includes teacher

knowledge, teaching materials, assessment instruments, etc. This article will only touch upon subject, object and mediating tools, and thus those components and relevant elements will be extrapolated here.

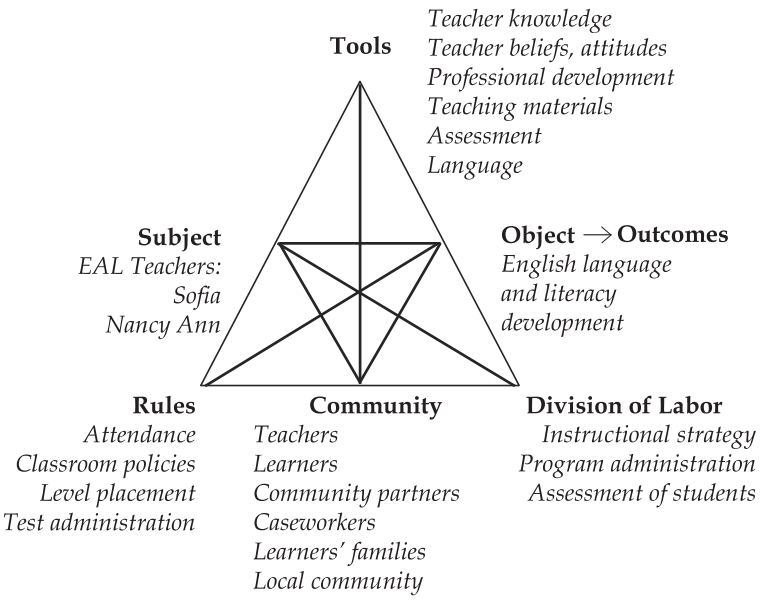

FIGURE 2 Modeling the activity system of the observed EAL classes.

In an activity system, the *subject* component is the doer of the action or the actor in the activity system. Analysis of the activity system takes place from the point of view of this individual or group. In other words, given the activity system of a language classroom, if the analysis is exploring what the teacher does in the classroom, the teacher would be the subject.

The *object* component of the activity system can be conceived of as that which the activity system is acting upon or toward which it is directed. By extension, there is an *outcome* component in the activity system that is generally conceived of as the goal (motive) of the activity system. As the activity acts upon the object, the aim is transformation of or within that object such that the outcome is reached (e.g., literacy development).

The *tools* comprise an integral component in the transformation of the object toward reaching the outcome. The elements that make up the tools component may be physical or material, such as textbooks, assessments and handouts; however, they may also include psychological or cognitive artifacts, such as language, beliefs, knowledge, and procedures. Tools either help or hinder the subject in carrying out the actions, depending on their availability, their usefulness for certain applications or their effect on the interactions between the subject and object.

2.3.3 Contradictions

Another key principle of activity theory is the essential function of contradictions as catalysts for transformation within the activity system. "Contradictions are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" that can lead to both conflicts and innovations (Engeström 2001: 137). They arise with the evolution of an activity system and the resultant interactions among components within the activity system. For example, they may occur with the introduction of a more advanced tool to the activity system, such as technology in the classroom, which *initially* may complicate the activity or limit the capacity of teachers or students to carry out tasks.

Contradictions are a critical tenet to activity theory and their centrality speaks to the inherent nature of conflict, contradiction, and tension in human activity. The opportunities for development that exist when contradictions are identified support the notion that they do not reflect failure in a system and should not be seen as obstacles or signs of weakness. Rather, they can be seen as the "illuminative hinges through which participants in an activity can reflect on their activity system's developmental trajectory and understand its dynamics" (Foot 2001: 12). It is the power of activity theory to acknowledge the dynamic nature of activity systems that makes this analytical tool ideal for the present study. Engeström identifies and explains four levels of contradiction within an activity system. For the purposes of this chapter, only secondary level contradictions are described below as the basis for analysis of the activity systems in this discussion.

A level two or *secondary* contradiction is a tension that arises between two interacting components of the activity system, such as subject and tool, subject and community or community and rules. In a study of a Korean EFL teacher, Kim (2011) discovered tensions between the subject (the EFL instructor) and the community (her students) related to the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches in the classroom. The instructor (subject) struggled to negotiate national curricular reform (rule), which required her to implement CLT (tool) in her classes, and her students' views (community) that these activities were irrelevant for their success on the high stakes national exams (outcomes). Relationships within an activity system are naturally complicated, but identifying inherent contradictions can lead to resolution and subsequent transformations aimed at improving upon a given activity system.

2.4 Study Design

This qualitative ethnographic case study design guided by activity theory aims to provide a holistic view of the situated practice of two community-based LESLLA teachers. The investigation uncovered some of the context-dependent relationships and tensions that shape both their professional knowledge and

practice. This discussion specifically highlights the tension present when the subject lacks access to a key tool for successful action toward an objective.

2.4.1 Participants

Sofia and Nancy Ann[4] are English language teachers in adult community-based programs in the United States. Sofia is a career teacher with over two decades of teaching experience in the EAL context, however her experience with LESLLA learners only extends back five years. Nancy Ann is a retired nurse who later joined the teaching force after receiving a BA TESOL. While they have varying levels of general teaching experience, they have the same amount (five years) of specific experience related to teaching LESLLA learners. Their students are primarily refugee populations from various countries in Africa and Asia.

2.4.2 Data Collection

Data was collected over the course of one year. The multiple sources of data for this study include 20 in-class observations per teacher, semi-structured interviews and relevant documents, including teaching materials and teachers' reflective writing. The goals for the *observations* in this case study included describing the phenomenon in its natural setting and understanding the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants. I observed the 80-minute EAL classes, compiled field notes and memos about the classroom activity (e.g., teacher behaviors, student behaviors, interactions, materials, topics, etc.) that contributed to a deeper understanding of the teachers' practices. I was a nonparticipant observer, thereby taking no role in the class beyond observer.

Throughout and following the period of observation, I conducted semi-structured *interviews* with the teachers to explore their classroom decisions, gain their perspectives on my interpretations, and determine which challenges they identified in their practice within this context. Activity theory, as a research tool, aims to not only uncover challenges, but transform the activity system to address the tensions. Consequently, our discussions often served to generate ideas that might target the tensions the teachers were experiencing in their work. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to influence the general direction with some guiding questions, but I maintained flexibility to add follow-up questions to the participants' responses and to allow for elaborate conversational responses from the participants.

Documents were analyzed to give further information about teachers' training and their classroom practices. From the classroom context, the documents included materials used by the teacher for instructional and assessment purposes, as well as participants' written reflections about their classroom practices and beliefs about teaching LESLLA learners.

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4 Sofia and Nancy Ann are pseudonyms.

2.4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis happened concurrently with data collection throughout the course of the study. Data collection ended when the on-going analysis indicated that new themes ceased to emerge (Merriam 2009). In this study, the themes emerged following a focus on the interactions between the components of the activity systems (e.g., the teacher (subject) interacting with the textbooks (tools) as a means of accomplishing the goal of developing students' literacy (object)). A theme would be represented by the predominant contradiction between components (e.g., a secondary contradiction between the teacher's perceived needs relative to teaching materials and the reality of what teaching materials are available). The observational data (field notes) were coded according to the activity theory schemes that targeted components of the activity system. First, the activity system was decomposed to identify the make-up of each component (i.e., subject, tools, community, rules, etc.). For example, all elements that comprise the tools component were identified (e.g., teaching materials, assessments, students' background knowledge, etc.). Next the activity system was coded to reflect the interacting components (i.e., the code S-T marked a relationship between a teacher (subject) and the tools she implemented, such as texts, handouts, and assessments). These relationships were then investigated for contradictions, which served as the central themes in the study (Merriam 2009). An example contradiction existed in the relationship between the teacher (subject) and the available teaching materials (tool). In the perspective of the teachers, there was a distinct lack of level-appropriate texts for literacy level learners, which subsequently demanded that teachers constantly adapt or create materials. The interview data was organized into existing themes uncovered through the activity theoretical analysis of the observational data. Some new themes were added to accommodate themes that did not emerge during the observations. For example, it was during the interviews that professional development emerged as an important tool in the activity system. The relationship between the teachers and the professional development tool is the central focus of this article. Finally, the classroom documents were considered or referred to when reflecting upon the teachers' classroom practices.

2.5 Findings

2.5.1 Modeling the Instructional Activity Systems

Sofia and Nancy Ann are the *subjects* of their respective activity systems, and as such, the activity systems within which they operate are considered from their perspectives. The objects and tools of the two activity systems are quite similar and therefore are described jointly. The *object* (objective) for each activity system can be labeled as English language and literacy development. The

outcomes vary slightly from one activity system to the next as they are shaped by the teachers' beliefs about what their learners' goals are, what their aim should be according to their respective programs, and, ultimately, what they think will best serve their learners in the real world. Underlying both activity systems is a desire to empower learners through increased access to a print literate society and increased confidence during interactions with the English-speaking world.

The *tools* within each activity system present the greatest complexity for this model. There are both cognitive and physical tools within each activity system. The cognitive tools include the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that shape their decision making in the classroom. Physical tools include the texts and materials that the teachers use to mediate their instruction, as well as in-class assessments and choice of learning activities. Professional learning opportunities also serve as important tools in each activity system, guiding teachers' decision-making processes and providing resources for personal and professional development.

2.5.2 Contradictions in the Activity Systems

In exploring the two activity systems, I uncovered several noteworthy relationships between components of each activity system. Some of the interactions between components in these relationships presented tensions or contradictions, the majority of which were at the secondary level (i.e., between two components within one activity system). This discussion centers on the tension between the teachers (as subjects of their activity systems) and their access to professional learning opportunities (tools).

2.5.2.1 Absence of Professional Learning Opportunities as a Key Tension

One of the greatest tensions present in the activity system of each teacher existed at the level of access to professional learning opportunities, which would ideally serve as an effective mediational tool and resource for the teaching activity. Professional learning communities hinge on the availability of opportunities for collaboration among members of a community of practice. Collaboration within a program can greatly enhance teacher learning and professional development and conversely, the absence of opportunities for collaboration can lead to feelings of isolation, lack of power and frustration – all of which surfaced in conversations with Sofia and to a lesser degree, with Nancy Ann.

Nancy Ann's Reflections on Collaborative Professional Learning

In her teaching context, Nancy Ann co-taught a class with another instructor. Her co-instructor taught for the first hour of class, focusing on life skills (e.g., family, shopping, transportation). Being very eager to learn, get new ideas and improve her own practice, Nancy Ann always observed her colleague during the first hour. She told me, "I like to import information and techniques from

other teachers and have done so shamelessly." During the second hour of this class, Nancy Ann shifted the learners' focus to developing early literacy skills using *Sam and Pat* as her core text. The *Sam and Pat* series relies on a decodable text and controlled vocabulary so that learners can decode using their phonics skills and background knowledge about previously encountered vocabulary. Nancy Ann also attributed much of her teacher development to her student teaching, which afforded her the opportunity to work with a mentor teacher who had extensive LESLLA teaching experience.

Nancy Ann's feelings about the value of collaboration evolved alongside her identity as a teacher. I asked Nancy Ann what her suggestion for professional development might look like. Her answer perhaps reflects her uncertainty with what might be possible, but she did express a desire to have more time for collaboration.

> Well, for me right now … within the school would be good - to hear from other teachers in the school cause they'd be able to give me ideas based on their knowledge of the same population. So that would be really helpful. And, so they understand the population and they understand … the constraints … of the, um, program and they have some knowledge of the materials that are available at the school. And so I think that would be really helpful on a regular basis. Maybe even just once a month. Ya know? Get together …
>
> But, because the way things are scheduled … so that there is no extra time … there is none. None of the teachers have any prep time. There's also no time between classes. She ends, I start. So, if we just had a block of time that was teacher time, to get together even just once a month, for an hour and everyone could get together and have … I mean it would have to be structured at first, or probably always … and have the topics that we're going to discuss. Ok, *What are some the new things that have worked for you? What are some problems? Could someone help solve those?*
>
> There are some people that have really so much experience that could be such good resources but you never get to sit down with them. We're always rushing off to everybody else's second job.

In addition to wanting to 'bounce ideas off one another' for the benefit of her practice, she also noted the value that collaboration would have for the learners. She recounted a story about a student in her literacy level class who made great gains between starting the program as a newcomer and moving out of her class into the next literacy level with another instructor. When this student moved into the next instructor's level one class, there was a breakdown for the student.

> We were pretty tight to the book and the next class, which was [Mike[5]] … and he's a fine teacher, but his way is very different and he doesn't coordinate curriculum with anybody else. So when they got in there, they couldn't figure out what the program was, let alone learn – too disconnected.

In this light, she saw the value in collaboration as a tool to support student movement through the program. She noted that different teaching styles may result in students being conditioned for 'doing school' in one way, only to be

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5 Mike is a pseudonym for another teacher who teaches Literacy and Level One ESL classes.

unprepared for the ways of 'doing school' in another classroom with another teacher.

Sofia's Reflections on Collaborative Professional Learning

In the case of Nancy Ann, the lack of collaboration presented a tension because of the impact she believes it could have on the students' ability to navigate through the program successfully. Sofia echoes this concern and additionally notes the need for more collaboration as a catalyst for teacher development and curriculum alignment.

> I would love to have some time to collaborate with my colleagues and find out what they are doing in their classes for so many obvious reasons. It would allow us to benefit from different techniques that we use. We could talk about the progress of individual students and move them when we feel they are ready. We could make sure that we're not duplicating curriculum.

She additionally noted the isolation that the teachers are experiencing in the program during several of our conversations. *Insufficient time* appeared to be one of the greatest predictors for the lack of interaction between teachers.

> I don't know about the other teachers who have lunches scheduled at a different time, but from what I have heard, few of them have the time to sit and relax and talk during their lunch. Most are entering attendance, planning classes, talking with students, or making copies.

According to Sofia, the lack of interaction between teachers negatively impacts the students because there is no discussion of aligning curriculum across levels and within levels. She shares, "as far as curriculum for the classes, it used to be that the teachers met regularly and we … and we had teams and stuff like that. The program is so disjointed now that nobody ever sees each other anymore." When I asked her about the other literacy level teachers in the program, she told me that neither of them has an ESL teaching background. In terms of what they are doing in their classes, she states, "I have absolutely no communication with them, I have *no* idea what they are doing in their classes." For Sofia, this is a problem because she sees students in the program moving within levels from one school term to the next, and she is concerned about the continued support they get for the gains she reports they made in her class.

Underlying Sofia's comments about the lack of collaboration was a simple desire to create a system of exchange among the teachers. Given the limited available materials for this learner population and the absence of an active professional learning community in this program, it was not surprising that Sofia craved interaction with her colleagues to gain access to ideas and resources.

> We're so isolated that nobody has any idea what anybody else is doing. There's no sharing of materials. It's just and um, so many other things that you need for literacy levels, you know … cutting up words, mounting to different colors … and it just takes so much time and no one has the time to do it and if someone does have time, then only that person has access to that. There's just no sharing of information.

One can sense in her words that there is a level of anger or resentment about her isolation. The lack of opportunity for collaboration seems to not only be affecting her sense of place in the program but also her sense of camaraderie with her colleagues. Perhaps, more accurately, she is simply upset to see what she perceives to be a deterioration of this program that she has belonged to for so long. She later shared, "It's very depressing to see the direction things are going. … There's absolutely no working together or, ya know, looking at curriculum as a step by step kind of thing … because there's no communication."

As far as workshops are concerned, Sofia said, "I think I have attended one professional development workshop that I felt was beneficial. Most have been a waste of my time." She expressed her frustration at the outside 'expert' being invited in to share information with her that she can find no use for when working with her current learner populations.

> They organize these options for professional development. Ok, you're gonna pretend to teach? Why not actually observe people teaching in the classroom and then talk about what's working and why. I would love to see what others are doing. I would love to see … rather than having someone come in who has no idea what I do in my classroom.

She noted how the teachers could grow from having the opportunity to observe one another, if they were simply given the chance to rotate out of their regularly scheduled classes. "It would be so beneficial. We all have such different teaching styles."

In the absence of well-established professional learning opportunities within the actual school, Sofia seeks professional development elsewhere. She notes that her "only opportunities for growth come from when [she goes] to conferences." The school district does provide 'paid leave to contract teachers (not hourly teachers) to take advantage of professional development opportunities, so Sofia does this as often as she can. She makes a point of applying early for the time off to attend conferences, such as the annual TESOL Convention. Although she doesn't receive additional financial support, she enjoys the chance to recharge a bit, see what people are doing and bring ideas back to try out in the classes.

However, conferences, like one-shot workshops run the risk of inspiring teachers momentarily, only to have teachers return to their teaching context and resort to their 'business as usual'. Sofia elaborated on a 'fabulous presentation' about using dictation in the classroom. Right after she told me about the presentation, she said,

> That's something that I didn't do enough and I came back and I started doing it and of course, that went out the window with ... [laughs] ... And of course, that didn't last long. You get new ideas and it's inspiring and then you go on to something else. And yeah, it's always inspiring to go watch someone else and you think, oh yea, I should try that.

This 'loss of inspiration' can be attributed to lack of synergy in the program. Teachers thrive, as do all social beings, in a community. In early interviews, I

anticipated the discussions to center on classroom practices for effective early literacy instruction, however the tension between the teachers' ability to effect change toward the desired outcome and their inability to access professional learning opportunities so colored most of our conversations that it presented itself as a dominating contradiction in their activity systems.

2.5.3 Theorizing Practice to Create Professional Learning

As noted in the previous section, Nancy Ann valued the chance to observe other teachers. She said that she learned a lot from debriefing with her mentor teacher after each lesson, "especially when I felt like my class was not the most successful." She also appreciated observing the co-instructor of her class to see "his techniques for teaching the alphabet and combining sounds." She said they often debriefed their lessons to discuss what did and did not work from day to day. For Nancy Ann, the 'practical' is where she is comfortable. She finds it challenging to make connections between theory and practice.

> I gotta say, in all the times that, even in my nursing career, and probably now, when you go to conferences you hear *theory theory, theory, theory, theory* and I think everybody would like to hear *practice*, all the practical little tips. Like somebody could say this is how I do it and it really worked for me because … and then you can say, well you know that's really neat and I'm going take this and this and this from what you said and try it out but when you're way up here [holds hand above head] theorizing, it's too big a leap. It's too big a leap for people that are more concerned with day-to-day practice.

I asked her how she attempts to connect the two, because I have witnessed her implementing some very effective strategies in the class. She replied,

> I think there's a disconnect, I think there is a disconnect and that's where it becomes you know, it becomes more stressful cause you think, *ok I understand this theory but how does it apply to me or how can I apply the benefits of this theory*? Just show me a technique that you use so I can steal it. Something like that … just, you know, I'm a concrete thinker.

She talked about a "little sliding thing" that her colleague, Evan[6] used to help students work on slides and blending. Nancy Ann described a 3x5 card with a word family (e.g., -an, -at, -ap) written on it and a hole cut out in place of the initial (or final) letter. Evan employed a long vertical strip with individual letters that would interact with the word family combinations (e.g., 'm', 'b', 's'). He moved the consonant strip up and down and the students read the words aloud as they were formed (e.g., man, bat, sap). Nancy Ann said that because "it's simple and catchy" the students liked it and were not confused by the changing consonants. Nancy Ann's penchant for the practical could enhance her capacity to theorize practice, if she had more opportunities to investigate the connections between theory and practice with colleagues.

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6 Evan is a pseudonym for another teacher who teaches literacy and low-beginner level classes.

Sofia tends to display more interest in theories and wants to know what is being developed in the field for work in the LESLLA context. As a career teacher, teaching shapes her identity in many ways, and she takes pride in her profession. In recent years, her teaching context has changed to reflect the new student populations and she now finds herself adapting to teach LESLLA learners after three decades of teaching literate learners only. This shift has presented her with new challenges and opportunities for growth.

> I just find it really fascinating and I know, uh, I know I could do a whole lot better if I had some time to think about what I do. I've just been doing literacy, you know, this if my fourth year and I just think I've learned so much through doing it and for me, you know, having students be able to identify a word, it's really important … and *first* and *last*. It's really important and it's [teaching concept of 'first' and 'last'] something that I just started working on this year and as I continue to do this I learn more.

In discussions about what she believes works with this learner population, it is apparent that what she knows and does is grounded in her own explorations into the theories and practices for teaching literacy. Sofia really enjoys puzzling over the best approaches to develop literacy skills in her class. She often shows a very complicated, if not scattered, reflective process that demonstrates her commitment to 'figuring it out' and theorizing her practice as best she can on her own. Sofia is working through a reconceptualization of her practical and pedagogical knowledge, which is influenced by her beliefs about what the students can and should be able to do. Her observation that she has to focus on such basics as *first* and *last* shows that she is reconsidering what is required of her as a teacher in this context. She encountered tensions in her work and upon reflection, realized that one approach for addressing this challenge was to teach *first* and *last* to help her students identify first and last sounds, first and last letters, first and last words, etc. Her expectations about how quickly they should develop certain skills or vocabulary are likely tied to her years of experience teaching higher level ELLs, but these expectations are evolving with her continued practice in this context. She attends to what developments they are making; she makes note of their progress and pays attention to social factors that impact their learning. She is concerned for the support they receive in other classes, and is able to relate their challenges to her own language learning experiences.

In noting that Sofia identified the contradictions in her own activity system and created solutions to address them, I am hoping to highlight the role of tensions as catalysts for change in a system. Sofia was not intending to apply an activity theoretical lens to analyze her teaching - she was simply reflecting on her practice. Without exploring human practices to uncover what is *not* working, we are not challenged to create approaches that do work. Providing the chance to engage in lucrative professional learning opportunities increases the likelihood that teachers will reflect on their practice, identify contradictions, generate solutions with colleagues and experiment with alternative approaches.

2.6 Discussion and Conclusion

The support for teacher collaboration and establishing communities of practice in educational settings is strong (Wilson & Berne 1999; Vinogradov 2013). This discussion of the apparent tension in the activity of teaching when access to professional learning opportunities are limited is only one of myriad tensions experienced by LESLLA teachers. The perspectives of Sonia and Nancy Ann point to the likely benefits of cultivating professional learning communities within the adult education program. First, the morale can be low when teachers feel isolated and coming together as a community helps teachers overcome the 'struggle for voice' (Britzman 2003). Sofia and Nancy Ann recounted on several occasions that they would benefit professionally and socially from collaborative, professional learning opportunities. Nancy, being a less-experienced teacher would further be able to find the confidence to move between the practical and the theoretical if she had colleagues serving as models in the negotiation between theory and practice.

Secondly, collaborative approaches to professional learning, such as peer observations, lesson study, and study circles are immediately accessible by the teachers because they are based in their teaching context and reflect the learner populations with which they are working. They can discuss cases related to students they share and problem solve based on collective experiences. Tasker (2011: 204) notes that "a teacher-directed collaborative professional development activity focuses the teachers' attention on gaps in their students' learning by creating a mediational space that encourages sustained dialogic interaction about student learning issues that are central to teachers' everyday teaching practice". Professional learning opportunities for teachers should, above all, be relevant and accessible to the teachers.

Finally, teacher-directed approaches to professional development enable teachers to "move beyond being not only consumers of top-down expert knowledge, but also producers of school-based, self-directed knowledge by adopting a 'researcher' lens" (Tasker 2011: 204). Within the LESLLA context, this is particularly important because new, relevant theories of second language acquisition and L2 pedagogy for work with LESLLA learners are still emerging and evolving. Contributions from practitioners who jointly theorize practice with peers are necessary to move the field forward.

Transforming practice is not straightforward and may be particularly challenging for career teachers who have been teaching and learning within one context for years and now find themselves in a starkly different context. Enabling teachers to participate in professional communities that promote risk taking is essential for teacher development (Putnam & Borko 2000). Perhaps one of the most generous contributions a program administrator can provide for the professional development of teachers is time. In a study on how adult education teachers changed over time, Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe (2003) found that the most significant factors at the institutional level

were teachers' access to benefits and preparation time. Succeeding these factors slightly in significance, but still emerging as important determiners of change, were teachers' access to paid professional development time and opportunities for collaboration with peers.

As noted by Vinogradov (2013), LESLLA teachers must develop a knowledge base that encompasses knowledge about adult learning, language and language acquisition, teaching, and the immigrant and refugee experience. Weaving opportunities for collaborative professional learning into the LESLLA teaching domain will only enhance the educational experience for the LESLLA learners and empower the LESLLA teachers as they join in the co-construction of new knowledge for work in this context.

The use of activity theory as an analytical framework allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of these LESLLA teachers. The strength of activity theory is multi-faceted. As a research tool in educational settings, activity theory creates a space to consider the value of relationships in teaching and learning environments, as well as the critical and transformative power in identifying and addressing inherent tensions within those relationships. As the research agenda in the LESLLA context continues to evolve, activity theory can serve as a useful, accessible tool for researchers and teachers exploring classroom practice.

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3 WHAT DOESN'T WORK FOR THE LOWEST LEVEL LITERACY LEARNERS AND WHY?

Jean Marrapodi, Applestar Productions

Abstract

Traditional approaches for teaching reading to pre-literate adults, those who "speak a language whose written form is rare or does not exist" (Savage 1993) are problematic because foundational learning and cognitive areas are often underdeveloped in these students. Three methods for reading instruction (phonics, sight words, and whole language) are explored in light of the pre-literate learner. The author performs a task analysis for activities used in these methods, and subsequent gaps are revealed, explaining why they may be problematic for use with low-literate adults. The task analysis method is advocated for lesson planning, and a recommendation is made for teachers to consider what is being expected of students when activities are presented. Educators, policy makers, and curriculum providers must be reminded that some LESLLA/literacy-level learners are likely to be pre-emergent readers with developmental areas needing identification and instruction and will not be successful with conventional methods of reading instruction without significant pre-reading skill preparation.

Keywords: LESLLA, low literacy, reading instruction, preliterate, adult literacy

3.1 Introduction

The experienced literacy teacher is keenly aware of the challenges of working with low-literacy learners. Those who are new to the population and those who write curriculum or develop policies to serve them are baffled as to why many activities and approaches are unsuccessful with these learners. Many adult educators are former elementary teachers in a second career and they anticipate what worked in the K-12 sector will work equally well with adults. It often doesn't. Little is done to prepare adult educators for the specialized insights required for working with the lowest-literacy learner. While research abounds around developmental reading strategies for children and L1 learners, there is no or almost no evidence-based research regarding different approaches in reading instruction to beginning LESLLA learners. This is a report of a series of personal experiences from an experienced teacher who learned what does not work with these learners the hard way. The three dominant approaches to reading instruction are presented with a summary of what might cause difficulty or misunderstanding in the mind of beginning first time L2 readers.

3.2 Reading Instruction in the United States

In the United States, reading has been taught in a methodical fashion, varying by the theoretical and educational biases in vogue at the time (Martinez & McGee 2011). Primarily, these methods can be categorized as phonics, sight word, and whole language approaches. Research undertaken by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000) has discounted the exclusivity of using a single method for instruction, advocating for an eclectic component-blending model and explicit strategies for teaching discrete skills. Here, reading is divided into five elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency, with the vision of touching each area during reading lessons. Despite the prevailing research on effective reading instruction (Burt, Peyton, & Van Duzer 2005; Condelli 2002; Smith, Harris, & Reder 2005; Trupke-Bastidas 2007), many adult educators in the US tend to stick with the familiar and teach with the methods in which they were schooled. For many low-literate and LESLLA (Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) adults, these methods are problematic because of missing foundational cognitive and developmental factors routinely acquired in literate cultures. Because of this, the metalinguistic awareness of the teacher and student are out of alignment. According to Kurvers, Vallen, & van Hour (2006: 69), "many observations [seem] to suggest that the concepts on language and literacy teachers brought to the classroom often did not match with what the illiterates were thinking".

The following sections examine phonics, sight word, and whole language methodologies of reading instruction and identify the problems of using them

with the lowest literacy-level LESLLA learner. A model of task analysis will be presented at the end to assist the low-literacy educator with a schema for determining the appropriateness of an activity.

3.3 The Phonics Method

Phonics has been the dominant method for teaching reading in the United States during the last four centuries. Hornbooks, *The New England Primer*, Tower's *Gradual Readers* and *McGuffy Readers* of the 16th–19th centuries are all phonics based (Hightower 2003). Supplemental spelling materials were included so the student had practice decoding and encoding written material.

Using the phonics method, the student is taught to associate specific sounds with specific letters. Students learn the name of each letter and a key word to associate a sound with the letter, such as A is for apple, B for bear. They use the initial sound of the key word as a pneumonic device to aid in recall of the sound of the letter. Students begin to sound out words by blending the sounds of the letters together. For transparent phonetic languages, this method is ideal. In English, there are 26 graphemes and at least 44 phonemes, so the learner is challenged with multiple options to determine the sound of many of the 26 letters of the alphabet.

3.3.1 The Complications of English

Learning to read in English is complex for the new language learner because of all of the variations in the grapheme-phoneme relationships. Many letters in English, such as b /b/ and l /l/ have a single regular sound, as is expected in transparent languages. When letters are put together, their phonemes may blend together so both sounds are heard, such as in b-r /br/ or b-l /bl/, but quite often, two combined letters make a different sound altogether, as with consonant digraphs like sh /ʃ/ for ship [ʃɪp]. Some letter combinations have multiple pronunciations, such as the digraph th /ð/ as in this [ðɪs], or /ˈθ/ as in think [ˈθɪŋk] or in vowel dipthongs like oo which may be read /uː/ as in moon [muːn] or /ʊ/ as in look [lʊk]. Sounds may change based on the letter that follows, as with r-controlled vowels like ar /ɑː/ as in car [kɑː], or may have "soft" and "hard" letter sounds like the letters g and c which vary their sound by the vowel that follows. "Soft g" says /dʒ/ as in giraffe [dʒɪˈrɑːf] but "hard g" says /ɡ/ as in goat [ɡəʊt]. "Hard c" /ˈk / begins coat [ˈkəʊt] and "soft c" /s/ begins cent [sent]. Memorizing and applying these rules is baffling for the lowest literacy learners. Additionally, there are numerous irregular English words like through [θruː], tough [tʌf], and could [kʊd] which must be memorized as sight words since they cannot be decoded. Learning to read using the phonics method is further confounded by regional accents that alter the pure sound of the intended phoneme.

3.3.2 Learning to Read in a Literate Culture

When a child from a literate culture is taught to read using the phonics method, flashcards are used to reinforce the letter-sound relationship. The teacher holds up a card with a letter and picture, and the child says the letter, word for the picture, and the sound, such as A, apple, /ă/. An assumption is made that the students have phonemic awareness and the ability to identify the initial sound of each word to participate in this activity. While this is a simple exercise in a literate culture, it is very complex for the low-literacy LESLLA learner. Using a task analysis by the author, the following skills are required to read the flashcard:

1. Recognize the line formation as a letter, distinguishing it from all other possible combinations of lines used to create symbols
2. Recognize the lines as A
3. Associate the name A with the symbol used to form the letter A
4. Identify the picture on the card
5. Recall the English word "apple"
6. Correctly pronounce the word "apple"
7. Use phonemic segmentation to pull the initial sound from the word apple to say /ă/
8. Recite the sound /ă/ in isolation from the word
9. Associate /ă/ with the letter representation A
10. Associate /ă/ with "apple"
11. Understand that "apple" begins with the letter A
12. Eventually, memorize /ă/, apple, A for instant recall

A literate person knows what to look for on the flashcard, easily processing these tasks and recalling the information within seconds. The lowest literacy learner often has deficits in the sub-skills necessary for reading the flashcard.

3.3.3 Limited Visual Literacy

Visual literacy is an underdeveloped skill for preliterate people. Doak, Doak, & Root (1996) identified four main steps in understanding a visual: 1) deciding to look or read, 2) finding the message, 3) locating and integrating relevant details, then 4) interpreting the information. In a task like a flashcard drill, emergent readers may be overwhelmed with the complexity of what is required and find it difficult to begin to know what to interpret (Dowse 2004). Low-literate

learners "find letters and any graphical representations – maps, graphs, charts, even pictures – difficult to interpret" (Burt, Peyton, & Schaetzel 2008: 2). Recognizing that the connected, slanted lines make the letter A, then distinguishing it from other objects made of straight lines is a new skill for preliterate learners and must be introduced systematically.

For the preliterate learner, understanding that a printed picture represents something may be a new concept. They easily identify photographs, but clip art, drawings, and illustrations may elude them. According to Linney (1995: 20), "If we have not learnt the common pictorial conventions, a picture simply appears as a meaningless collection of lines, shapes, tones and colours on a piece of paper". Buski's research (2011) investigated ESL learner recognition of line drawings in ESL texts and revealed that many learners misunderstood the concept represented by the drawing.

Beyond pictorial recognition, the lowest literacy-level LESLLA learner may have difficulty connecting the picture of the apple to the real fruit because his or her mental imagery may not be trained to connect a print item with the real thing. Even the real apple itself may be new to some learners. In America, apples are commonplace, but in rural southern India, for example, apples are rare commodities, and some individuals would have no experience with them. Teachers must ensure that any key picture selected as an aid to recall is actually something the learner recognizes and has experience with.

3.3.4 Difficulty Isolating and Identifying Sounds

When we ask students to identify /ă/ for apple, we are requiring phonemic segmentation and the production of a sound which may be new to the learner. Low-literacy learners do not understand the structure of language and have difficulty understanding that words are comprised of sounds. According to Kurvers et al. (2006: 70) "illiterate adults, like young children, perform poorly in segmenting words into phonemes. In all studies, illiterates differed significantly from readers in every phoneme manipulation task, such as phoneme segmentation, and phoneme deletion or addition". The phonics approach is based on the critical understanding that words are made of sounds. For the low-literate learner, this concept is puzzling.

For beginning language learners, hearing the differences between new sounds not found in their native tongue is very challenging; reproducing them is even more complex (Brod 1999). In time, as the LESLLA or any new language learning student hears and learns to speak new words, new sounds become familiar and begin to be recognized more readily. The low-literacy teacher must provide activities for the students to practice hearing discrete differences in phonemes to help the learner with the auditory discrimination skills required to identify, differentiate, and reproduce new sounds. Minimal pair exercises are helpful with developing this skill. Here, two similar words, differing by a single phoneme such as (sheep [ʃiːp] / ship [ʃɪp]), (sip [sɪp] / zip [zɪp]), (buzz [bʌz] / bus [bʌs]) are spoken, requiring the learner to identify the designated correct choice.

3.3.5 Phonics Approach Limits Word Choices

Beyond the visual and auditory limitations, teaching reading from a purely phonics approach makes it difficult to create meaningful stories because it limits word choices. All learners look for meaning in their activities. The phonics approach presents a challenge to meet this goal. A few books, like *Sam and Pat* (Hartel, Lowry, & Hendon 2006) and *Bob books* (Maslen & Maslen 2006) have good storylines, but the cartoon illustrations may present problems for the LESLLA learner because of the learner's limited visual literacy skills. One LESLLA learner in the author's class, in her frustration with a phonics activity exclaimed, "No cat wears a hat! I don't care about him sitting on a mat. Why are we doing this?"

3.3.6 Rejecting the Phonics Approach for Lowest Literacy Learner

Until the prerequisite steps of sound differentiation of the phonemes in the new language and basic visual literacy, including visual discrimination and picture recognition are in place, using a phonics approach is problematic for the lowest level LESLLA learner.

3.4 The Sight Word Approach

In 1930, the Scott Foresman Company published the *Dick and Jane* series, and millions of American children were taught to read using a highly controlled set of words about Dick, his sisters Jane and Sally, and their dog Spot. This series was one of the initiators of the sight word approach, and it was used to teach reading in the United States into the late 1960s. The model advocated whole-word learning, using a look-say pattern. Teachers introduced words one at a time ("look"), and students practiced reading them ("say") on flashcards and in stories with controlled vocabularies. Proponents believed children recognized the shape of the whole word, and extensive repetition of the words assisted with memorization.

Frequently used words in English were analyzed, and students memorized and were drilled on Dolch's Sight Word List of the 220 Most Common Words (Dolch 1948). Sequential lists of additional words were created and broken down by grade level so basal reading textbooks could be written with stories that contained only words that had been previously introduced.

In 1955, Rudolph Flesch released the seminal work, *Why Johnny Can't Read* and *What You Can Do About It*, discounting the sight word method and advocating for a return to the phonics approach. Readers were no longer equipped with word attack skills to break new words into their component pieces because they had no letter-sound associations.

3.4.1 Advantages of the Sight Word Approach

While the sight word approach has issues because it does not teach new readers to decode, it still has merit. In the 1990s, Edward Fry expanded the Dolch list to become the 1000 Instant Words, including 1000 of the most common words in the English language. Fry's research (1999) uncovered that these 1000 words make up 65% of all written material. Readers who can master these words are successful because they have reached a point of automaticity with much of the material they encounter and can often use context clues to determine words they do not know.

Fluent reading occurs when the reader no longer needs to decode individual words, having neural networks created to recall learned words. The sight word methodology supports fluency, assisting the reader with memorization through extensive repetition. In the 21st century, reading teachers incorporate memorizing the Dolch and/or Fry lists into instruction to assist students to move toward fluency, leveraging cognitive resources on comprehension rather than on decoding. Words that are not phonetically regular need to be memorized and are part of the sight word lexicon.

3.4.2 Sight Words and the Low-Literate Learner

For the low-literacy LESLLA learner, the sight word approach is a step above the phonics approach because there is a one-to-one correspondence between a word and what it represents. Functional, high-interest words can be taught, working with familiar and survival skill words. Learners are motivated and see progress quickly.

There is an initial challenge for the beginning LESLLA learner with this method. The Onderdelinden, van de Craats, & Kurvers (2009: 46) study revealed "that those who cannot read nor write, whether adults or children, do not have a clear word concept [however, they] indicate that literacy acquisition enhances one's awareness of words". Not understanding what a word is has the sight word methodology building on a flawed foundation. This is a preliminary skill that must be taught first.

The low-literate learner may not have developed print awareness, understanding that print words represent things and ideas. In the early beginnings of the author's faith-based literacy center, a lesson was presented to introduce reading using a sight word approach. Each student was given three index cards, one with his or her name, and the other two with the words "loves" and "Jesus". Students knew and understood the sentence "[Name] loves Jesus" in their mother tongue and in English and were very familiar with the concept. The three cards were laid out in front of each student as [Student Name] loves Jesus. As the cards were presented, the teacher pointed to each word, saying [Student Name] loves Jesus. After each student had their set of cards in place, an example was put up on the board using the cards. The teacher pointed to each word, saying, "Elizabeth loves Jesus." The class repeated as the teacher pointed to each word. After the class seemed to recognize that the

words on the board represented the sentence "Elizabeth loves Jesus," students were instructed to watch as the words Elizabeth and Jesus were switched. The board now read "Jesus loves Elizabeth." When the students were asked to read what was on the board, they all repeated in chorus, "Elizabeth loves Jesus." They appeared to have no concept that the individual card representing the word was attached to the word even though they watched the cards being switched to create the new sentence. This is a foundational step in print literacy, one of the prerequisites of reading, and substantiates the research of Onderdelinden et al. (2009).

3.4.3 Print Literacy is Foundational to Reading Acquisition

Sebastian Wren (2000) of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory calls this Concepts about Print, and considers it one of the baseline requirements for reading. Figure 1 illustrates the components of this framework for reading development. According to Hoover & Gough (2012: para 21):

> [T]he basis for knowledge of letters and the alphabetic principle is knowledge of the mechanics of the printed word, or concepts about print. This includes knowing that printed text carries a linguistic meaning, that there is a correspondence between printed and spoken words, and that text in English runs left-to-right and top-to-bottom on a page.

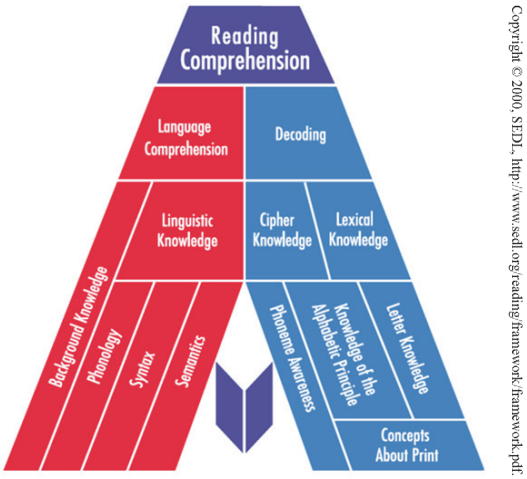

FIGURE 1 The Cognitive Framework for Reading (Wren 2000: 43).

For any low-literacy learner, print concepts will not be in place unless he or she has had exposure to them. Like very young children, pre-literate learners have no idea how reading works. Students who have no concept of print will have difficulty understanding that words represent linguistic constructs and that individual words may be broken down into letters and sounds. The low-literacy

learner must have the critical underpinning of print awareness before any reading instruction will be useful.

3.4.4 Sight Word Method Requires Memorization

Additionally, the sight word approach requires memorization. The ability to memorize and recall information is underdeveloped in low-literacy learners. According to Abadzi (2003: 2):

> People's level of education influences their ability to solve abstract problems, use readily presented data in decisions, recognize and name pictures of objects and understand radio broadcasts. Most important, the unschooled perform less well in most memory tasks: recalling a series of digits backward and forward, remembering lists of words, reproducing a short story, reproducing complex figures that were presented, recalling common objects, remembering sequences. The limited memory and cognitive resources probably also reduce performance in literacy classes.

By comparison with the agile minds of young children who learn to read in the primary grades, learning to read as an adult is a slow, laborious process for the low-literacy learner. Teachers must do all they can to scaffold success and remove barriers to learning.

3.5 The Whole Language Approach

The Whole Language method for reading instruction is a top-down approach, rooted in constructivism. It was popular in the United States beginning in the 1970s (Weaver, 1995). There are distinct receptive and expressive activities, with all instruction centered on meaning-making. Receptive activities begin with literature as the teacher reads a story to the class. Students discuss the story, reflecting on the ideas within it and their thoughts about it. Here, they apply analytical thinking and expressive language. Next, students spend time drawing and writing about the literature they have discussed using inventive spelling. This allows them to create visual and written representations of their ideas using their own pictures and words, sounding things out according to their personally invented rules, with a focus more on the meaning than on the mechanics. Ultimately, students begin writing their own stories, often kept in a journal so progress can be identified.

Inventive spelling comes from the research of Read (1975) and Gentry (1982) who recognized that spelling is a developmental process with discrete stages. Learners progress through the stages of precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic, transitional, and conventional spelling as mental rules are refined (Gentry 1982). In the precommunicative stage, the child moves from scribbling and begins to use letter symbols to represent words. In this stage, letters represent words but there is no sound-symbol relationship, and may not have left-to right orientation. When the child moves to semiphonetic stage, words begin to have connections with letter sounds, but connections are related

to the letter name rather than the letter sound, such as using R for "are", or U for "you". As the child begins to understand orthography, there is movement into the phonetic stage, where the child "invents" spellings based on their own "ingenious and systematic invention of an orthographic system that represents the entire sound structure of the word. Though some of the inventive speller's letter choices do not conform to conventional English spelling for some sounds, the choices are systematic and perceptually correct" (Gentry 1982: 192). In the transitional stage, the child begins to move from phonological to morphological and visual strategies, and begins to use learned words. There are still invented patterns and "misspelled" words. At the conventional level, the student has mastered a designated corpus of words appropriate to his or her grade level. The critical elements behind the process of inventive spelling are the acceptance of what is generated, and the availability of a teacher or parent to answer the child's questions as they arise. The teacher does not correct errors, but waits for the student to seek the proper way to spell particular words.

3.5.1 Challenges of the Whole Language Approach

There is much controversy about this approach because unlike bottom-up approaches, the foundational rules of phonics and spelling are not explicitly laid out for the students. Like the sight word approach, students may never learn decoding skills and may struggle with new words. The naturalist assumes children will learn as they experience different activities, presented when they are ready. Without a planned curriculum, the learning is only as good as the creativity and facilitation skills of the teacher. Advocates of this method find that the children are more engaged and creative, and develop better thinking skills without the constructs of a rules-driven curriculum.

3.5.2 Whole Language and the Low-Literate Learner

For the low-literate learner, this type of approach has advantages and disadvantages. In order to understand a story that is read aloud, the learner must have enough receptive aural language to construct meaning. Most language learners recognize only a percentage of a spoken conversation, so during the reading of a story, they may miss ideas and concepts. Beginning learners easily get sidetracked when they do not understand a word and focus on figuring the word out, rather than letting it go and moving forward. This distraction causes them to miss the meaning of the sentences that follow the unknown word. Reading and discussing things in small chunks provides a comprehension check and allows the learners to ask questions and catch up with the storyline.

Simple stories are generally presented to beginning readers through picture books. If the pictures are anything but photographs, low-level LESLLA learners may not recognize what is being represented because of their underdeveloped visual literacy skills, even if they are familiar with the concept. Beyond identification, they must be able to create a mental model of whatever

the concept is, so it must lie somewhere in their personal experiences and frame of reference. The students must have some connection with the concept in order to construct meaning from it.

Once a story is comprehended by the learner, the approach of accepting whatever is produced in an expressive form has much potential for low-literacy learners. Working with clay to represent the story teaches the learner that symbols convey ideas, a precursor of print literacy. Learners who can draw about a story begin to recognize that pictures are symbolic representations of ideas. In time, students become interested in adding words to their art. Here, the teacher can help spell the desired words or print a model for the student to copy. When this occurs, students learn that writing is an expressive form of meaning-making in response to their own ideas. Giving students the freedom to experiment allows them to generate meaning without needing to be doing it the right way as they gain experience with letters and words. Once this foundation is built, more explicit methods of reading instruction can be added to the curriculum.

3.5.3 The Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach, an expressive whole-language activity, is highly successful with most LESLLA learners. In this approach, the class dictates a story to the teacher, who captures it on chart paper. As the story is dictated, the teacher models the correct spelling of words, but will accept sentences as they are dictated. As the story is read out loud, mistakes are often corrected by students who hear errors they did not recognize as they were sharing their ideas. Sentences may be moved around, and new ones added. The story is revised, edited, and rewritten, modeling the writing process. Once the students are happy with the final product, this created story becomes the foundation for future lessons. There are considerable possibilities for extension activities using the dictated story. Students can practice oral and silent reading with it. Students can be directed to find certain words or given copies of words to match in the story on the chart paper. Key words and/or repeated words can be identified and color coded. Cloze activities, where words are left out and must be filled in, help students learn words in context and their placement in a story. The story can be reproduced, and the sentences cut up for the students to sequence. The story can be broken down to one sentence per page, and the students can add a drawing or a photograph to illustrate the story. Students are engaged because they are working with something they feel ownership of.

There are many ways of working with this type of student-generated material. It is especially effective when the story is about a shared experience, such as a field trip or school activity. Stories can also be dictated by individual students, starting with an idea or working from a photograph. Another idea starts with the student's pictures, then captions can be narrated for a scrapbook. The language experience approach provides shared experiences of meaning-making with personal, emotional connections for the learner.

3.6 Task Analysis – Determining the Appropriateness of an Activity

In reviewing the gaps present in the lowest literacy learners in light of reading instruction, the literacy teacher must always step back and consider the tasks being presented and expectations of the activity to determine if it is appropriate for the student at his or her current level. It is important to remember that many LESLLA learners have limited, if any, experience with school and have not developed commonplace learning skills of a literate culture. According to Brod (1999: 5):

> [T]he learner who knows how to learn comes to class with tools for tackling the different process of mastering learning to read in a new language. The learner who does not have some educational experience usually has less information upon which to draw in coping with concepts as well as fewer techniques with which to tackle the job.

Task analysis is a method of examining the discrete skills involved in an activity. The reviewer decomposes a task by asking how and why to determine principal and subordinate tasks to a level of granularity that represents a single teachable concept or procedure (Ruyle 1999; Poulson, Ashby, & Richardson 1996). Cognitive Task Analysis goes beyond the behavioral elements of task analysis and considers the knowledge required to perform a specific activity (Crandall, Klein, & Hoffman 2006). These processes of analysis identify the requisite skills and knowledge for a task to be completed. Both are commonplace in corporate training analysis, as an aspect of job analysis in human resource planning, and are used in special education for developing patterning activities. Actions required are broken down into granular components to assist trainers and teachers with the development of learning materials. Using this form of analysis can assist the literacy teacher with the selection of appropriate activities for the classroom. If the student does not have the prerequisite skills required for each component, the activity will likely not succeed with the student.

The following will consider three typical activities used with young children and analyze what is required for completion and consider their appropriateness with the LESLLA learner.

3.6.1 Task Analysis One: Matching Worksheet

A matching worksheet is an activity that might be used in the sight word approach to review or assess student recognition of words that have been taught.

The student is presented with a worksheet containing five clip art pictures in a column on the left and five matching words in a different order on the right. He or she is to draw a line matching the picture with the correct word.

This is the principal task, but in order to complete this assignment, the student must be able to do the following subordinate tasks.

Tasks Required (analysis by the author):

1. Orient the paper so words are right side up.
2. Identify each picture:
    a. Possess visual literacy skills to recognize clip art and identify the item represented.
    b. Form a mental model. Is it a familiar concept?
3. Remember the English name for the picture.
4. Correctly read the five words on the right.
5. Understand that the words and pictures are in different orders.
6. Understand the goal is to connect the picture and word.
7. Associate the picture with the correct word.
8. Use a writing implement to draw a line.
9. Draw a line connecting the picture with the correct word.
10. Understand that crossing lines are acceptable.
11. Recognize the one-to-one correspondence of the words to pictures.
12. Work the task until all words and pictures are matched.

The intent of this worksheet is to provide reinforcement and recognition of the five words. School-based skill assumptions are made, anticipating that the foundation is in place for the learner to complete the task, and the only new skill is reading the words. In a traditional school setting, these prerequisite skills are generally in place for this type of assignment to be completed. For low-literate students, many of these basic skills may be new. If the literacy student has been working with flashcards containing these pictures and words and knows them well, this written task is still difficult unless the LESLLA learner has seen similar activities. A precursor to scaffold this activity might be to start with matching separate word and picture cards, then using a paper version where the picture is opposite the correct word, having the student practice drawing lines to connect them. As requisite sub-skills are mastered, the complexity may be increased, mixing up the order if the items until the student is able to complete the matching activity with crossed lines as initially presented.

3.6.2 Task Analysis Two: Cutting out the Letter A

The student is to use a newspaper or magazine to find 10 ‘A’s, cut them out, and glue them on the A page in the workbook. The principal task is to locate the letter A in a print source. This type of activity may be part of a phonics approach to reinforce letter names. For the student to complete this activity, the following subordinate skills must also be in place.

Tasks Required (analysis by the author):

1. Know how to use scissors to cut.
2. Fine motor coordination to cut small objects.
3. Understand that it is acceptable to cut up old newspapers and magazines in this setting.
4. Remember the shape of the letter A.
5. Understand that A will be found in many words all over the paper.
6. Understand that "A-ness" is independent of font and size.
7. Recognize A in a variety of sizes and fonts.
8. Discriminate the A from other letters.
9. Hold the place for the A while navigating to it with the scissors.
10. Cut the A in isolation, keeping the letter intact.
11. Operate a glue stick to apply glue to the A.
12. Understand that the sticky side holds the letter to the paper.
13. Position the A right-side up on the paper.

While this task seems simple in a print-literate culture, for the beginning literacy learner, the task is challenging. Consider how many words are in a typical newspaper, then imagine them in a language that uses an unfamiliar character set. Now the task becomes one of complex visual discrimination because of the similarity of letter shapes. This type of activity can only be successful if the student has been able to correctly identify A mixed with other letters in multiple settings. A better activity to help scaffold this type of learning would be to provide a worksheet with three different letters and ask the learner to cut out the A, then provide additional worksheets with restricted numbers of letters and increasing amounts of difficulty. This builds automaticity and understanding of the task and puts the prerequisites in place for the learner to work with the newspaper or magazine.

3.6.3 Task Analysis Three: Writing about a Field Trip

The language experience approach is a top-down learning method used in whole language settings. It tends to be successful for the low-literacy learner because it is based in familiar, concrete experiences. For this example, students dictate a story to the teacher after a shared experience of a trip to the market to purchase fruit for a fruit salad. It is assumed that the teacher has reviewed the vocabulary identifying the purchased fruits, and created a display of the fruits with their labels on a table in the front of the room. Students are asked to describe the trip to the store and the process of identifying and purchasing the fruit. The teacher uses questions to elicit information from the students and writes their narrative on chart paper as they dictated it.

Tasks Required (analysis by the author):

1. Remember the event.
2. Break down the trip into component parts.
3. Recall the sequence of activities.
4. Describe the different activities.
5. Recall verbs related to each process.
6. Recall the vocabulary word for each fruit.
7. Express thought orally.
8. Understand the concept of a sentence.
9. Take turns expressing ideas.

In general, pre-literate learners are comfortable with oral narrative, since it is the primary method they have used to communicate prior to entering a school setting. This activity requires retelling of a familiar event (shopping), even if it is purchasing unfamiliar items in a new language, so the cognitive load is reduced and the student can focus on expressive vocabulary. Having the fruit names identified and reviewed prior to the activity scaffolds the lesson, and provides a visual to assist with recall. Students may have trouble understanding segmenting of the story into sentences and may want to tell it in its entirety. This is a skill to be built, since pre-literate students may be unfamiliar with the metalinguistic concepts of sentences and words. Otherwise, based on the task analysis, this would be a successful activity for these learners because they possess the majority of the skills required for the lesson and can focus on the target skill of the expressive vocabulary.

3.7 Working with Pre-Emergent Readers

Many LESLLA learners are pre-emergent readers. Pre-emergent readers need very different instruction than those with some basic skills. Ellery (2009: 34) describes four stages of reading development:

> Emergent: Students begin to make correlations among oral, written, and printed stimuli.
> Early: Students are beginning to read, using problem solving to collect clues about meaning of new words.
> Transitional: Students are making sense of longer, more complex texts, and employing strategies to support meaning.
> Fluent: Students are reading independently for extended periods; relies on text more than illustrations.

The lowest level LESLLA learner may be in a pre-emergent stage, prior to the place where he or she is beginning to make correlations with print. Teachers

must provide for developmental opportunities by working on pre-reading activities.

The Public Library Association, in partnership with the Association for Library Services to Children, has identified six essential pre-reading skills in the Every Child Ready to Read program, developed in 2004 and revised in 2011. These skills are:

> Narrative Skills: Being able to describe things and events and tell stories
> Print Motivation: Being interested in and enjoying books
> Vocabulary: Knowing the names of things
> Print Awareness: Noticing print, knowing how to handle books and how to follow words on a page
> Letter Knowledge: Knowing letters are different from each other, knowing their names and sounds and recognizing letters everywhere
> Phonological Awareness: Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words

These skills must be built up in the low-literacy learner. LESLLA students usually come from oral, skill-based cultures, so they have a strong foundation in narrative skills. They must learn to transfer this skill into English. The literacy teacher can leverage this strength to build up the other skills. The teacher must provide significant exposure to materials that allow the LESLLA learner to develop foundational learning skills, generating the experiences with print that will become part of the learner's personal frame of reference. It is crucial that the lessons be targeted to the appropriate level of the students and analyzed to ensure the pre-requisite skills are in place.

3.8 Conclusion

This paper has reviewed three methods for teaching reading, examining issues that may arise by using them with low-literate adult learners. Traditional activities associated with these methods, such as flashcards and worksheets may be problematic in the literacy classroom because the pre-requisite skills are not in place for the learners. While many of these seemingly simple activities appear in early childhood classrooms, adult education beginning literacy teachers are often surprised when their students are challenged by them. As literacy teachers work with preliterate and low-literacy learners, it is essential to remember that the developmental processes occurring naturally in young children growing up in literate cultures are absent for learners who come from preliterate and limited literacy environments. Learning must begin where the student is at the moment he or she enters our classrooms. Teachers must continually assess their own assumptions and examine the elements of the tasks presented to students. When the learner has mastered the majority of skills in the task analysis, the focus can be directed on the target objective rather than

diverted to yet-to-be learned skills. By using a simple task analysis method for each activity, teachers are much more likely to ensure learner success.

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4 COUNSELLING OF L2 LITERACY LEARNERS IN GERMAN INTEGRATION COURSES WITH A LITERACY COMPONENT

Stefan Markov & Christiane Scheithauer, Universität Leipzig

Abstract

Learning difficulties have been identified as one major reason for unsuccessful learning by teachers for German as a second language (GSL) within the field of integration courses. The authors of this paper argue that counselling L2 literacy learners is an effective opportunity for an individual handling of learning difficulties. Language counselling as an approach, which is widespread at universities, enables the individual development of learner autonomy. We consider the establishment and advancement of learning strategies as most promising variable within the counselling process. This paper presents a concept of counselling L2 literacy learners established within the project Leipzig learning counselling in integration courses with a literacy based component. Our approach combines a concept of preconditions of learning difficulties with central ideas of language counselling concepts.

Keywords: learning counselling, learning difficulties, learning strategies, L2 literacy learners

4.1 Introduction

With the establishment of an integration course system in 2005 by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) German as a Second Language (GSL) has been organized centrally for the first time in German history. LESLLA learners were not only left out of the conversation in the development of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). They were also not considered in the early stage of the development of the course system. Feldmeier (2008) points out, before the implementation of literacy integration courses, even with a tradition of L1 literacy education in Germany, nearly no scholarly publications existed in the field of L2 literacy learning.

According to a report (BAMF 2012), 1.2 billion Euros had been spent on establishing a national system of language courses until 2012. This high investment can be considered as an indicator of political willingness to integrate former guest-workers, who at this point had become long-term residents, but also new immigrants.[7] Learners of German today have the opportunity, and in some cases, the obligation, to attend up to 660 course hours in general German language courses and up to 1260 course hours in literacy courses.[8]

Since the new established integration course system includes courses for learners with special needs, a systematic improvement of the opportunities for LESLLA learners has been planned in terms of quality and quantity, including an increased course volume of up to 1260 course hours, curricula for literacy courses (BAMF 2008), further qualification for literacy teachers, and comprehensive development of new course material. On the other hand, due to the relatively short existence of a separate offer for LESLLA learners, the development of more group-oriented materials is still at the onset and more research in the field of applied linguistics, socio-psychology, and didactics is needed. A recent study indicates that the literacy courses are not yet meeting the set goals (Schuller, Lochner, Rother, & Hörner 2012: 47). While the target of the regular integration courses is level B1 (CEFR) according to the BAMF (2008: 11), the level A2 is aimed for in literacy courses. According to Schuller et al. (2012), there are deficiencies especially in reading and writing. Only about half of the learners (reading 46.6%, writing 54.8%) are able to reach the level A1. Also literacy teachers report an unsatisfying outcome for several learners. If learners do not make the expected progress within the course, learning difficulties are usually cited as the cause.

In 2010, literacy teachers and language schools expressed this particular issue to researchers at the Herder-Institute at the Leipzig University, and intended to find a solution for learners with special needs. In order to meet

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7 For a historical overview of German as a second language and L2 literacy in Germany see Feldmeier 2008 and Schramm 2011.

8 In 2007 new regulation became effective, taking the special needs of learners into account. As a result the course system can be divided into general integration courses, courses for young adults, remedial courses, intensive courses, courses for parents and/or mothers and literacy courses (see BAMF 2012).

these demands, we established a learning counselling program, and started the project *LeLeBe – Leipziger Lernberatung in Integrationskursen mit Alphabetisierung* [Leipzig learning counselling in integration courses with a literacy component] in April 2012 which is co-financed by the European Integration Fund and the Robert Bosch Foundation. Within a period of two years, the project plan is to develop a counselling concept to support potentials of autonomy for learners and their individual language acquisition process. Based on a resource-oriented approach, we plan to develop materials and procedures in the fields of diagnostics and counselling. We argue that most of the learning difficulties occurring in the integration and other L2 literacy courses are a result of the individual learning biographies. Consequently, the research question of the project is, whether a training of learning strategies within the counselling process will reduce learner's learning difficulties. The effect of the learning strategies will be evaluated within the project.

Defining the theoretical background of the project in the second section of this paper, we will give a brief introduction into the field of learning difficulties and present the counselling concepts that we found helpful for the development of the LeLeBe concept. In the third section, we will introduce the project with its goals and present sample materials involved in counselling.

4.2 Theoretical Framework of Preconditions of Learning Difficulties

This section presents the theoretical background of the project, starting with learning difficulties and their preconditions. This perspective helps to understand the background of psychological strain of learners with limited learning success and is a vantage point for a resource-oriented approach. Subsequently we will present the origins of learning counselling.

4.2.1 Learning Difficulties and Their Preconditions

According to Zielinski, learning difficulties occur when the performance of a learner is below the tolerable deviations of binding institutional, social and individual reference standards (Zielinski 1996: 370). In the context of L2 literacy learning, learning difficulties prevent learners from reaching their personal technical and functional goals (e.g., reading a process sheet at work) and/or the course goals (e.g., blending phonemes and syllables), even though the learner attends the course regularly. Difficulties may occur temporarily or last a long time and range from specific to comprehensive.

Terminology in the context of learning difficulties can be either typological or dimensional. During the last decades typological concepts dominated

academic discussions[9]. Even though borderline cases are difficult to handle within typologies and interventions are challenging to plan, when diagnostic results, for example, do not indicate whether someone is "still dyslexic" or "already learning-disabled", this type of classification still dominates current terminology. We also argue that in the process of L2 literacy learning it is ethically problematic to categorise learners with problems, especially if there is no adequate intervention or educational follow-up support.

In contrast to typological conceptions, dimensional terminology organises learning difficulties or problems on a continuum. Klauer & Lauth (1997) suggest the systematisation of learning difficulties on two dimensions, independent of their severity: the dimension of amplitude (partial/area-specific vs. general/comprehensive) and the dimension of time (temporary vs. long-term).

According to Klauer & Lauth (1997: 704), long-term difficulties are resistant to successful intervention. This understanding has a direct impact on educational practice: on the one hand, teachers in literacy courses as well as counsellors need to set boundaries with regards to their educational responsibility. Learners can be partially assisted with adequate materials, as is the case for dyslexia, but the anticipated success must be appropriate. The more we know about how to handle specific difficulties, on the other hand, the better teachers and counsellors may confront difficulties within the classroom and improve the learners' situation.

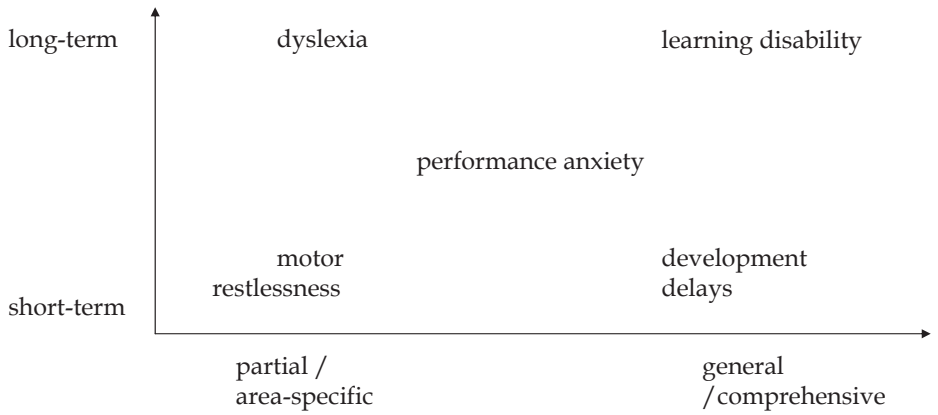

FIGURE 1 Dimensional classification of learning difficulties (Source: Klauer & Lauth 1997: 704, translated by the authors).

In educational practice or counselling sessions, there is a need (1) to identify the problem, and (2) to reflect its multifaceted preconditions. Within the project, learning difficulties range from grapho-motoric issues or permanent problems in reading consonant clusters to low motivation or attention deficits.

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[9] For a remedial education perspective in terms of terminological diversity, see Klauer & Lauth 1997:702.

The theoretical framework for the preconditions of learning difficulties in the project LeLeBe is based on central assumptions by Klauer & Lauth (1997). Their understanding of performance problems is widely accepted within the domain of remedial education and special education. Referring to the authors' analysis of preconditions, we also distinguish between four perspectives on preconditions:

1. cognitive and actional perspective
2. motivational perspective
3. socio-ecological perspective
4. clinical perspective.

Using these conditions as a frame for the analysis of occurring phenomena proved to be helpful in the practice of learning counselling. We assume that performance problems are in most cases not caused by one single aspect. Instead a combination of the conditions stemming from the four perspectives, such as a lack of learning strategies, deviating expectations and educational culture (socialisation), should be considered.

Cognition and Action

The quality of information processing and subsequent learning success primarily depend on the successful use of learning strategies (Gold 2011: 37). The development, use and monitoring of strategies are dependent mainly on metacognitive processes, which are responsible for the effective use of the strategies (Klauer & Lauth 1997: 707). We operate on the assumption that the authors' insight is also true for literacy learners. Accordingly, literacy learners possess a limited quantity of learning strategies as a result of comparably restricted support of metacognitive activity during the educational processes in the primary and secondary socialisation. In fact, inefficient learners are characterised by a limited number of learning strategies; their learning results are worse than those of learners who show a comparably high range of such strategies. Additionally, not only the knowledge *about*, but also the effective use *of* learning strategies is important for successful learning. Literacy learners might for instance not be able to use strategies spontaneously and situationally adequate but rather only when supported.

Moreover, learning strategies, rudimentary knowledge and previous experiences are important components in learning success. In our context, we expect that insufficient knowledge appears to correspond with the individual learning biography (Zielinski 1998) and an inconsistent educational background, which has a significant impact on literacy learning. In combination with deficient metacognitive knowledge, a learner might not reflect the reasons for acquiring learning strategies, setting personal learning goals or planning activities to achieve goals. In the context of L2 literacy learning, we also want to emphasise phonological awareness and learners L1 as additional factors that

affect learning. Phonological awareness is a precondition to reading and will impede language acquisition if not sufficiently developed (see section 4.3).

Motivation

While the lack of learning-relevant knowledge, strategies and previous experiences are important predictors of learning success or failure, motivation is one key component in the acquisition of cognitive factors. Consequently, we emphasise the close relationship between the two perspectives.

Therefore, if literacy learning is without success, negative attributions ("I fail, because I am unable to learn it") will harm self-efficacy and the consequent acquisition of avoidance strategies will result in an increased probability in the future. These strategies fulfil the essential function of protecting self-efficacy (Grawe 2004: 278–280). Consequently, goal-oriented activities will become less probable and learning even less efficient and successful. However, there is evidence for a close correlation between learning strategies and the improvement of positive motivation. To break the vicious circle, teachers or learning counsellors need to reflect the learners' specific learning situation and guide them to learn more about strategies and how to effectively use them. Klauer & Lauth, however, suggest training in problem solving. They developed their own training programs, inspired by Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment Program[10].

Socio-ecological Perspective

Considering that learning strategies and basic knowledge are imparted through social mediation processes, a socio-ecological perspective is given an important role concerning learning difficulties. Families, who do not ascribe a high value to education or do not have sufficient metacognitive learning strategies themselves as a result of their primary, secondary and tertiary socialisation, will most likely not support their own relatives in the learning process. In terms of social reproduction, the milieu of the learner will display a significant impact on the learners' orientation, motivation, effective transfer of basic knowledge, learning strategies, as well as the direction of attentiveness. This, of cause is a specifically Euro-centric perspective, as the theoretical construct of learning difficulties results from the social consensus of the "western" achievement-oriented society. Moreover "patterns of language learning in any community are in accord with and mutually reinforce other cultural patterns" (Heath 1983: 344). Reading and writing, for instance, may occur far less in interaction than oral conversation and the ways of learning, problem solving and use of strategies may differ from our cultural expectations, which can be misinterpreted as learning difficulties.

Even though the importance of the socio-ecological factors in language acquisition is no longer disputed, the impact of learning counselling on the social environment of learners, however, remains very limited.

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10 For further explanation see also Feuerstein, Rand, & Tannenbaum (1979).

Clinical Perspective

Aside from the conditions that have been discussed previously, neurological (e.g. dementia, migraines) or psychological issues, such as traumata or depression can influence language acquisition. Furthermore, medication in case of mental or other diseases will also affect learning. This perspective, however, will not be considered within the project, as treatment is best provided by professionals in the domain of clinical psychology, medicine and other fields.

Conclusively, we expect that most of the learning difficulties occurring in integration and other L2 literacy courses are a result of the individual learning biographies. Consequently, we suggest counselling as an efficient opportunity to support the development of learners.

4.2.2 Origins of Learning Counselling

The concept of promoting learners' autonomy as a goal of the learning process can be traced back to Knowles' (1975: 18) idea of self-directed learning in the 1970s which could be seen as the origin of a variety of self-learning approaches, e.g., tandem language learning and language counselling/advising.[11] Several studies have shown the development of counselling approaches at self-access centres of universities (Kelly 1996; Voller, Martyn, & Pickard 1999; Pemberton, Toogood, Ho, & Lam 2001). Core-elements of these concepts are inter alia clarifying needs, goal-setting, monitoring the learning process and self-assessment. However, previous research in learning counselling has failed to address LESLLA learners with their individual needs. Developing a concept and materials for counselling L2 literacy learners, which are empirically tested, the project LeLeBe aims to fill this research gap.

In Germany, two types of learning counselling have been developed: On the one side, counselling concepts for the area of vocational training and education were developed, with primary focus on individuals with low education. Kemper & Klein (1998) linked their concept to Holzkamp's learning theory and his construct of expansive learning. It aims to support learning management competences, while considering the individual learning biography (Klein & Reutter 2011: 15). The authors argue that, aside from other aspects, learning conferences, learning diaries, learning counselling consultations, and feedback are the core-elements of a concept for learning counselling (Klein 2004: 93). On the other side, Kleppin & Mehlhorn (2006) developed a concept for learning counselling in the context of academic language acquisition. Similarly to the concept of Kemper & Klein (1998), counselling aims to support learners to take responsibility for their own learning. (See Kleppin & Mehlhorn 2006: 1.) Consequently, learning counselling can contribute to learners' autonomy by a) encouraging reflexion of learning b) supporting the reflexion of one's own needs and institutional requirements and c) encouraging collective learning

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[11] The terms ´language counselling´ and ´language advising´ are used interchangeably (see Voller et al. 1999; Crabbe/ Hoffmann /Cotteral 2001).

(Vogler 2011: 21). Overall, the authors' approach is based on Carl Rogers' (1994) principle of non-directiveness and voluntary participation.

LESLLA learners are at the intersection of the target groups of both concepts: While participants of the Kemper & Klein counselling concept are low educated but not in the process of L2 language acquisition, the Kleppin & Mehlhorn concept of learning counselling addresses highly educated L2 learners.

LeLeBe participants on the other hand, are basically low educated, illiterate and characterised by having learning difficulties. Therefore, counselling in integration courses requires a unique concept, which considers the preconditions for language learning of until now disregarded learners.

We argue that most of the principles of both concepts are valid in the LESSLA context as well, even though we consider a more directive treatment to be more effective, because metacognitive strategies that are needed for non-directive counselling, often need to be initiated first. LeLeBe includes different elements of both concepts:

- the aim of strengthening learning management competences and supporting self-directed learning with specific consideration of the learning biography (Kemper & Klein 1998)
- reflection of participants' attitudes towards learning in the L2 acquisition process, setting goals, a selection of learning strategies, self-evaluation of the learning process and the attempt to strengthen self-confidence and motivation (Kleppin & Mehlhorn 2006).

Owing to the demands of LESLLA learners, our concept is, moreover, diagnostically based, linguistically grounded and primarily directed towards written language acquisition (see section 4.4).

4.3 Project LeLeBe – Leipzig Learning Counselling in Integration Courses with a Literacy Component

In this section we introduce the project with its goals and present the learning counselling in practice.

4.3.1 Goals of the LeLeBe Project

We began the project LeLeBe in order to confront learning difficulties within individual semi-directive counselling sessions. As evident in the concepts above, we aim to improve autonomous learning and the transfer of learning strategies for further learning and to enable learners to more successfully participate in integration courses.

The LeLeBe project includes three phases: (1) development of diagnostics, (2) intervention/resource activation, and (3) program evaluation. We will

provide a brief overview of the project here and discuss its realisation in more detail in the subsequent section.

Development of Diagnostics

Because there is a lack of materials for our target group, we developed different diagnostic tools within the project or adjusted existing methods for our purposes and target group. The inventory includes observation sheets for mnestic functions (attention and concentration), visual differentiation and grapho-motoric skills, a biography of learning[12], a learning progress assessment (assessment of reading and writing skills and of phonological awareness), a test for phonological awareness and a learning style assessment.

We are aware of the fact that most of the tests are culture-specific and results may be affected by the individual cultural background. Apart from the observation sheets, which are only used in very specific cases, diagnostics within the learning counselling is based on an intense, if necessary L1-based, communicative process in order to minimize these effects. Biographical data, for example, is strictly collected and evaluated in dialogue with the participants, and, if necessary, a translator.

Intervention/Resource Activation[13]

In section two, we focused on learning difficulties and their preconditions. We assume that only focusing on deficits and problem activation is not sufficient to improve the learners' situation. Consequently, we address learners' resources and focus on individual abilities in order to reduce learning difficulties.

Like Klauer & Lauth (1997), we also consider the training of learning strategies as an effective intervention. We distinguish between metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies include reflexion about one's own learning process and the use of strategies; cognitive strategies range from asking questions, using visualisations, to memory strategies, while affective strategies include motivation control or individual goal setting (Friedrich & Mandl 2005: 5), and social strategies involve the role of family in terms of family literacy. For each category, there are several examples. The categories of strategies, however, show an interesting correspondence with the Klauer & Lauth perspectives on learning difficulties, excluding the clinical perspective. We argue that self-directed learning can be prepared by developing the ability to reflect and use strategies.

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12 This instrument will be translated into the three most common languages in literacy courses: Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and it contains many visualisations to better enable conversation.

13 Medical socialist Aaron Antonovsky developed an alternative to the most common deficit oriented (pathogenesis) perspective in the early 1970s (see Antonovsky 1997). Not only the cause of disease but the cause of (mental) health was targeted for the first time. This perspective shows relevance for language acquisition, too. In the L2 learning process, a learner needs his existing abilities and knowledge to find a way through his individual labyrinth of difficulties in order to meet his personal goals. The findings described also provided evidence for the effectiveness of therapy. Klaus Grawe & Daniel Gassmann (2006) show in one experiment that therapy which includes resource analysis and resource activation is more effective than therapy with only problem analysis.

Evaluation
In the third phase of the project, we will evaluate the collected data. Furthermore, we plan to edit a guide for learning counsellors in Germany, which shall include diagnostic tools and materials for treatment or course-immanent counselling.

4.4 Learning Counselling in Practice

Here we focus on the process and the materials involved in counselling. First, we will present a possible time schedule for counselling L2 literacy learners. Following, we will discuss the materials used for the counselling.

Process of Counselling
For the initial phase of the project a counselling schedule including the sessions and the corresponding materials has been developed (see Figure 2).

Following traditional counselling concepts we decided on 12 to 15 counselling sessions per learner. The frontal situation of the counselling sessions requires much attention and concentration from the learners, in particular from L2 literacy learners. Thus, the sessions last 30 to 45 minutes and take place once a week. Depending on the learner´s needs, an interpreter supports the counselling sessions.

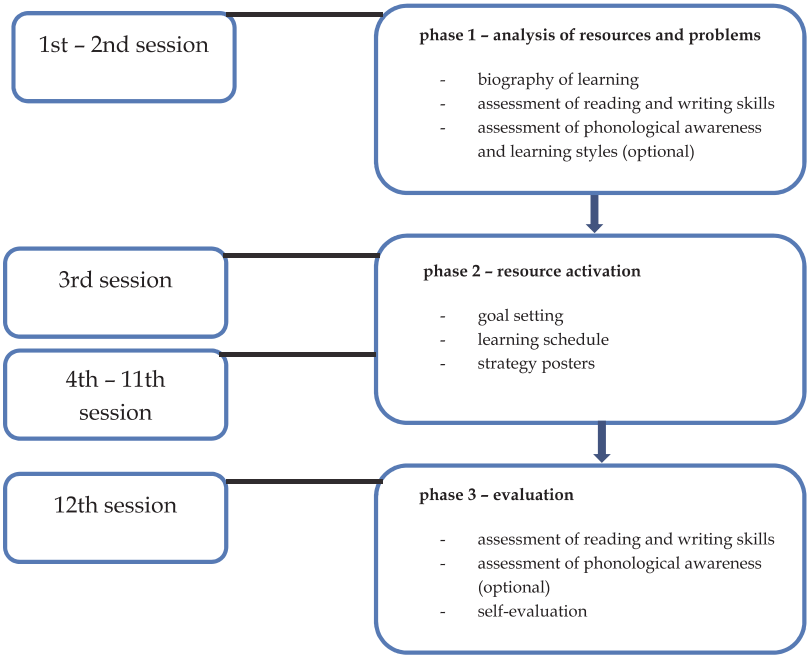

FIGURE 2 Phases of the 12-hour counselling process.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the counselling process consists of three phases. The first phase (1st – 2nd session) focuses on the analysis of resources and problems starting with a conversation about the learner's learning biography. The first small task for the learner within the counselling is to write a short text about himself. This text forms the basis for the assessment of the writing skills. The assessment of the reading skills is based on a recording in which the learner reads aloud during the first counselling session. Phonological skills and learning styles can be assessed during the 2nd session as well.

During the second phase (3rd – 11th session) we concentrate on resource activation. In the 3rd session we discuss the learners' goals using a collection of pictures (see more in detail in section Counselling materials). Accordingly, up to three goals are determined. Subsequently, a learning schedule based on the goals is developed and discussed with the learner during the 4th session. The sessions following the goal setting are determined by the introduction and training of learning strategies. According to the goals various strategies including cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies are established by the counsellor. From counselling session to counselling session the learner is asked to fulfil small tasks, e.g., take photos, collect words or texts, and to try out a strategy at home.

The purpose of the last phase (12th session) is to evaluate the counselling process. This includes an assessment of the learning progress (reading and writing skills, possibly phonological awareness) and a self-evaluation about the learner's satisfaction with regard to achieving the set goals and the counselling process in general.

Counselling Materials

Due to the lack of suitable materials for LESLLA learners we developed most of the counselling materials during the initial phase of the project. We distinguish two kinds of materials for the counselling of L2 literacy learners: Diagnostic materials, which aim to identify resources and problems of the learners, are mostly used at the beginning of the counselling and interventional materials for resource activation are used during the second phase of counselling – the interventional phase. Considering the learners L1 as a great resource and an aid in completing tasks as well, some counselling materials are bilingual. According to the three most frequent first languages of learners in German integration courses with a literacy component, translations in Arabic, Kurdish (Sorani), and Turkish are included in the materials. Table 1 illustrates the developed materials:

TABLE 1 Counselling materials

Diagnostic materials	**Interventional materials**
- Observation sheets	- Goal setting
- Biography of learning	- Learning schedule
- Learning style assessment	- Learning contract
- Learning progress assessment:	- Strategy posters and training materials
Assessment of reading and writing skills	
Assessment of phonological awareness	

In terms of the preconditions of learning difficulties observation sheets for mnestic functions, such as attention and concentration, visual differentiation and grapho-motoric skills were developed. Because the tool aims to reveal deficits in basic knowledge and abilities, it is used if needed in class by the counsellor or during the counselling sessions.

The biography of learning as a traditional counselling material (Kemper & Klein 1998; Mehlhorn 2005) is to be used during the first counselling sessions. This diagnostic tool aims for the learner and counsellor to become acquainted with each other, mutually build confidence and to learn about the educational background of the learners, their attitude towards learning and as well their learning strategies. The information from the biography may also reveal causes for learning difficulties. As we know, learning does not only occur at school but also in non-educational contexts; the biography, therefore, includes information about the social circumstances of the learners and their profession. The biography of learning consists of three parts: *Me and my family – My first language, My work, My German course*. The material includes questions and statements for the mentioned subjects, is bilingual and includes pictures, which helps to facilitate conversation during the first sessions.

Figure 3 illustrates an example of the tasks in the Turkish – German biography of learning. The task belongs to the part *Me and my family – My first language*. As can be seen in the example, the learner is asked to reflect on his/her written language skills in the first language. The learner can select between *I can read and write: very good – good – bad* by circling the smiley in the table.

FIGURE 3 Example of the Turkish-German biography of learning.

To determine learners' perceptual preferences, a learning style assessment was developed which can be used during the first counselling sessions. This tool consists of a bilingual questionnaire based on the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Survey from Reid (1998), an observation of cognitive learning styles according to Ehrmann (1996) and a memory test. Firstly, the results of the assessment aim to stimulate the learner's reflection about his/her learning styles and preferences. Secondly, they allow us to develop materials and strategies based on perceptual preferences.

Within the learning progress assessment we focus on the reading and writing skills and on phonological awareness. In assessing reading and writing skills of learners, we decided to work with a framework composed of can-do-statements, which enables us to identify competences and difficulties at a certain reading and writing level. Because the CEFR was developed for foreign language learners who are able to read and write in their first language, it overlooks the necessary skills for literacy learning such as technical skills, e. g. analysing phonemes of words and blending them. Therefore, the CEFR is not a suitable tool for assessing reading and writing skills. Stockmann (2005: 154) proposes a Framework Literacy for Dutch as a Second language[14]"splitting up level A1 into three smaller parts: Alfa A, Alfa B and Alfa C" and including

14 Stockmann, Willemijn (2008): Raamwerk Alfabetisering NT2. Arnhem: Citogroup.

technical and functional skills. This Framework can be used for the assessment of reading and writing skills. To assess learners' reading and writing skills, we analyse recordings from the first counselling sessions and written material from the learners.

Due to the fact that phonological awareness is a strong predictor of reading and writing skills (Goswami & Bryant 1990; Küspert 1998), the assessment of phonological skills includes the learning progress assessment as well. It aims to identify potential causes for learning difficulties. Additionally, with the help of the assessment of phonological awareness an individual training programme for phonological skills can be developed. Previous research has shown that phonological awareness of low-literate adult learners – as well as of young children's – develops from syllables, over onsets and rimes to phonemes (Young-Scholten & Strom 2005: 62). Referring to the different levels of phonological awareness and following Schnitzler (2008) and her two-dimensional model of phonological awareness, seven tasks for assessing phonological skills in the first and second language were developed. Furthermore, the tasks were recorded in the learners´ first language and in German. Embedding the tasks into the context "My life in Germany", a "learning board" similar to a game board with seven situations, e.g., *my flat* and *at work*, was developed. These materials for the learning progress assessment are used at the beginning of the counselling and during the last sessions as well.

Because we believe that individual goals are very important for learners' motivation, goal setting is a core element in the counselling process. Setting goals for learning is a metacognitive strategy and the basis of every learning process, in particular in autonomous learning. The goals set by the participants form the basis and the context for working on learning difficulties. According to goal setting theory (Latham/Locke 1990), setting demanding and concrete goals in combination with a high degree of goal commitment influence the achievement of the goals. Facing the problem that goals are often unconscious, we developed a method according to the Zurich-Resource-Model (Storch & Krause 2007) using pictures to determine the learners' goals. The focus of the goal setting is a collection of pictures presented to the learner. The selection of the pictures is based on the various life domains of migrants mentioned in the curriculum for German integration courses (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2008). Looking at the pictures the learner is asked to choose the three most important pictures out of the collection. Subsequently, during a conversation about the pictures concrete goals are set in cooperation with the learner. Afterward the learners and counselor discuss potential and existing problems in achieving the set goals.

A learning schedule as a traditional counselling tool is strongly connected with goal setting. First, it aims to organise the learning process for achieving set goals. Secondly, according to Friedrich & Mandl (2006) who emphasised the role of self-controlled learning, planning the learning process is an important step towards the development of metacognitive strategies. Planning includes splitting up the goals into small, feasible tasks, monitoring the learning process

("Up to what date do I need to complete the tasks?"), evaluating the fulfilled tasks ("How did I manage the tasks?") and self-regulation ("Do I have to do the task again?"). These processes should be considered while establishing the learning schedule. As can be seen in the sample learning schedule in Figure 4 it was designed like a table consisting of three columns, and split up into tasks (first column: "Das ist zu tun:"), the date until the learner has to complete the task (second column: "Bis wann?") and a self-evaluation of the completed tasks using the traffic-light-system (third column: "Geschafft?"). The learning schedule is implemented after the goal setting.

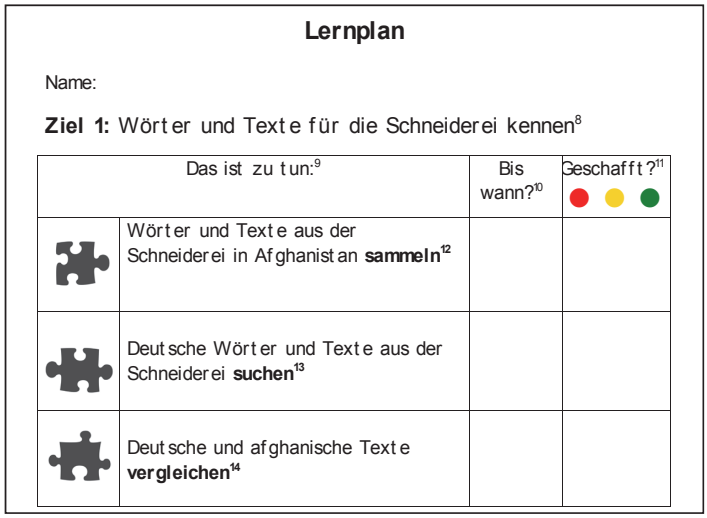

FIGURE 4 Example of a learning schedule[15].

In the course of developing counselling materials a counselling contract with the aim of fixing the goals and creating transparency with regard to the expectations of the learner and counsellor was developed. However, during the counselling sessions it became apparent that this tool is not necessary for our target group.[161718192021]

Since we focus on learning strategies in the counselling concept, methods to present strategies to learners need to be identified. In our opinion, the use of strategy posters is a promising way to introduce and explain new learning strategies to our target group. Due to the kind of media, strategy posters are useful in their visuality and durability in contrast to oral explanations of learning strategies (Schramm 2009: 109–110). In particular these aspects are

15 Translation: "Goal 1: to know words and texts about tailoring".
16 Translation: "This is what I have to do:"
17 Translation: "Until when?"
18 Translation: "How did I manage the task?"
19 Translation: "Collect words and texts about tailoring in Afghanistan"
20 Translation: "Collect German words and texts about tailoring"
21 Translation: "Compare German and Afghan texts"

essential in working with L2 literacy learners. The following characteristics should be considered when developing strategy posters for our target group: title of the learning strategy on the poster, using little text on the posters, organising the strategy into small and clear instructions, using meaningful pictures or photos, considering font size and font type with regard to L2 literacy learners (Schramm 2009).

4.5 Conclusion

Facing learning problems and developing self-regulated learning among LESLLA learners, a new approach suggested in this article is the counselling of L2 literacy learners. The central ideas of counselling concepts – regardless of the target group – are the strengthening of autonomous learning, finding new ways for learning, taking responsibility for one's own learning process, as well as recognising and using one's own competences.

Counselling materials such as goal setting and a learning schedule aim to promote the use of metacognitive strategies. During the counselling sessions the introduction and training of learning strategies with regard to the set goals are emphasised. This improves the opportunity to stimulate and encourage learners' autonomy, which plays an important role especially after completing the German course. The counselling materials are tested during the counselling sessions and the project will be empirically evaluated and discussed after having finished the counselling sessions.

Concluding, one great advantage of our counselling concept is its individual character. Based on the reflecting of one´s own learning process, improving learning difficulties becomes possible. Thereby, competences of the learners can be uncovered and harnessed to positively promote the literacy process.

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II CLASSROOMS

5 GRAPPLING WITH THE ORAL SKILLS: THE LEARNING PROCESSES OF THE LOW-EDUCATED ADULT SECOND LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNER

Susanna Strube, Ineke van de Craats, & Roeland van Hout, Radboud University Nijmegen

Abstract

This paper focuses on the learning processes in L2 literacy classes in the Netherlands, discussing specifically possible influences of the learning processes during the practice of the oral skills. To achieve a better understanding of the students' spoken language development, classroom processes of six adult L2 literacy classes were observed during a period of eight months and students were pre- and post-assessed. In comparing the classes, notable differences in gain scores in morphosyntactic features as well as aspects of relevance and coherence in discourse surfaced. In order to explain these differences certain factors were examined in relation to learner characteristics, classroom hours and attendance, and classroom practices. The study initially looked at ten learner and classroom characteristics. Of these, only age of arrival proved to be of any significance. In the area of classroom practices the use of the computer as a support in (vocabulary) learning showed to be of essential significance, particularly in the area of morphosyntax.

Keywords: oral skills, low-educated, learning processes

5.1 Introduction

The research described in this paper is part of an on-going investigation focusing on the development of the oral skills during classroom practice of the low-educated L2 and literacy adult learner in centres for adult education in the Netherlands. Studying the learning processes of the non- or low-literate L2 adult learner is complex. These learners are not only handicapped by their illiteracy, as the written word is not sufficiently developed to function as a support in learning, their competence in the L2 oral skills is also limited. This means that the intrinsic knowledge of sounds, words and sentences is inadequately developed to be put to use in the process of learning to read. The low-educated learner has a double handicap: learning to read and write while at the same time working on the oral skills, the latter being the building blocks on which the former materializes. For many learners formal education in school is their major source for developing these skills. If, for whatever reason, their access to the L2 is restricted, the classroom is their only source. For this reason knowing what goes on in the L2 classroom in terms of teaching and learning is of special importance. There are two major premises concerning a study of the LESLLA learners: (1) understanding the oral skills development of LESLLA learners, and the relationships to their literacy skills; and (2) understanding the relationship between instructional conditions and skill development in these areas. This study stands to make a contribution to the understanding of the oral skills trajectory of LESLLA learner as seen through their development in an institutional situation.

This paper centres on two main questions: What happens during the practice of the oral skills in the L2 literacy classroom? And, do certain learner and/or teaching characteristics have an influence on the learning process? In order to answer these two questions, two steps had to be undertaken. First, the initial and end L2 level in oral skills during the observation period had to be assessed. For this an assessment was developed. Secondly, learner and teaching characteristics had to be determined. Section 5.2 of this paper opens with a short discussion of relevant L2 classroom research having bearing on the non-literate learner. The research method is described in section 5.3. In section 5.5 the results are presented. In section 5.6 the findings are discussed in relation to other research concerning the L2 literacy classroom, followed in section 5.7 by recommendations for the classroom.

5.2 Background

In general very little research has been done concerning low- or non-literate learners of a second language, and even less concerning their learning in the classroom. Many studies in the past have focused on adult L2 classrooms (e.g., Chaudron 1988; Johnson 1995; Van Lier 1988), but only a few have studied the

low- or non-literate adult L2. One of the few classroom studies that had been done was by Kurvers & Van der Zouw (1990). This study was the first study in the Netherlands that, to our knowledge, took a closer look at L2 literacy classrooms. In that study the literacy processes of intensive (15 hours per week) and non-intensive classes (between one and a half to six hours per week) were followed. Concerning the oral skills practice in the adult literacy classroom no such studies have been executed before this one, as far as we know. Consequently, SLA theory is largely based on the performance demonstrated by literate, and often highly educated L2 learners. Bigelow & Tarone (2004: 690), who have undertaken one of the few experimental studies on the effect of literacy on L2 oral production state that, "The failure to investigate illiterate learners has resulted in SLA theory that may not account for the full range of contexts in which human beings learn L2". They continue by stating, "If accepted findings describe only literate and educated language learners, then theory has limited applicability and little value in guiding teachers who work with illiterate learners". Fortunately, in the field of linguistic acquisition more research has taken up the challenge to focus on this specific group of learners, as is testified by the yearly symposia (since 2005) and ensuing publications of the LESLLA forum (Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition).

In the last few years, three major projects focused on the L2 literacy classroom. The first was the extensive *What Works* project in the United States by Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon, Cronen, & Seburn (2003). The objective of this project was to identify instructional activities that help to develop and improve literacy and communicative skills in English. Three instructional practices emerged as being most influential for positive language development: bringing the outside world into the classroom, use of the L1 for clarification, and varied practice with focus on communication. The most outstanding student factors were regular attendance, prior education and age (older students seemed to acquire language skills more slowly). In line with this project was *ESOL effective teaching and learning* project executed in Great Britain by Baynham, Roberts, Cooke, Simpson, Ananiadou, Callaghan, McGoldrick, & Wallace (2007). While the *What Works* project concerned literacy students, the *ESOL* project encompassed all students within the ESOL field (English for Speakers of Other Languages), those literate as well as non-literate. The main findings of this project indicated the teaching strategies that promote "balance and variety" as well as "planning and explicitness" were more significant than "a collaborative learning environment" and "connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives." The third study was carried out in the Netherlands by Kurvers & Stockmann (2009), *Alfabetisering NT2 in beeld: Leerlast en succesfactoren* [Focus on L2 literacy: Study load and success factors]. This study focused on how long it takes to become literate in the L2 for non-literate adult learners and which success factors play a role in this process. The study showed that becoming literate takes a lot of time, between 400 and more than 2000 hours. Because the learner population is so diverse, a benchmark is difficult to set, and perhaps even inadvisable. Three success factors stand out: contact with native speakers,

the use of the L1 as a support in the classroom, and an L2 literacy language portfolio, the latter containing attestations of learning achievements in literacy. The discussion in section 5.6 refers again to these three studies.

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Design

This paper investigates possible factors of influence on the development of the oral skills during normal classroom practice in adult L2 literacy classes. Not wanting to disturb the processes in the classroom as they occur, a non-experimental design was chosen. The study, based on qualitative as well as quantitative data, was longitudinal. Six adult L2 literacy classes at a beginners' level in centres for adult education in the Netherlands were observed from November 2006 to 2007. In order to determine the change in language development of the students a pre- post-assessment design was administered. An explanation for the differences that arose from the assessments was then sought in learner and classroom characteristics.

5.3.2 Data Collection

Three main sources formed the basis of the data collection: teacher and school records, results from the pre- and post-assessments, and results from classroom observation. The information noted in the school records varied from centre to centre, and was often incomplete. For example, there was no data on the level of L1 literacy nor on the level of attained DSL (Dutch as a second language) schooling. Each class was, on average, observed eight times and the students were pre- and post-assessed. The assessment and the observation schemes were developed for this purpose. Of the initial 68 learners, 41 were both pre- and post-assessed. Audio-recordings were made during classroom observation and the assessments. Both were later transcribed in order to be analysed. The classrooms were later analysed using three different observation schemes: classroom content, participant interaction, and corrective feedback, all based on the COLT format (see Spada & Fröhlich 1995). This paper centres on the observation scheme concerning 'classroom content'. It is explained further in section 5.5.2.

5.3.3 Participants

Students

The main learner characteristics of the six classes are summarized in Table 1. From the figures in Table 1, observable differences between the classes are evident. Class 4 has students with the youngest mean age, shortest mean length of residence (LOR), and the youngest mean age of arrival (AOA). The students

in Classes 1, 2, and 3 were slightly older and had a longer LOR than the students in Class 4. The students in Classes 5 and 6, were on average older than those in the other classes and, because of their much longer LOR, their AOA did not differ greatly from the other classes.

TABLE 1 Learner characteristics for each of the six observed classes based on school records (LOR = length of residence; AOA = age of arrival; DSL = Dutch as a second language).

Class (N)	Mean age	Mean LOR	Mean AOA	Mean years L1 schooling	% learners L1 literate	% learners DSL schooling	% students with children	% students with work
1 (7)	38.1	7.1	31.0	0.7	42.9	42.9	100	14.3
2 (8)	35.6	7.9	27.7	2.5	37.5	75.0	50.0	12.5
3 (5)	35.2	2.2	33.0	0.8	40.0	100	60.0	40.0
4 (6)	26.8	2.0	24.8	3.5	33.3	50.0	50.0	16.7
5 (9)	44.9	14.1	30.8	0.9	11.1	44.4	100	0
6 (6)	42.7	13.8	28.9	0	0	100	100	0
Means	37.2	7.9	29.4	1.4	27.6	68.7	76.7	13.9

The information given in the school records for L1 schooling and L1 literacy was most inconsistent. Schooling was usually given in number of years attended and/or in type of school, for example, three years elementary school. Such information gives an indication of having had some schooling, but because school systems differ greatly from country to country, no conclusions could be drawn as to the actual learning level of the student. In addition information concerning L1 literacy was frequently obscure. Sometimes the script in which the student was literate was noted, but other times only a mere "yes" or "no" was registered without indicating the script. Consequently, the information in Table 1 is an approximation. Nevertheless, it is clear that Classes 2 and 4 had the most number of years of schooling in comparison to the other classes. For L1 literacy another picture emerges. Although Classes 2 and 4 had had the most L1 schooling, there were fewer students L1 literate. In Class 4 only two out of the six students (33.3%) were noted to be L1 literate, one in Latin script and one in Arabic. One student was noted to be non-literate, even though she was noted to have had six years of elementary schooling. This student, from Somalia, most probably had had a fragmented educational past due to internal instabilities in the country of origin. In Class 2, three students had had on average eight years of L1 schooling and were noted to be literate in the Arabic script, although the ability to use this skill in learning was not evidenced. The L1 schooling and literacy in Classes 5 and 6 was very low.

Again the school records gave an incomplete picture for DSL schooling. The school records might give start and end dates (no hours) or total number of hours or a vague indication as "some" or no data at all. The percentages in Table 1 only pertain to the number of students having followed some type of DSL course. In total 68.7 % of the students have had some sort of DSL schooling. Regardless of these uncertainties, the students that have had some DSL

schooling, make them false and not absolute beginners in the classroom. As seen by the low LOR of Classes 3 and 4 (2.2 and 2.0 years respectively) the students were probably placed in the present course shortly after arrival. In contrast, the students in Classes 5 and 6 with a high LOR (14.1 and 13.8 years respectively) were placed in the present course many years after arrival. Four students in Class 5 and all the students in Class 6 have had some previous DSL training. The fact that they were placed in a beginners course points to very fragmented previous DSL training.

Most of the learners were noted to have children, 76.7%. Only five learners in total (13.9%) were noted to have had some type of work outside the home. Work and children are factors which can enhance the L2 contact and, consequently, can be important factors of influence for language learning.

Classrooms

The six observed classes were selected on the basis of a questionnaire survey mailed to all 35 centres of education in the Netherlands with literacy programs, with a 77.14% response rate. Demographical features (geographical location, size of centre of education, and L2 literacy learner population in size and type - newcomer or long-term resident) as well as classroom organizational aspects were examined. From this survey the six classes with different demographical and organizational features were selected. Concerning classroom organization, three types surfaced in terms of time spent on oral and literacy skills. Since the amount time and frequency of oral skills practice could have an influence on its development, it was essential to include each type in the research. Two classes from each type were selected, each differing in its demographical features. Table 2 gives an overview of the selected schools.

TABLE 2 Selected classes in terms of program organization, geographical location, school size, and category and number of students (2006).

Selected classes	Classroom organization type	Geographical location	School size	Category of students	Number of students at start
1	1	Northwest	Large	Primarily newcomers	11
2	1	West	Medium	Primarily newcomers	15
3	2	South	Medium	Mixed	7
4	2	East	Small	Mixed	11
5	3	Northwest	Medium	Long term residents	13
6	3	Centre	Large	Long term residents	11

These differences are also reflected in the scheduled classroom hours. Table 3 gives an overview of the classroom hours. As Table 3 illustrates, there is a difference between Classes 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the one hand and Classes 5 and 6 on the other. In Classes 1, 2, 3, and 4 a fixed amount of time was allotted for each skill and the skills were practiced separately, often before and after the break. In Classes 5 and 6 the teacher determined when and how much time a particular

skill was to be practiced. Another difference between these classes is the total number of hours given per week to orals skills practice. Classes 1, 2, and 3, with a similar organisation, allocated an equal number of hours to each skill. Class 4 had one classroom period per week for the oral skills practice, but two for literacy practice. Class 5 had the least total number of weekly classroom hours and Class 4 had the least number of oral skills practice hours.

TABLE 3 Scheduled classroom hours per week for the six observed classes.

Class	Lessons per week		Hours per week		Total hours per week
	Oral skills	Literacy skills	Oral skills	Literacy skills	
1	3	3	4.50	4.50	9.00
2	4	4	6.00	6.00	12.00
3	4	4	5.00	5.00	10.00
4	1	2	2.75	5.50	8.25
5		2		5.00	5.00
6		4		11.00	11.00

Table 4 shows the number of scheduled and attended oral skills classroom hours during the observation period. The number of scheduled hours was calculated from the number of lessons that took place during that period and the duration of each lesson. All the classes had a relatively high rate of attendance, with Classes 2 and 3 the lowest.

TABLE 4 Scheduled and attended oral skills classroom hours during the observation period for the six observed classes.

Class	Duration per lesson (in hours)	Number of lessons	Scheduled oral skills classroom hours	Mean rate of attendance	Mean number of attended classroom hours
1	1.50	90	135.00	0.86	116.10
2	1.50	120	180.00	0.66	118.80
3	1.25	120	150.00	0.75	112.50
4	2.75	30	82.50	0.85	70.13
5	2.50	60	150.00	0.82	123.00
6	2.75	120	330.00	0.80	264.00

5.4 Procedure

Assessments

The assessment focused only on the speaking skills, through oral descriptions of pictures, not oral interaction and communicative skills. In order to exclude influence from the written skills the assessment was solely based on pictures.

The assessment tool was piloted by three literacy teachers and ten of their students. A period of eight months intervened between the two assessments. The pre-assessment was administered at the start of the observation period and the post-assessment at the close. The post-assessment was a repetition of the pre-assessment. The students were assessed in a separate classroom during normal classroom time. Both assessments were audio-recorded and were later transcribed orthographically. There was no time limit placed on the assessment. It took approximately 20 minutes per learner to administer. The researcher administered all the assessments and explained to the testee how each task was to be performed.

The assessment tasks focused on discrete vocabulary knowledge, picture description, and storytelling. The vocabulary tasks checked productive and receptive vocabulary knowledge of 50 words represented by pictures. There were two types of picture tasks: (1) describing single pictures and (2) telling stories based on a series of pictures. All the pictures depicted familiar actions and episodes, each requiring its own vocabulary to tap as much language as possible and to allow for variation in vocabulary and in utterance complexity for the less and more capable students. The first picture description task had four pictures with simple line drawings, each showing one person performing one action. In the next description task (six pictures) the protagonist performed an activity with an object or person. The final description task contained four coloured photographs of common daily affairs. These photographs contained a lot of detail and were the most complex of the description tasks, allowing the possibility to produce utterances with greater complexity. The picture descriptions were operationalized in terms of entities and activities/properties for each picture. The entities were the objects or persons (nouns) about which something was said and concerned the main figures in the pictures, often the agent. The activities/properties (verbs, adjectives, adverbs and nouns) expressed the actions or described the entities. These entities and activities/properties collectively formed the minimal distinctive elements on which the performance of an utterance was assessed (for details see Strube, Van de Craats, & Van Hout 2010).

In the analysis of the assessments eleven variables were examined in the areas of vocabulary, morphosyntax, and discourse. These were: general vocabulary knowledge, the tokens, the types, number of constituents, the presence of a verb, the position of a verb, the presence of an agent, verb inflection, utterance relevance of the picture descriptions and the picture stories (in relation to the entities and activities/properties used), and coherence in the picture stories. In order to identify more clearly patterns of similarity and difference as seen in the pre- and post-assessments results, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was applied. By applying PCA the number of variables was reduced forming interrelated groups, which were in turn easier to compare.

Classroom Observation
Classroom observation was carried out with the least possible amount of interference. During the research period the teachers prepared their lessons as usual. The only intrusion on the lesson program was the intermittent presence of the researcher and the MP3 recording device pinned to the teacher's garment. The teachers and the students were made aware of the researcher's interest in teacher-student interactions during lesson time. No further details were given. No video recordings were made, because the students in two classes objected.

5.5 Results

5.5.1 Pre- and Post-assessments

There were eleven variables (test results) for both pre- and post-assessments, which are intended to measure different competences, but the analysis shows that several variables seem to measure similar underlying competences, such as, for instance, lexical proficiency. The variables can be assigned to different underlying competences or components by applying Principal Component Analysis (PCA, also known as factor analysis). The variables, the test results in this study, are ordered on the basis of correlation patterns. That means that we get interrelated groups of test results, defined in terms of components. Table 5 presents the PCA factor matrices for the eleven variables for pre-assessment and post-assessment. The PCA returned three underlying components in both assessments. The loadings reflect the correlation between a specific test result and the component in question. The three components appear to reflect three types of competences. The first component represents lexical competence having high loadings for vocabulary knowledge of specific words and word count. The second component contains three variables: constituents, verb presence, and picture story coherence. These were subsumed under the heading of syntagmatic competence covering relationships between linguistic units. The third component is morphosyntactic competence, stipulated by the three relevant variables verb position, agent presence and verb inflection. The two relevance variables, relevance for picture descriptions (pd) and relevance for picture stories (ps) did not have consistent high loadings on the dimensions and were excluded from further analysis. It is obvious that the analysis for the pre-assessment and the post-assessment are strikingly similar, indicating that the competences we distinguish represent robust findings.

TABLE 5 PCA factor matrices for eleven variables for pre- and post-assessments. (pd=picture description, ps=picture story); loadings > .60 in bold face.

	Pre-assessment			Post-assessment		
Factors	Lexical competence	Syntagmatic competence	Morphosyntactic competence	Lexical competence	Syntagmatic competence	Morphosyntactic competence
Specific vocabulary	**.738**	.159	-.126	**.819**	.112	-.103
Tokens	**.865**	.171	.316	**.638**	.303	.422
Types	**.883**	.202	.176	**.808**	.136	.272
Constituents	.265	**.875**	.239	.171	**.894**	.263
Verb present	.239	**.888**	-.101	.194	**.902**	.000
Verb position	.146	-.067	**.909**	.062	.117	**.795**
Agent present	.370	.266	**.738**	.270	.439	**.617**
Verb inflection	.059	.165	**.805**	.150	.119	**.884**
Relevance pd	**.765**	.292	.381	**.772**	.315	.198
Relevance ps	**.748**	.413	.335	.523	.498	.457
Coherence ps	.221	**.842**	.212	.272	**.779**	.298

In order to investigate the development over time and the differences between classes, z-scores were calculated for each of the three components (see Strube, Van de Craats, & Van Hout 2012). These z-scores give an indication of the initial state of each class as a whole (the pre-assessment) and the final stage (the post-assessment). The difference between the z-scores gives the gain scores. From the gain scores it can be discerned whether a class had improved, stayed constant, or even regressed during a certain amount of time. In the following sections, the discussion focuses on Class 2 with the lowest mean gain scores and Class 4 with the highest mean gain scores. Table 6 presents an overview of the z-scores and gain scores for the three competences.

TABLE 6 The pre- and post-assessment z-scores and gain scores for lexical, syntagmatic, and morphosyntactic competences for all six classes.

Class	Lexical competence			Syntagmatic competence			Morphosyntactic competence			Total mean gain
	z-score		Gain	z-score		Gain	z-score		Gain	
	Pre	Post		Pre	Post		Pre	Post		
1	-0.68	-0.17	0.51	-0.70	0.22	0.92	-0.05	0.23	0.28	0.57
2	0.13	0.35	0.22	0.24	0.36	0.12	0.12	0.07	-0.05	0.10
3	-0.69	0.26	0.95	-0.52	0.10	0.62	-0.43	-0.29	0.14	0.57
4	-0.12	0.64	0.76	0.04	0.90	0.86	-0.05	1.37	1.42	1.01
5	-0.76	-0.44	0.32	-0.87	-0.65	0.22	-1.00	-0.27	0.73	0.42
6	0.87	1.13	0.26	0.44	1.00	0.56	0.12	0.61	0.49	0.44
Means	-0.21	0.30	0.50	-0.23	0.32	0.55	-0.22	1.72	0.50	0.52

Table 6 reveals some interesting differences between the six classes. As seen from the total mean gains Classes 2 and 4 in particular stand out. Class 2 had high z-scores in the pre-assessment for all three competences, but in view of the

gain scores it had consistently the lowest of all the classes. Class 4 had the most overall gain in comparison to the other classes. For lexical competence Class 4 was superseded by Class 3, but for the other competences Class 4 superseded Class 3. For syntagmatic competence, Class 4 was superseded by Class 1, but for the other two competences Class 4 superseded Class 1. For morphosyntactic competence Class 4 superseded all the other classes. The total mean gain score for Classes 1 and 3 was the same. Class 1 made remarkable gain for syntagmatic competence and Class 3 for lexical competence, both classes showed little gain for morphosyntactic competence. Class 5 had consistently the lowest or near lowest z-scores for all the competences, but when considering gain scores, improvement is indicated, particularly in the area of morphosyntactic competence. This suggests that schooling can still have a positive effect on low-achieving learners. In contrast stands Class 6, although it had the highest z-scores in both the pre- and post-assessments for all three competences, it made little improvement as shown by the gain scores. For lexical competence this is probably due to a ceiling effect.

5.5.2 Factors of Influence

Many factors influence development in L2 learning. Some apply to the individual learner such as age, aptitude, social-psychological factors, personality, cognitive style, and literacy level. Other factors are connected with the organization of the classroom such as the number of scheduled hours and rate of attendance or involve aspects of teaching such as content focus, participant interaction, and task grouping. In an effort to explain the differences in attainment between the classes as expressed in Table 6, certain learner and classroom characteristics were studied more closely. An earlier paper also reported on the influence of certain learner characteristics on learning (see Strube, Van de Craats, & Van Hout 2012).

Learner Characteristics

For eight learner characteristics (age, length of residence, age of arrival, L1 schooling, L1 literacy, previous DSL schooling, children, and work) the Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to determine the relationship between these variables and the three competences. The correlations revealed that only the factor of age of arrival was significant (at the pre-assessment) for lexical competence and had a negative relationship. This is an indication that the older the learner was at entrance, the lower the score for lexical competence. The reverse also applies: the younger the learner was at entrance, the higher the lexical competence score. Table 7 presents these correlations.

TABLE 7 Pearson product-moment correlations for the factor of age of arrival for lexical, syntagmatic, and morphosyntactic competences at the pre-assessment (N=41).

	Lexical competence	Syntagmatic competence	Morphosyntactic competence
Age of arrival	-.567**	-.194	-.057

** significant (2-tailed) at p<.01

Classroom Characteristics

The next step was to look at factors of possible influence in the classroom. The following discussion focuses on classroom content in which the amount of time spent on various factors within four main categories are examined more closely. The four main categories are: content focus, participant interaction, task grouping, and classroom materials. The results for each category are summarized in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11. The time for each factor is expressed in hours and percentages. The time given in hours shows the actual time spent on a particular factor, while the time in percentages shows the distribution of time spent in relation to the total number of available classroom hours. These percentages are an indication of how the teacher had organized her lessons.

In each table the first three factors are the same: scheduled computer time, scheduled classroom time, and non-practice time. Classroom time and computer time together form the total scheduled classroom hours. Only Class 4 made systematic use of computer practice during classroom hours. In dealing with a mixed-level class the teacher divided the class into two relatively homogeneous groups. While one group practiced vocabulary with various computer programs under the guidance of an assistant, the other practiced the oral skills with the teacher. At break time the two groups exchanged positions. The third factor, non-practice time, is composed of lost time and procedural time. Lost time, for which the teacher is responsible, is a consequence of late starts, early conclusions of the lesson, and/or extended breaks. Procedural time involves classroom management and occurs during the lesson. This includes roll call, interruption by late arrivals, the teacher calling the class to order, and the handing out of lesson material. Non-practice time, although sometimes unavoidable, if extensive, takes valuable time away from practice time.

Content Focus

The category content focus covers the factors: vocabulary, grammar, restricted discourse, unrestricted discourse, and life skills knowledge. Restricted (or planned) discourse includes fixed dialog practice – often memorization of short exchanges. Unrestricted discourse includes free and spontaneous speech – conversations, discussions, explanations – often as responses to subject matter at hand. The factor life skills knowledge connects inside classroom practice with the outside real world. It concerns building on general knowledge and awareness of the social environment, often necessary for language use. For example, talking about the health system provides life skills knowledge that is

essential when practicing 'making an appointment with the family doctor'. Table 8 presents the time spent on these five factors.

TABLE 8 Classroom time for content focus over the 30-week observation period for the six observed classes, in hours and percentages.

Class	Classroom time	Scheduled computer time	Scheduled classroom time	Non-practice time	Vocabulary focus	Grammar focus	Restricted discourse	Unrestricted discourse	Life skills	Totals
1	Hours	0	135	26.81	19.25	22.41	10.54	11.35	44.64	135
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(19.86)	(14.26)	(16.60)	(7.81)	(8.41)	(33.07)	(100)
2	Hours	0	180	29.53	39.97	11.60	32.80	42.31	23.79	180
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(16.41)	(22.21)	(6.44)	(18.22)	(23.51)	(13.22)	(100)
3	Hours	0	150	26.33	52.70	3.38	12.61	7.43	47.56	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(17.55)	(35.13)	(2.25)	(8.41)	(4.96)	(31.70)	(100)
4	Hours	37.5	45	4.58	11.84	2.41	5.74	9.08	11.35	45
	(%)	(45)	(55)	(10.17)	(26.31)	(5.36)	(12.76)	(20.19)	(25.22)	(100)
5	Hours	0	150	72.36	19.24	6.10	0	17.42	34.88	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(48.24)	(12.83)	(4.07)	(0)	(11.61)	(23.25)	(100)
6	Hours	0	330	134.33	6.42	20.40	5.03	56.31	107.51	330
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(40.70)	(1.95)	(6.18)	(1.53)	(17.06)	(32.58)	(100)

The most remarkable difference between the classes is the systematic application of CALL (computer assisted language learning) activities for the individual training of lexical and basic grammar skills during classroom time by Class 4. Inserting CALL activities in a lesson has reduced the total number of classroom hours available for oral skills practice from 82.5 to 45 hours, much less than all the other classes. Nevertheless, as seen in Table 8, the actual number of hours practiced in Class 4 for three of the five factors (vocabulary, restricted discourse, and unrestricted discourse) is not consistently the lowest. For example, Class 4 spent almost twice as much time on vocabulary practice than Class 6. Classes 5 and 6 stand out in their high percentage of non-practice time, 48.24% and 40.71%, leaving less than 60% for classroom practice. Overall, the classes can be characterized as focusing primarily on vocabulary learning and life skills knowledge with ample unrestricted discourse. There is also a noticeable infrequent focus on grammar and little practice on restricted discourse. In Class 5 no restricted discourse practice was observed.

Participant Interaction

In the category participant interaction the speakers of an interaction are identified. Four factors were covered: teacher talking, teacher interacting with the class or a student (teacher takes the initiative), a student interacting with the class or another student (student takes the initiative), and choral repetition.

Under the latter, other student modalities than speaking were subsumed such as watching a video, listening to a CD, or doing a simple written exercise. Table 9 characterizes the classes in hours and percentages.

TABLE 9 Classroom time for participant interaction over the 30-week observation period for the six observed classes during oral skills practice, in hours and percentages.

Class	Classroom time	Scheduled computer time	Scheduled classroom time	Non-practice time	Teacher talking	Teacher - student/class	Student – student/class	Choral + other	Totals
1	Hours	0	135	26.81	20.76	55.11	29.78	2.54	135
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(19.86)	(15.38)	(40.82)	(22.06)	(1.88)	(100)
2	Hours	0	180	29.53	23.22	50.09	68.32	8.83	180
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(16.41)	(12.90)	(27.83)	(37.96)	(4.91)	(100)
3	Hours	0	150	26.33	32.31	83.40	0	7.97	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(17.55)	(21.54)	(55.60)	0	(5.31)	(100)
4	Hours	37.5	45	4.58	14.79	18.59	2.77	4.27	45
	(%)	(45)	(55)	(10.17)	(32.88)	(41.30)	(6.16)	(9.49)	(100)
5	Hours	0	150	72.36	26.49	34.88	11.31	4.95	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(48.24)	(17.66)	(23.25)	(7.54)	(3.30)	(100)
6	Hours	0	330	134.33	61.30	98.39	10.87	25.12	330
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(40.70)	(18.58)	(29.81)	(3.29)	(7.61)	(100)

Characteristic of all the classes was the strong teacher-centred learning. In such a classroom the teacher controls classroom processes, determines what is to be done, and generally how it is to be performed. This is reflected by the high percentages and number of hours for the factors teacher talking and teacher-class/student interactions, between 40% and 78%. Exercises such as question-answer type were abundant. In five classes, except Class 3, there was an activity where the student had some control over the interaction. In Class 3 no such activity was observed. Class 3 primarily focused on vocabulary learning characterized by abundant question-answer type exercises.

Task Grouping

The category task grouping examined the organization of the students during a particular task. Three types of task grouping were identified: whole class, small groups or pairs, and individual. Table 10 shows in number of hours and percentages how the classes were organized during the various parts of the lesson.

TABLE 10 Classroom time for task grouping over the 30-week observation period for the six observed classes, in hours.

Class	Classroom time	Scheduled computer time	Scheduled classroom time	Non-practice time	Whole class	Small groups/pairs	Individual	Totals
1	Hours	0	135	26.81	71.71	26.12	10.36	135
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(19.86)	(53.12)	(19.35)	(7.67)	(100)
2	Hours	0	180	29.53	120.90	27.51	2.06	180
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(16.41)	(67.17)	(15.28)	(1.14)	(100)
3	Hours	0	150	26.33	113.02	0	10.66	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(17.55)	(75.35)	0	(7.10)	(100)
4	Hours	37.5	45	4.58	33.56	2.63	4.23	45
	(%)	(45)	(55)	(10.17)	(74.59)	(5.84)	(9.41)	(100)
5	Hours	0	150	72.36	74.58	0	3.06	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(48.24)	(49.72)	0	(2.04)	(100)
6	Hours	0	330	134.33	125.41	0	70.27	330
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(40.70)	(38.00)	0	(21.29)	(100)

As can be seen in Table 10, activities and tasks predominantly involved the whole class with percentages between 38% and 76%. Striking is the low figure for group work. In Classes 3, 5, and 6 no activities organized in small groups or pairs were observed. In contrast, Classes 1 and 2 have a relatively high percentage for small group activities. This concurs with the percentages in Table 9 for student-student/class interactions.

Classroom Materials

The final category investigated which materials were used during a particular activity or task. This involved four main factors: text, extra materials, audio/visual, and none. Table 11 compares the six classes on use of these materials.

TABLE 11 Classroom time for material use over the 30-week observation period for the six observed classes, in hours and percentages.

Class	Classroom time	Scheduled computer time	Scheduled classroom time	Non-practice time	Textbook	Extra materials	Audio/visual	None	Totals
1	Hours	0	135	26.81	36.14	16.69	4.67	50.69	135
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(19.86)	(26.77)	(12.36)	(3.46)	(37.55)	(100)
2	Hours	0	180	29.53	39.52	35.84	21.11	53.99	180
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(16.41)	(21.96)	(19.91)	(11.73)	(29.99)	(100)
3	Hours	0	150	26.33	0	67.11	0	56.57	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(17.55)	0	(44.74)	0	(37.71)	(100)
4	Hours	37.5	45	4.58	10.76	13.96	5.83	9.88	45
	(%)	(45)	(55)	(10.17)	(23.91)	(31.02)	(12.95)	(21.95)	(100)
5	Hours	0	150	72.36	0	16.34	3.34	57.96	150
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(48.24)	0	(10.89)	(2.23)	(38.64)	(100)
6	Hours	0	330	134.33	1.52	107.49	0	86.67	330
	(%)	(0)	(100)	(40.70)	(0.46)	(32.57)	0	(26.26)	(100)

Three classes, Classes 1, 2, and 4, based their learning program on a textbook. These classes, in following the instructions in the textbook, also made occasional use of audio and/or visual materials. Classes 1 and 2 both based their programs on the same textbook. Classes 3, 5, and 6 did not use a textbook. All the classes made ample use of extra materials, such as real objects, hand-outs, and materials made for educational purposes, such as practice clocks and color cards. Between 21% and 39% of classroom time no materials were used during an activity. As noted under Content focus, only Class 4 made use of CALL activites (45% of the time) during classroom time in an open learning centre.

5.5.3 Classroom Characteristics and Assessment Gain Scores

In this discussion two classes are highlighted, one with the lowest mean gain scores in the assessments (Class 2) and the other with the highest gain scores (Class 4). Each of the classroom practices summarized in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 could be a factor of influence in language learning. The practice of vocabulary could be advantageous for lexical development. The practice of grammar could improve the morphosyntaxis. The practice of restricted and unrestricted discourse could influence syntagmatic development. Although no absolute conclusions can be drawn, a comparison of the differences in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11, in particular between Classes 2 and 4, with the results on the assessments as expressed in Table 6 certain observations are of interest in view of language learning of L2 literacy students.

In Table 8 on content focus, the differences between Classes 2 and 4 as seen in percentages is minimal, except for CALL activities. Class 2 did not do CALL activities during classroom time whereas Class 4 spent almost half of the classroom time at the computer, 45%. Aside of this, it is still surprising how little time Class 4 had spent on the other factors of content focus and produced such high scores on the assessment. Class 3 had, in contrast to all the other classes, spent the most time (in hours and percentage) on vocabulary practice and had the highest gain score for the assessments. This indicates that the focus on vocabulary had a positive effect, but, as seen by the z-scores, Class 3 did not attain high scores for the other two competences. Therefore, vocabulary practice alone does not seem to be sufficient for language learning. Class 2 had spent notably more time on grammar and restricted as well as unrestricted discourse than Class 4. The assessment results show another picture. Class 4 had far higher gain scores for syntagmatic and morphosyntactic competence. It is evident that the factor of time spent on grammar practice and restricted discourse practice cannot explain this discrepancy, but that of CALL training could definitely have been an important influence.

As pointed in section 5.5.2, the classes are characterized by strong teacher-fronted teaching. In comparing Class 2 and 4 the results in Table 9 on participant interaction show that in percentages the teacher in Class 2 had spent much less time in talking (teacher talking and teacher-student/class interaction), 40.73% than the teacher in Class 4, which was 74.18%. In looking at student-student/class interaction time the opposite is evident. Class 2 spent almost 25 times more classroom hours on activities with student-student/class interactions than Class 4 (in percentages 37.96% and 6.16% respectively). Again the gain scores show that Class 4 outranked Class 2. The question arises if student-student/class interactions are constructive for this target group. Apparently, as seen by these results, this does not seem to be the case. CALL activities seem more challenging and effective.

Table 10 on task grouping shows that whole class activities were overwhelmingly frequent while practice in small groups or pairs was much rarer. Group practice was observed in only three of the six classes. The relatively high percentage for student-student/class interactions for Class 2 as seen in Table 9 points to the presence of activities performed in small groups. This is indeed the case; only the percentage is lower than that for the interactions, 15.28% and 37.96 respectively. It was observed that student-student interactions also took place during whole class activities. For Class 4, practice in groups was just as minimal as the student-student interactions (6.16% and 5.84% respectively). In L2 research small group or pair interactions (be it teacher-student or student-student) have been shown to facilitate language learning (e.g. Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005), but the observed classroom practices do not reflect this. More research is necessary.

Table 11 summarizes the classroom materials that were used during the observed lessons. Clearly there is a lot of talk in the lessons which is not supported by learning materials. When looking at the distribution of the

classroom materials, it appears that Classes 2 and 4 have relatively balanced focus in the sense that there is no great difference in the time spent on practice using a textbook, extra materials, audio/visual materials or no materials as is seen in the other classes. This could be the result of textbook use, as the book guides the teacher through the program. Both textbooks were also accompanied with a CD. One feature did show a great difference – the use of CALL materials. Such an activity induces working on your own, thinking on your own, and making choices about what might be right and wrong.

5.6 Discussion and Conclusions

In the above, an explanation was sought to account for the differences that arose from the pre- and post-assessments. Class 2 and Class 4 emerged as classes with the lowest and the highest mean gain scores in the assessments. Observable differences between these two classes were also noted in their learner characteristics, classroom factors, and teaching processes. The question arises as to whether the results that surfaced are only relevant for the present study or whether they reveal dimensions characteristic of the target group as a whole. No broad generalizations can be made from data based on a small sample of students as was the case in this study. Nevertheless, by comparing the results from this study with studies based on comparable target groups, general characterizations can be made. The three recent studies discussed in section 5.2 are taken as sources for comparison. In these three studies various factors of influence on learning surfaced as well. The following discussion, focusing on Classes 2 and 4, centres on age, classroom hours, rate of attendance, and task grouping, the latter including computer time.

The factor of age on L2 learning has often been investigated (Muñoz & Singleton 2011), but the factor of literacy together with age was not taken into account in the Muñoz and Singleton review. In the current study the classes were compared in terms of age at the start of the research and age of arrival in The Netherlands. The mean age of the students for Class 4 was 26.8 years, the youngest of all six classes. Class 2 had a mean age of 35.6 years, a difference of almost ten years with Class 4. Taking the length of residence (LOR) into consideration, the mean difference of age of arrival (AOA) for the two classes was minimal, only 1.9 years (see Table 1). In the present study only AOA, not age at start of the language program, was found to be significant and only for lexical competence (see Table 7), meaning that the older the learner was at entrance, the lower the score for lexical competence; and in reverse, the younger the learner was at entrance, the higher the score. In the three studies cited above only age at the start of the research was examined and a significant negative correlation surfaced as well. In the Condelli et al. (2003) study age was significant for the factors reading, writing and the oral skills. Kurvers & Stockmann (2009), focusing only on the reading and writing processes, produced similar results. In the Baynham et al. (2007) study results were

expressed in terms of progress on a speaking test in which grammar, vocabulary pronunciation, and interactive communication were globally assessed. Age had, likewise, a significant negative correlation with learning progress. These results indicate that the younger learner has an advantage over the older learner, which is not compensated by a longer LOR.

The factor of time can be investigated on two levels: that of total classroom hours and hours per week. Class 6 emerges as the class with the highest assessment scores. This class also has the most classroom hours (see Tables 3 and 4). One could then assume that the more hours a class was scheduled, the higher the competence score. In looking at Classes 2 and 4 this conclusion seems contradictory. Class 2, with six weekly hours for the oral skills, did perform better than Class 4, with 2.75 weekly hours, on the pre-assessment. For the post-assessment Class 4 consistently outranks Class 2 (see Table 6). However, we found no correlations for the gain scores with classroom hours, nor with attendance measures. Using the statistical technique of mixed modelling did not result in any significant results implying that we did not find classroom or learner characteristics that would explain the size of progress between the pre- and post-assessment. In the Condelli et al. (2003) and the Kurvers & Stockmann (2009) studies reading skills and number of classroom hours had a negative significant correlation, in other words, the more the classroom hours, the lower the reading scores. In the Baynham et al. (2007) study a moderate positive correlation was found between number of classroom hours per week and mean gain on the assessment. This same study reported that the correlation between lesson length and gain scores was negative. Here we see that students with longer scheduled classroom hours showed less growth than students with fewer hours. Consequently, it is not only a matter of total number of scheduled hours a program has, but also of the intensity of those hours. In another study by Kurvers (Kurvers 2007; Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990) it was found that intensive courses of 15 hours per week showed more growth for reading than non-intensive courses of three to five hours per week – even when tested after both had completed an equal amount of classroom hours. This suggests that there is not only a maximum limit to the number of classroom hours and learning achievement, but also a minimum. Apparently, as the Baynham et al. (2007) study shows, concentration and thus also performance is bound by a time limit. At the same time, as seen in the Kurvers study, practice must be on a regular and relatively frequent basis. The aspect of optimal classroom time for learning is still not fully answered.

Concerning the factor of attendance, in the present study no correlations were found for gain scores with attendance. All the classes in this study had a relatively high rate of attendance, between 0.66 and 0.86. All the other studies showed significant correlations for attendance. Kurvers & Stockmann (2009) found attendance significant for reading and writing, Condelli et al. (2003) for reading and the oral skills, and Baynham et al. (2007) for general progress. These findings indicate that attendance is a crucial factor for learning. This sounds rather obvious; nevertheless it is of essential importance – even more

important than number of scheduled classroom hours – the more hours a class was attended, the higher the competence score. As Condelli (personal communication) suggested attendance is probably an indirect measure of motivation (either intrinsic or extrinsic). One attends class on a regular basis if one is motivated. This seems to result in positive learning, a finding other researchers also have noted (Vispoel & Austin 1995; Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna 2001).

The fourth area of influence concerned grouping during language practices. The statistics of the current study show that between 38% and 76% (mean 59.67%) of classroom time was focused on activities involving the whole class – indicating strong teacher-centred tuition. Activities performed in small groups or pairs were only sparingly organized in the classes of the current study. From SLA research, with Long as one of the first advocates (Long & Porter 1985), group work is seen to be an important tool facilitating language use – learners participate more actively and the communication is more realistic in that negotiation devices such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks are more readily applied. From the results of the current study this does not seem to be the case. Only three of the six classes worked in small groups or pairs, including Classes 2 and 4 (see Table 10), but the percentages were low, 13.82% and 5.84% respectively. The use of negotiation by the students occurred only very incidentally. In support of whole class work, the Baynham et al. (2007: 55) study observed that it has an important cohesive function within the class, "Talk is work in the ESOL classroom, but talk is also the means of creating social solidarity: '*The whole class activities are to keep the atmosphere going as much as anything*.'" For the literacy skills, the Kurvers & Stockmann (2009) study showed that whole class activities for reading and writing have a significant negative correlation – the more time that was spent in whole class activities, the lower the reading and writing scores. Individual focus is necessary for the practice of these skills, as the significant correlations in this same study show for the factors individual work with writing and computer work (also individual) with reading.

In the present study, Class 4 was the only class that made systematic use of the computer during classroom hours. Class 2 had access to a multi-media student learning centre, but not during classroom hours and the students could make use of the learning centre on a voluntary basis. The teacher of Class 4 implemented the use of CALL activities to promote vocabulary learning and she organized her classroom time to accommodate this practice. The students, under guidance of an assistant, were allowed to choose between several programs. The words in these programs were usually presented in three ways: visually with a picture, written, and orally. Often a context was incorporated by also presenting the word in a sentence or a situation. Even though these programs had not been included in the analysis, their implementation most probably facilitated the learning of grammar and discourse, as seen by the high scores Class 4 made for the morphosyntactic competence. Next to the Kurvers & Stockmann (2009) study showing the significant influence of computer work for

reading, the Condelli et al. (2003) and Baynham et al. (2007) studies showed no significant correlations. In the Baynham et al. (2007) study the amount of time spent on ICT (computer skills and language learning support) was noted to be less than 5%.

The present study focused its investigation on the practice of the oral skills only; consequently its effect on the literacy skills was not measured. The Kurvers & Stockmann (2009) study as well as the Condelli et al. (2003) study focused on the effect of the oral skills on literacy development. Both studies found significant correlations for oral skills and reading: the more developed the oral skills were, the higher the reading scores. This is all the more reason to focus on the oral skills during classroom time.

5.7 Recommendations for the Classroom

What can be learned from the present study for classroom practices? Given the complexity of learning and teaching, as shown above, there are no ready-to-use packages which, as it were, can be purchased in the language store. It is essential that teachers are aware of learning processes of their students. In closing, here are a few pointers to take seriously. It is essential that there is focus on the oral skills during classroom time, not only in combination with the literacy skills, but also as a separate skill. It promotes literacy learning and facilitates social and economic integration. Secondly, as Class 4 illustrates, same-level classes seem to be an advantage for learning as instruction can focus on the class as a whole and ensure the participation of all the students. Thirdly, it is advised to use specially developed computer programs (CALL) as a support for language learning. Such materials can not only enhance the learning of the oral skills through interaction with the computer, but at the same time the listening skills, and grammar and dialog knowledge. Finally, take heed of the number of classroom hours. More is not always better.

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6 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEED IN ADULT L2 READING

Ineke van de Craats, Radboud University Nijmegen
Mark Peeters, Albeda College

Abstract

As observed by Kurvers, Stockmann, & Van de Craats (2010), many adult first time readers of Dutch as a second language never progress beyond a very basic level of reading. They understand the sound-letter correspondence, can read simple words and very short sentences, sometimes with many restarts and errors, but, in the end, they often do not succeed in fully understanding the meaning of what they read. It will be argued that the mental steps to be taken for reading a word or a sentence take so much time that hardly any space in working memory is left for building up meaning. This article is an argument for a more structural focus on fluency in literacy courses. A small-scale pilot classroom experiment with gathering reading speed shows enhanced fluency and illustrates that automatization can be attained with simple tools.

Keywords: reading process, reading speed, training, computer-assisted intervention

6.1 Sketching the Problem

In this contribution a well-known problem will be addressed which is familiar to those who teach beginning readers how to read, particularly adult first time readers in a second language. They often attain a very basic level of reading after 400 to 1200 or more hours of instruction in oral and written skills (Kurvers, Stockmann, & Van de Craats 2010), that is to say, they can read simple words,

word strings or simple and short sentences, but they do not seem to understand the meaning of what they are reading, whether it is a word group, an entire sentence, or a small text. They read aloud, by preference, with much subvocalization, many restarts and errors. Sometimes their decoding reading skills are considerable, but a lack of fluency prevents them from successfully participating in a regular L2 class of readers.

In the Netherlands, where the Common European Framework (CEF) of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001) is used in second language education, this framework has been extended with three literacy levels at the lower end of the six CEF levels.[22] This has been done because the European framework is not tailored to adult learners with a low or no level in reading and writing. By adding these literacy levels the progress of adult literacy learners could be measured and become visible to the learners themselves, to teachers, and stakeholders. The literacy framework – added to the CEF and illustrated in Figure 1 – consists of three levels (A, B, and C) for the decoding and encoding steps and three levels for the related functional skills.[23] The three levels for literacy can be characterized as the following can-do statements:

- Level A: can read words consisting of CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) and words that are learnt as sight words for functional purposes.
- Level B: can read (without sounding out individual sounds) and write highly-frequent words with consonant clusters and grammatical morphemes such as the nominal plural marker *–en* (e.g. boek*en*).
- Level C: can read short and simple texts on familiar subjects; the reading of those texts is automatized.

With regard to fluency, it can be noted that fluency does not play a role at level A. It does play a role at level B, where fluent reading (after visual and auditory analysis and synthesis) of highly-frequent words is required in simple sentences, and at level C, where fluent reading (decoding and blending) of short and simple texts on a familiar subject is required. We abstain here from the description of the functional reference levels as they are irrelevant for the present article.

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22 The Common European Framework describes three main levels: that of Basic User (A1 and A2), Independent User (B1 and B2) and Proficient User (C1 and C2), each divided into two sublevels. See Janssen-Van Dieten (2006) for a concise overview.

23 The L2 Literacy Framework and the related Literacy Portfolio (Stockmann & Dalderop 2005) are successfully used in practice and were also introduced in the Scandinavian countries. See also Stockmann (2006) for an overview.

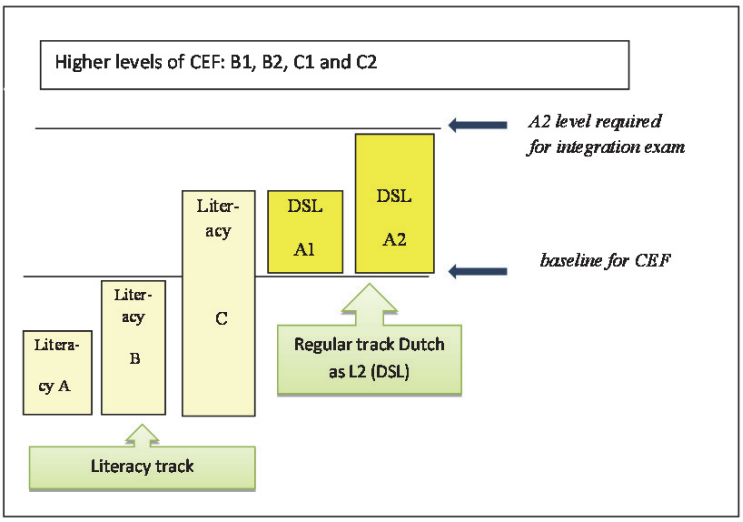

FIGURE 1 The literacy track for Dutch as L2 (DSL) in relation to the basic levels (A1=Breakthrough and A2=Waystage) of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF).

The problem roughly sketched above is particularly observed in learners at the B-level. Most adult learners attain a basic level of reading but do not succeed in attaining level C (Kurvers, Stockmann, & Van de Craats 2010).

In the Netherlands a phonics approach is most often used in the literacy classroom, as Dutch has a rather transparent orthography. This implies that the instructor teaches how to decode the letters of a word one by one and helps to synthesize (or blend) the sounds again into a word. This is done aloud in the classroom often with the help of paper strips on which the structure of the word is printed or in a similar way using a computer program. After a variable amount of time (variability seems much larger with adults than with children) the learners are able to automatize the blending process and read the word as a whole without spelling the letters one by one. Most learners, however, get stuck in the B-phase. For them the decoding of words is still problematic: many errors, restarts, subvocalizations (spelling) occur, and/or the meaning of the sentence(s) is not (fully) understood.

For an explanation of these phenomena we first focus in section 6.2 on the reading process and the function of working memory in relation to the age of adult first time readers in a second language. In section 6.3, we report on an experimental pilot study on enhancing the speed of reading in the classroom. In section 6.3.1 the design is presented. Section 6.3.2 provides information on the participants. The reading practices in the classroom and the materials we used, including the reading software are discussed in section 6.3.3. Section 6.4 describes the procedure. The results for this experiment, for which computer software for dyslectic readers was used, are given in section 6.5. We close off in

section 6.6 with tentative conclusions on the use of this software for enhancing automatization of the reading process.

6.2 The Reading Process in Relation to Working Memory

When we speak words are used making sentences and sentences are combined making discourse. In doing so, we start by associating phonetic forms (sounds or phonemes) with meanings (for example of the word 'book'). Other speakers of the same language can recognize the word because they have stored in their minds the phonological and semantic representations of the word 'book'. However, a word also has properties that link it to other words (syntactic properties), or combine it with various morphemes (morphological properties). Speakers – also non-literates – have stored these properties of words in their long-term memory and activate them when speaking. Neither literates nor non-literates are aware of using this knowledge.

When children, as mother tongue speakers, learn to read and write in an alphabetic script, they learn how to link sounds to letters (or phonemes to graphemes). After a relatively short time (depending on transparency of orthography) they will have developed also a visuo-graphical representation of a word. Normally, it is not a problem for young children to activate also the semantic representation when they spell the sounds of a (CVC) word one by one because the phonological representation is already linked to the semantic representation (or sound is already linked to meaning). However, when the adult first time reader starts reading in a new language, not only is the visuo-graphical representation new, but also the sound-meaning linking has been recently established, and so is the phonological/phonetic representation (how to pronounce a word). From this short sketch it may be clear that the task of learning to read and write is much more challenging in an L2 than in the L1. Reading a sentence is still more difficult than reading one word because more has to be done. Apart from reading words and retrieving the meaning from the mental lexicon, a syntactic representation has to be built up, a meaning has to be assigned to the whole string of words, and this string (or sentence) has to be linked to the context. Again this task is more difficult and time consuming in the L2 because, having a low oral proficiency, the learner has not yet completely discovered the syntactic and morphological properties of words, nor is the process is yet automatized to the same extent as in the L1.

Processing and analyzing speech-based information takes place in a component of working memory: the phonological loop which repeats and stores spoken language and can be considered an on-line capacity for language processing (Baddeley 1999, 2003). Working memory is also assumed to play a role in learning to read (Baddeley & Gathercole 1992; Goswami, Ziegler, Dalton, & Schneider 2001). The capacity of working memory, though, is limited. Miller (1956) claimed that there is individual variation in the number of unrelated elements, such as digits, letters, or words that a person can recall in correct

order after presentation. The memory span of young adults is approximately seven items ('The magic number 7'), with a variation of plus or minus two. This implies that one's working memory may vary between five and nine unrelated elements, e.g., letters, syllables, words or sentences, or what can be considered a unit or an element. It is evident that the size of an element (for instance, the number of syllables) and also other factors (for instance, the extent to which a word is known) also play a role. Also, more recent research comes forward with other limits of cognition. According to Cowan (2000) there is a limit of four elements in adults, but two elements according to Gobet & Clarkson (2004). In general, the memory span of young adults is higher than that of children and older adults, but this does not hold for non-literate adults (see Kurvers & Van de Craats 2007, 2008: 51).

In addition to differences in capacity, the availability in real time of new information – here the spoken elements – is very restricted, with a variation between one and two seconds, if recall happens. Written material is first converted into an articulatory code (Baddeley 1999, 2003). A third limitation is age-related. According to Salthouse's (1994, 1996) processing-speed theory increased age in adulthood is associated with a decrease in the speed with which many processing operations are executed. Some functions such as spatial visualization and speed of thought are already in decline at age 27 (Salthouse 2009). Consequently, cognitive performance is degraded when processing is slow. Due to limited time relevant processing cannot be successfully executed and the products of earlier processing may no longer be available when later processing is complete. In relation to reading this means that the memory of the words at the beginning is gone by the time the words at the end are read. This sounds rather dramatic for adult first time readers: how can they learn to read words of more than four letters (cf. Cowan 2000) or seven letters (Miller 1956) when an average working memory cannot store more than four or seven elements with a decreasing processing speed. The problem is solved by clustering or chunking two or more elements into a new unit, for example, by dividing a telephone number of nine digits 1-6-2-4-5-7-3-6-4 in three groups of three digits. The same can be done with words: e.g., the five sounds of *t-r-e-k-t* can be combined into an onset (*tr*) and a rhyme (*ekt*): *tr-ekt*, and next into word groups forming a sentence.

As we assume that the problems sketched above – too much subvocalization and insufficient reading comprehension – seem to be related to working memory, we have searched for training procedures for the development of fluency and reading speed. Training aimed at fluency and automatization belongs to the standard repertoire of methods for emergent child readers, as evidenced by the existence of fluency tests for children (e.g., Jongen & Krom 2010; Verhoeven 1992), but such training is rare in courses for adult readers. The functionality, that is to say, the ability of reading a word has been considered more important than the fluency with which this was done. Much research in this area has been done with poor child readers and dyslexic children (e.g., De Jong & Van der Leij 2003; Steenbeek-Plantinga, Bon, &

Schreuder 2012), but there is hardly any research with regard to emergent L2 readers. Children learning to read transparent orthographies (like Dutch) make fewer errors than children reading opaque orthographies (Aro & Wimmer 2003; Patel, Snowling, & De Jong 2004; Seymour, Aro, & Erskine 2003). Impairment in reading speed is the main characteristic of reading disorders in languages with a transparent orthography (De Jong & Van der Leij 2003; Huemer 2009). Huemer successfully trained words at the sublexical level (consonant clusters and syllables) with repeated reading. Why should we wait until a disorder emerges? Instead, we should integrate such training also in regular L2 literacy lessons. In the present pilot study we did use such training with adult L2 learners to enhance reading development.

6.3 The Study

6.3.1 Design

This study was set up as a small-scale pilot study to test a simple technique to be used in the adult classroom for improving reading speed and fluency. It has a pre- post-test design with a short treatment.

6.3.2 Participants and their Classroom

In this particular classroom fourteen L2 literacy students had been sent to class by the municipality of Rotterdam to learn how to read and write in Dutch. They were all female; most of them were mothers between 20 and 50 years of age. They invariably had a 540 hour contract to provide them with the instruction needed to reach the next literacy level (Literacy level A, B or C; see Figure 1). Some students in this class had a schooling background in their country of origin and were considered literate in their own language, but not in the second language; others had no formal schooling background at all as, for instance, Jamina. The proficiency level for oral skills varied, but was below A2 for all of them and below A1 for most of them. Five out of the fourteen students took part in the present experiment. Their learner characteristics are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Learner characteristics of the five participants of the fluency experiment

Name	Age	CEF level oral skills	Country of origin	Literacy level in L1	Literacy level	Years of education in native country
Jamina*)	43	< A1	Morocco	Non-literate	0	0
Nadifa	40	< A1	Morocco	Non-literate	A	0
Roon	34	< A1	Somalia	Non-literate	< A	3
Rahma	41	< A1	Morocco (Berber)	Non-literate	0	0
Zula	45	< A1	Eritrea	Literate	B	12

*) The names are not the real names.

In the curriculum about 40% of the available time was spent on oral skills to help the learners 'survive in daily life', and to support their literacy acquisition. The actual reading and writing instruction took place in the remaining time. This instruction encompassed functional reading as well as decoding and encoding through a phonics approach. As this article is concerned with the role of speed and fluency, the focus is on the decoding and encoding skills. For basic decoding and encoding skills an '*indiflex*' method was used. The concept of *indiflex* is best illustrated by identifying the words that form the acronym: '*individualisation*', '*differentiation*' and '*flexibilisation*'. The method implied that students had their individual route (a necessary approach in a heterogeneous class with various levels of literacy) and pacing, as well as their own set of pre-structured practice materials. Instruction was shaped through the use of task forms, booklets with audio support and enhanced by computer software.

6.3.3 Materials: Exercises for Improving Blending and Increasing Speed

The most basic type of exercise was the one of reading in clusters instead of letters one by one. The teacher made a list of words (the majority of which are known words) with the same onset or the same rime. The first column of words in Table 2 are CVC words with an identical rime, the second column consists of CCVC words with an identical onset. This also holds for the last column in which the onset consists of two sounds (*s* and *ch*) of which the latter is a digraph. The hyphen indicates how the words should be split into two clusters. The aim of the exercises is to promote the clustering of sounds within the word.

TABLE 2 Three exercises for reading words in clusters instead of spelling the graphemes one-by-one

CVC with same rime	CCVC with same onset	CCVC with same onset
p-ak	st-ok	sch-ool
z-ak	st-ak	sch-aap
b-ak	st-op	sch-ep
t-ak	st-ip	sch-ip
l-ak	st-ik	sch-uur
v-ak	st-ap	sch-oen

The next step was reading the same words without a pause (indicated by the hyphen), then the same words but faster, and finally in a different order. Most success was booked when every learner got his own exercise with his individual problematic letters and words. The target was reached when all words of a row were read as a whole (without spelling), without errors, and at higher speed than before. The list could be practiced at home where much repeated reading could be done. To stimulate the learners in the automatization, the teacher had a couple of timers in the classroom: egg timers, stopwatches, kitchen timers etc. It might even happen that learners became so fanatical that they bought their own timer (which is very cheap) and started practicing at home. Similar exercises can be constructed with longer words divided in syllables, as Huemer (2009) did with Finnish children, but is less functional for Dutch.

Similar lists were composed as rehearsal of the key words from a text or as extra practice for the most difficult words. When these problematic words are read faster, the whole sentence will be processed faster and reading comprehension will improve. The students had individual goals, all of which applied to each learner at some point in the learning process:

- Students who needed to practice blending and automatizing. They used standard 16-word lists, directly taken from their own *indiflex* booklets (see Appendix 1).
- Students who needed to practice specific phoneme-grapheme combinations, because these combinations had proven to be difficult for them to master. They use made-to-measure word lists (see Appendix 2).

We saw a teacher who brought together a set of keywords and administered them isolated from the text to a couple of students who had trouble with fluency. They were asked to note how many words they could read within one minute measured with an egg-timer. Their homework assignment consisted in reading the list every day. The teacher told them: "When you practice every day, you will read five words more in the same time.'' This assignment was repeated several times and after two weeks the pace doubled. It is not the case that older, adult students cannot read with a certain pace, but they often do not see that it is necessary to do so. As it is difficult to explain that to them, it is easier to make it a game (e.g., with a stopwatch or an egg timer).

6.4 Procedure

In accordance with the *indiflex* model the various fluency exercises were presented to the individual students. A sheet of paper was attached to function as a medium between the instructor, the learner and the word list to be practiced. The sheet was divided into four numbered columns, each providing

space for inserting a date (= Time 1, etc.) and the reading time (see Table 3, in which five tables are shown for each of the five students). The first column, named Time 1, was for the first date and the first measured reading time for (almost) spontaneously reading the word list. The remaining three columns distinguished between the target time (TT) on a set date and the actual reading time (T) measured at that date. The obvious goal was to gather speed without losing accuracy between the first and the last reading sessions, generally spanning one or two weeks. The instructor could reinforce the reading behavior by pointing to the students' achievements, by providing immediate feedback about the accomplished reading tasks and by giving suggestions for future tasks. Student achievements were notable speed gain without losing accuracy, successfully incorporation of a difficult phoneme-grapheme combination into one's personal repertoire (that was read incorrectly before, as noticed by the teacher or by the student herself), or a display of perseverance. One example of reinforcing students' efforts to improve fluency with texts was offering them the possibility to read a text aloud in the group. Other students in the class tended to reward this display of growing skills with spontaneous applause.

So, what are the successive steps of practicing? The instructor or an experienced student uses a simple timing device to measure the opening reading time. Instructor or student writes down the resulting time and the date in the first column. The instructor then provides the reader with feedback and suggestions for further practice and sets a new target time and a date for the next session. Some learners have a sense of realistic targets and they are allowed to experiment, others have no clear idea; in that case, the instructor decides. Then learners can start practicing, using classroom timers, working with peers in class, with family members at home, and with the instructor. The process of setting new speed targets and new dates, of providing oral feedback about accuracy or the learner's task approach, is repeated for every step, up to the final reading session.

For the recordings in this classroom experiment a smartphone was used. The poor sound quality, however, was not satisfactory for analyzing accuracy results between Time 1 and Time 4.

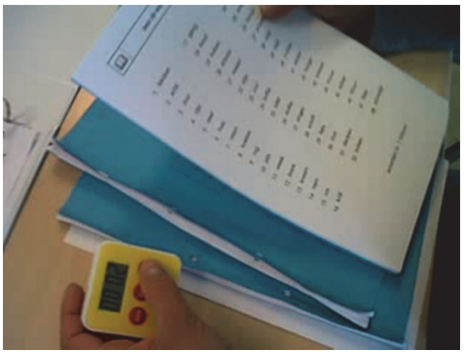

FIGURE 2 Training with timer with *Sprint* software.

FIGURE 3 Training.

In addition to a timer, reading software meant to support dyslexic readers called *Sprint* (Jabbla n.d.) was used in this classroom. The basic version of *Sprint*, originally meant to support dyslexic readers, is in essence a speech synthesizer that uses real-speak voices to read different types of text in Dutch and French (it is a program developed in Belgium where Dutch and French are the two official languages). The more elaborate 'plus' version also reads texts in English and German, and offers the user additional support functions such as 'word prediction' and 'spell check'. The core characteristics of the software are interesting for beginning readers. The synthesizer can read the separate sounds that constitute a word on the screen and blend them and in this way models the reading process. It can also read parts of words, whole words, sentences and whole texts. The reading speed can be controlled in different ways. The instructor can set the reading speed as well as the length of the pauses before actual reading takes place, preferably after a very short trial to check if the speed settings suit the student's needs. The word list or the text will then be read out at a fixed speed. Students control the reading speed in a different way when working on their own: they often use the 'read next' button to jump to the next word and use the 'read previous' button and 'repeat' button to reread words they find difficult. For practicing fluency with word lists, students often start off with the blending function of the program and continue with reading the words as units. Students who have to read a whole text often use the instructor's speed settings combined with the function 'reading the text from the beginning'. Difficult words in the text are read separately by clicking on them. In this way the reader practices overcoming obstacles that prevent him or her from fluently reading the text and then reads the text again and again.

6.5 Results

Table 3 shows five students and the results of their individual learning tasks – all wordlists. We did not include readers working with reading texts.

TABLE 3 Examples of learners' progress with gaining speed at reading; (TT=Target time; T=Time measured)

Student	Learning task	Time 1	Time 2		Time 3		Time 4	
Jamina	16 monosyllabic words standard blending and automatization	06-11-2012 T 38s	06-12-2012 TT -	T 14s	06-14-2012 TT 14s	T 13s	06-14-2012 TT 13s	T 10s
Nafida	16 mono- and disyllabic words with diphthongs /ei/ and /ui/	10-11-2102 T 48s	10-12-2012 TT 45s	T 35s	10-16-2012 TT 35s	T 34s	10-18-2012 TT 34s	T 18s
Roon	16 monosyllabic words standard blending and automatization	09-25-2012 T 37s	09-27-2012 TT 30s	T 16s	10-01-2012 TT 14s	T 14s	10-15-2012 TT 12s	T 13s
Rahma	16 monosyllabic words specific vowels /e/ and /a/	11-8-2012 T 25s	11-12-2012 TT 25s	T 23s	11-15-2012 TT 23s	T 21s	11-20-2012 TT 21s	T 19s
Zula	23 monosyllabic words specific consonants /g/ and /k/	09-20-2012 T 52s	09-24-2012 TT 52s	T 49s	09-27-2012 TT 48s	T 47s	10-11-2012 TT 45s	T 41s

The difference between the time measured on Time 1 and Time 4 is the actual speed gain in seconds. The results of the first three students are striking. Jamina is a beginning reader from Morocco. She managed to read the same word list almost four times faster within a period of only four days. Introducing the concept of gathering speed propelled her into action and the target time was the 'fuel' that made her focus on the activity. This resulted in a more active attitude towards reading. Nafida is a more experienced reader. She told the instructor that she had difficulties reading words with the Dutch /ei/ and /ui/ sounds (diphthongs). Her speed gain after extensive practice with the reading software and the use of the timer was 30 seconds. Like Jamina, Roon from Somalia, practiced with a standard list taken from the *indiflex* material. She improved her speed by 24 seconds in about three weeks' time. Rahma and Zula practiced with made-to-measure lists. They were having difficulties with specific phoneme-grapheme combinations: /e/ and /a/ for Rahma, a speaker of Berber and /g/ and /k/ for Zula, a speaker of Eritrean. Both were struggling with their pronunciation. Their measured speed gains were less spectacular than those of the other learners mentioned. A reason for this may be that it takes more time to automatize a 'new' sound, to discriminate it from sounds already known in the L1, and to pronounce it while linking it to the grapheme and combining it with other sounds, than to read a list without focus on a specific sound. Rahma gained six seconds and Zula eleven through extensive practice with the reading software and the instructor.

Faster readers may, however, become less accurate readers. A trade-off effect between speed and accuracy may occur in such exercises. Many students have proven to be able to read faster without reading less accurately. Accuracy is one thing the instructor should address when providing oral feedback and feed-forward: for the reader it is a matter of focusing on accuracy while gathering speed. Accuracy can even improve when the student learns to read faster, as was proved by Nafida practicing a standard word list of 16 words over a period of three days, reading ten seconds faster, but improving the accuracy rate by 7%. For some beginning readers in this class, however, the instructor observed a considerable trade-off effect between speed and accuracy. In these cases the fluency exercises were postponed, but not the exercises with the software that focused on synthesis. This indicates that the learner is still in the earliest stage of reading (cf. the stage model of e.g. Chall 1983, 1999) in which familiar words are necessary for attaining fluency, while in later stages reading can be used for learning new words and extending reading comprehension.

6.6 Discussion and Conclusions

In order to make more robust claims about the influence of a cyclic approach of this type of fluency training in the adult literacy classroom with scheduled reviews of the completed exercises and measurement of speed gain, it is clear that we should repeat the experiment with more subjects and use better recording equipment in order to better assess the read words and make claims on accuracy. We should also know more about the long term effects: Does this training have effect on the development of reading comprehension?

Nevertheless, the results of this pilot study have important implications for classroom instruction: benefits for both learner and teacher can be seen. The student senses that practice leads to results in terms of speed gain and that speed gain leads to reading more text or reading the same amount of text with more space for constructing meaning. The teacher should reflect and enhance this process consciously by only asking questions about a text when the student reads the text with sufficient fluency.

In our opinion, there are more pros than cons with regard to this type of automatization or fluency exercises as an addition to the regular reading education. In the first place, these exercises are individual exercises. The students practice on their own, as much as possible with their individual problems, which is time spent efficiently, more efficiently than when only one student is spelling or reading aloud and the others are listening (or not!). The next advantage is that such exercises have a short term target, but a clear and feasible one for the student. A third advantage is that students begin to understand that speed in reading is important and might even experience – in the most favorable case – that they better and sooner understand the meaning of a sentence/text. Unfortunately, we cannot provide evidence for this because

the present experiment was a working procedure in the classroom rather than a carefully prepared research experiment. And last but not least, the students can experience success with such small tasks.

There is also a disadvantage. Students practice without immediate formal feedback on potential reading errors. This disadvantage, however, can be compensated for by building in some alternative forms of feedback. We mention here some simple and less simple forms of feedback:

- The student may ask someone or something to read a word aloud. This reader may be a partner, teacher, or a child, but also a synthesizer built in a computer program, e.g., in reading aloud software for dyslexic readers.
- The reader may also use a reading pen (synthesizer) that reads the words causing difficulties.
- Difficult words are written down by the teacher in a rehearsal program on internet and can be read aloud by a synthesizer. A con is that this might not be easy to find for a low-literate learner.
- The teacher or a colleague reads the words aloud in a voice recorder or MP3 player (or other variants) and links the sounds to the words on the computer, puts it on a memory stick and gives the memory stick to the student as homework or assignment for the coming week. Another student with similar reading problems might use it at a later moment.

A disadvantage is that synthesizers do not have natural voices and that for teachers it involves more work when preparing exercises on memory sticks.

The theoretical background in this article can help instructors understand why certain readers do not seem to grasp written messages. It also provides instructors with sound ideas with which to work, and to remove, at least in part, the obstacles that prevent them from becoming better readers. The experimental method used in this classroom is one way of doing this. Several other ways are conceivable, especially when developments in reading software and the use of internet as a medium are considered, but even without these developments, this theoretical background proves useful for practice. The onset and rime principle can, for instance, be used by the instructor to stimulate the students' awareness of clustering when they start reading word rows early in the learning process. In later stages when students start reading whole sentences, the limited space in working memory and short availability of new information can explain why those students cannot read and understand, for instance, ten-word-sentences. Fewer words in a sentence may help. Making use of the theoretical concept of working memory opens the door to multiple ways of training students in gathering speed. Computerized exercises are ideal for this purpose.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Standard 16-word list, directly taken from an *indiflex* booklet

- gaan
- kuiken
- voeten
- duur
- tafel
- zingen
- fiets
- deuken
- koud
- schoon
- kijkt
- koffie
- stoffer
- schrift
- groot
- koken

Appendix 2: Made-to-measure word lists for specific reading problems (oe – uu)

- oer
- boer
- luur
- moer
- loer
- oen
- boen
- kuur
- stoep
- uur
- koer
- snoep
- buur
- stoer
- stuur
- koen
- loep
- muur

III POLICY AND ASSESSMENT

7 TESTING THE READING ABILITY OF LOW EDUCATED ESOL LEARNERS

Jane Allemano, University of London

Abstract

Current national policy requires all further education courses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to be accredited, including those in English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL). However, there are issues surrounding this policy, particularly for learners at the lowest level, who bring with them a very wide spectrum of prior language and/or literacy knowledge. Some have little or no experience of literacy in any language and poor English language skills.

A major barrier to assessment of beginner readers seems to be the examination process itself. This article summarises an on-going research project into the reasons for wrong answers given by low educated adult ESOL learners in reading examinations and explores how the process of testing is affected by the structure and format of the examination itself. This research focuses on the learners and how they approach an examination strategically or otherwise and how they see the relationship between the rubrics, the questions and the text.

The initial findings are that the biggest issue concerns the learners' interaction with the test. By the time they come to take the test, most of them have become proficient enough readers to take meaning from text but can fail to demonstrate this because of the task set.

Keywords: reading assessment, low-educated, barriers to assessment

7.1 Introduction

What is an exam? It is fundamentally a testing device but what does it test? In order to have construct validity, a test should test what it purports to test, be it history, biology or mathematics (Koretz 2008; Lambert & Lines 2000). It is common practice to present tests through questions written on a paper according to an accepted culture of testing methods. But what if the target knowledge and skills of an examination are also embedded in the very structure upon which the examination is built and is being taken by candidates with no previous experience of the conventions of testing, and with rudimentary command of the language? This is the case with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners with little or no previous education or literacy.

This article reports on an enquiry that took place in the UK and sets out to explore how the construct validity of testing the English reading ability of speakers of languages other than English with limited education and low literacy abilities is affected by the examination process itself.

7.2 Background

To set the context, this concern has arisen from current UK government policy, whereby all adult learners in post compulsory education (16 plus) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including those in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, are required to work towards a qualification. Of the funding for each learner 10% is paid to the provider only on the learner's achievement of the qualification (Department for Education and Science DfES 2005). The introduction of this policy led to the rapid development by several awarding bodies of external certification for all levels of the curriculum, with little time for the quality assurance stages of piloting and redrafting. Most of the awarding bodies concerned had been developing best practices in assessing the English language skills of non-native English speakers for many decades with a rigorous research base in some cases. However, there had been little experience gained in externally set and administered testing of learners at the lower end of the achievement scale. Some awarding bodies developed portfolio-based continuous assessment processes, while others produced examinations in speaking and listening, reading and writing. Many providers chose the examination route, as it reduces in-lesson evidence production and record keeping and allows more time for teaching and learning to take place. While this may be the best route for low-educated ESOL learners in terms of the teaching time that is available to them, it presents problems for them at the testing stage, especially in terms of their reading, as their achievement rates in reading are low compared to those of literate learners. This is despite the fact

that learners in both groups who are entered for these examinations can usually read for meaning in non-test situations.

The focus of this research is on reading tests used at the lowest level, A1, of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) or Entry 1 of the ESOL Core Curriculum for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

7.3 Literature Review

Much work has been done on the assessment of reading from level A2 upwards and on the teaching of reading at all levels, but there has been less on summative assessment at level A1. This may be because hitherto there has been no official requirement for assessment at this level.

As a major awarding body in the field of English language testing, Cambridge English have conducted and sponsored a great deal of research into the assessment of reading. In a recent article outlining the connection between testing and the reading process, Khalifa & Weir (2008: 3) took the view that hitherto "informed intuitive approaches have been helpful in advancing our conceptualisation of what is involved in reading both for pedagogical and assessment purposes". This conceptualisation broke reading down into subskills such as skimming, scanning, inferring meaning, and deducing meaning. Since the early 1980s, the 'subskills' approach has been predominant in teaching (e.g. Grellet 1981) and has been reflected in assessment to the extent item writers have been required to identify the subskills that apply to each item, a practice that is arguably more relevant when testing information-based subjects than it is for cognitive processes involved in reading.

However, this "informed intuition" alluded to by Khalifa & Weir (2008) has not reflected the varied literacy practices that the learners living in multilingual communities are engaged in. These are exemplified by Saxena (1994) in a description of the multilingual literacies of a Punjabi family in Southall, London. Saxena's work highlights the strong connection between literacy and other aspects of life, the main argument being that reading is embedded in a much wider range of skills employed in everyday life.

Social practice theory has also had an important influence on the teaching of basic literacy in recent years (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanovic 2000; Grieve 2007) but not so much on test design, although authentic reasons for reading are a major consideration in test design. For example, we may 'scan' a takeaway restaurant to find out delivery times, skim to find some vegetarian options, read for detail to select a meal that goes together, read critically to compare with other outlets (Schwab 2010: 153). "Linguistic processing is embedded within and inseparable from social practices or routines in which individuals are engaged" (Hellerman 2006: 379). Furthermore, "while assessment approaches have typically captured the skills that learners can perform in a classroom, research has shown that these skills do not necessarily lead to improved literacy practices in learners' daily lives" (Grieve 2007: 124). There is a need to include

"broader purposes for adult literacy such as personal development, community participation, supporting children's education and social change" (Grieve 2007: 126). This is a view also very strongly put forward by Wallace (1992) and by Cooke & Simpson (2008), who argue for a socio-cognitive view of literacy. In order to be a successful reader, a learner needs to be able to decode written text, handle longer stretches of discourse, relate the discourses to their social and cultural contexts, and bring a degree of criticality to their reading. "In order to assess this ability the test writer needs a knowledge of how L2 readers [those reading a text in their second language] process text and how their lives connect to the written word" (Schellekens 2007: 169).

Khalifa & Weir (2008) go on to argue the importance of a cognitive processing approach. There has been work done by language theorists and cognitive psychologists to try and establish what is involved in the reading process. The role of context is interlinked with this process. Khalifa & Weir (2009) discuss this issue with regard to context validity of different item types on an examination paper. This is a key area and a crucial factor in the testing of reading, as contextual clues that readers use are often not apparent on an examination paper. However, they do not discuss testing below level A2 on the CEFR.

At level A1 there are also issues of decoding and phonemic awareness to be taken into consideration when testing inexperienced readers (Young-Scholten & Strom 2006). This is especially true when learners have not built up a significant sight word vocabulary, the ability to decode at word level as opposed to phonemic or even alphabetic decoding. This has a significant bearing on the level of deep understanding, inference, and interpretation that can take place when a reader encounters a text.

In recognition of the difficulties imposed by the above constraints, examples of good practice in assessing level A1 readers include working one-on-one in a testing situation, with the assessor engaging in conversation about the text with a learner (Spiegel & Sunderland 2006). This is not practical on a national scale, although one awarding body goes some way towards this by examining candidates in small groups who talk face to face with an assessor.

I have as yet found no research focusing on a detailed analysis of large-scale methods of assessment of A1 ESOL literacy learners.

7.4 Level A1 ESOL Learners

At A1 level in ESOL classes in the UK post compulsory sector, there is a wide disparity among the learners in terms of prior language and literacy knowledge. There are three broad categories of learners:

- The first group consists of well educated (secondary level or beyond), highly literate learners with a background in a language that uses the

Roman alphabet, for whom the issue is more that of learning a modern foreign language at a beginner level. They are not basic literacy learners.

- The second group consists of learners who are also well educated and highly literate but with a background in a language that uses a script other than the Roman alphabet. These learners do have to learn a new written code, sometimes also a different direction of reading text on the page, as well as the language, but they have literacy skills to transfer. Many also arrive in the UK fully cognisant of the Roman script. In both cases, they are also not basic literacy learners.
- The third group are the focus of this study, learners who have had little or no schooling and, therefore, have limited literacy skills in their first language (L1) or any other acquired language. At the beginning of their studies, they may even be grappling with the notion that "print carries meaning" (DfES 2001: 70).

In many Adult and Further Education (post-compulsory) programs in the UK, all three groups attend the same classes and work towards the same qualification. One unintended consequence of this is that the literate learners described above find these tests very straightforward because of their previous acquisition of literacy and so raise the average scores. This has meant that the pass/fail boundaries, which are based on "cumulative frequency graphs showing the proportion of candidates at certain scores" (Lambert & Lines 2000: 53), are set beyond the reach of the third group. This situation has been affected further by the accession of eastern European countries into the European Union. The consequential influx of migrant workers from these countries led to the first of the three groups described above expanding disproportionately to the other two groups and raising the benchmarks for all of the groups.

Why do learners who are literate in their L1 fare better than learners who are not? It is recognised that the first language or culture can be an impediment to reading; for example, the letters of the alphabet may be pronounced differently or the sentence structure that they are used to may not apply in another language and they may, therefore, have difficulty identifying the components of a sentence. However, the consensus so far is that while there are significant variables in play, not the least of those being the scale of difference between the L1 and the L2 in terms of either the language or the coding system or both, learners who are experienced readers in their L1 share certain benefits. There is an argument that the stronger a learner's literacy in the first language, the more readily literacy in a subsequent language is acquired (Cummins 1984).

These learners are aware of what reading is, that print relates to speech, that speech is segmented into sounds and that the written word may be different from speech. They have developed metalinguistic awareness, an understanding of the general properties of language, including morphological awareness, and an understanding of the components of words when represented in print. They relate what they are reading to their existing knowledge and experience in order to aid understanding and enhance their

knowledge. They may have many years of experience interpreting print. Koda (2008: 80) calls this "top down assistance".

Adult beginner readers who have reached the A1 level and are ready for summative assessment for funding purposes will have passed through up to three stages of learning. Frith (1985) defines these stages as logographic, based on recognition of overall visual appearance of text; alphabetic, based on phoneme awareness; and orthographic, "where words are recognised and retrieved at speed and enable reading to take place without sound" (Spiegel & Sunderland 2006: 57).

Another breakdown into three stages appears in the Literacy Framework set up in the Netherlands (Stockmann 2005: 154): Alpha A, where the learner has basic phonemic awareness; Alpha B, where "consonant clusters and morphemes are read as a unit"; and Alpha C, where reading is "automated except for long and unknown words".

Both the orthographic stage and Alpha C equate to the lowest level, A1, of the CEFR: "Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words and basic phrases and rereading as required" (Council of Europe 2001). This is the target level for the lowest ESOL certification in the UK. At this level, readers would be beginning to use a top down approach to reading (Khalifa & Weir 2008; Spiegel & Sunderland 2006). Here readers begin with the text as a whole in its context and predict, confirm, and "engage in active thought processes to make sense of text […] context is of paramount importance" (Spiegel & Sunderland 2006: 58). In order to do this, readers need to bring "a wide range of background knowledge to reading and […] construct the meaning of the text by interpreting it in terms of the background knowledge activated by the reader" (Grabe 2009: 15). Challenges, therefore, arise for learners who are learning the language they are reading in and have limited literacy or education.

7.4.1 Teaching Level A1 ESOL Learners

In order to address these challenges, current practices in teaching reading are rooted in social practice theory (Barton et al. 2000), whereby text is embedded in the daily lives of the readers. In this approach, reading, although often an activity carried out by an individual, seldom happens in isolation. Adults share what they have read by summarising, discussing, reading aloud and taking action. Paulo Freire (1972) goes so far as to suggest that reading is part of a process that leads to exploring social issues and campaigning for social change. In any case, adult readers are taught to approach a text with a reason or even a goal, be it pleasure, to gain knowledge, or to follow instructions. This reason brings with it predictions and expectations in their minds as to the content of a text based on previous knowledge and experience, which the text will extend, confirm, or challenge. This approach to reading texts is impossible to replicate on the scale of a national examination, where candidates are asked to work with decontextualised text.

7.5 Tests of the Reading Ability of Level A1 ESOL Learners

According to Koretz (2008: 220), three main factors undermine test validity: "failing to measure adequately what ought to be measured, measuring something that shouldn't be measured, and using a test in a manner that undermines validity". This study is concerned with the second factor, where performance is affected by the need for skills unrelated to the intended construct. To interpret this in view of the examinations concerned, where the intended construct is understanding of written material, the result could be marred by a lack of background knowledge, unfamiliarity with the testing method, or failure to understand the language of the rubric. Any of the above could lead to a difference in performance between the literate and low-educated second language learners and therefore be a threat to the validity of the examination. "We need to […] examine […] the nature of the reading activities in which we engage during a test in such a way as to enable comparison with activities occurring during non-test reading" (Khalifa & Weir 2008).

A traditional reading test for adults consists of a number of texts, taken out of their contexts and with certain aspects of layout and design removed in order to save production costs. These texts are followed by questions in a variety of formats, including multiple choice, binary choice and open ended. Tests assess, among other subskills, recognition of the purpose of a text, understanding of overall meaning, recognition and understanding of detail, deciphering of syntax and deducing meaning of unknown lexical items. The questions are often preceded by an introductory explanation with a view to making the task accessible. Although good practice in developing reading assessments requires that the questions and rubric contain language slightly below the level of reading ability being tested, in a basic literacy test, they can double the reading load, which can prevent the candidate from grasping the concepts behind the task.

The reading tests concerned in this study attempt to frame the texts in social situations and represent the layout of real texts, which is easier for some genres than for others. For example, a letter can quite readily resemble the real thing, a magazine article less so. Problems arise, however, because at present examination papers contain texts in black and white with few illustrations. They may represent a whole document or part of one, which can be confusing for a beginner reader. Also they are not situated in the learners' immediate environment, adding another layer of complication for the learners.

Skilled writers of reading tests also make a considerable effort to assess real-life reading skills, and to a certain extent they succeed. They may ask candidates to follow referencing within a text, to deduce meaning, or to scan for specific information. All of these skills can be transferred from reading in another language. Thus, learners without these skills in another language are disadvantaged. In tests of receptive skills, candidates need to demonstrate understanding by completing tasks such as finding answers from a selection of

possibilities, which involves eliminating wrong answers designed to distract; establishing whether a given statement is true or false; and answering open-ended questions in writing. The tasks inevitably increase the reading and understanding burden and, therefore, may affect the validity of the test. In addition, the rubric that surrounds the texts may pose more of a challenge for the candidates than the tests themselves, another example of "construct irrelevant variance" (Koretz 2008: 221).

7.6 The Study

The question for this research was: In what ways does the examination process and tasks affect the validity of assessment of the reading ability of low-level ESOL Literacy learners? The subquestions were:

- What are the reasons behind the choice of wrong answers on reading comprehension examination papers?
- Do the reasons relate to the contexts of the reading texts themselves or to the format and rubrics of the examination paper?

7.6.1 Theoretical Perspective

As there is a plethora of terminology to describe the different stages of the research process, I will follow the definitions laid out by Crotty (1998: 5). The crux of the theoretical perspective for this research is the constructionist concept of phenomenology. "The image evoked is that of humans engaging with their human world. It is in and out of this interplay that meaning is born" (Crotty 1998: 45). The view of reality researched here focusses on the learners and how they approach an examination. The way in which they see the relationship between the rubrics, the questions, and the text forms the basis of the enquiry. Here there can be no universal truth, because each individual creates his or her own unique understanding of the world so there are multiple constructions and multiple interpretations of reality (Croker 2009: 6). This is further complicated by the fact that the learners' constructions and interpretations change as they develop awareness.

Here meaning is socially constructed; it is concerned with the way that the participants interact with the examination phenomenon in a particular context at a given point in time and the multiple meanings it has for them (see Table 1) The research is, therefore, limited to a particular group of adult ESOL learners in the face of a reading examination in the classroom setting.

TABLE 1 The reading test phenomenon

Participants	Phenomenon	Context
Low educated ESOL learners	An externally set reading test	Reading as social practice

The premise is that learners faced with an examination will attempt to interpret it by using their pre-existing views of the world blended with new meaning brought to them by the examination process. The aim is to ascertain how far this is happening for the low-educated ESOL learners when undergoing an assessment of their reading.

7.6.2 Research Methods

The research was based on participant observation, the main form of which was an observer "interacting with people while they are carrying out their everyday tasks" (Cowie 2009: 169). I was introduced to the learners as an observer researcher but took the role of a participant in the classroom proceedings in order to elicit the information I needed from the learners. I reviewed their paper with them after they had taken the examination in the same way that I would if I were their teacher. This was, in effect, a semi-structured interview in a group format (two groups of four students). For triangulation purposes, I had also considered individual semi-structured interviews to follow up the observation sessions but rejected this as a method, as the interviews would have had to be on another day for timetabling reasons and so too much time would have passed since the learners had actually completed the test. Secondly, it would take learners out of their everyday worlds and might inhibit them (Croker 2009: 7).

7.6.3 Sampling

In order to gather data from learners with the requisite backgrounds, it was necessary to work with learners who:

- had minimal literacy skills in their first language, which would mean that their education would have been interrupted during primary schooling or earlier
- had a speaking ability of at least level A2 in order for them to be able to express their reasons for their answers
- were progressing at a pace that did not indicate learning difficulty or disability, such as dyslexia. However, this can be difficult to identify in the early stages of literacy development.

I had the opportunity to work with an inner city further education college, which I have had very close links with in the past. This scenario had the benefit

of my knowing the teacher, who would be comfortable about my presence, but not knowing the learners and therefore having no preconceived ideas as to their abilities or approaches to tasks. One of the teachers had two classes each containing four learners who matched my requirements exactly. It was important that the two groups were taught by the same teacher so as to reduce the variable of different approaches to teaching. The choice of groups was, therefore, convenience sampling, as they were the nearest and most convenient (Robson 2002: 265).

The eight learners were from eastern Africa and the Indian subcontinent, in the 30–50 age range. There were five women and three men. Six had had no schooling, and two had had basic primary education.

I attended two lessons, one with a daytime group of learners and one with an evening group.

7.6.4 Data Collection

As the exact nature and quality of information the learners would be able to convey about the test taking process was unpredictable, data collection was an issue. I met with the four learners in each group in their classroom immediately after they had taken the reading test. The group interviews lasted about 40 minutes.

We went through the paper on a question-by-question basis to replicate as far as possible the classroom procedure that was familiar to the learners. This involved my noting which learners answered each question on the test incorrectly, their answers to my questions, and any other comments on the question that might present clues as to why they answered as they did. I therefore designed a chart for each item on the examination paper. In this way, I could focus on only one sheet at any given time and was more able to respond to the learners. After the interviews had taken place, I coded the answers according to the type of explanation given or comment made.

7.6.5 Trustworthiness of the Findings

A number of issues could affect the validity of the research. The small scale of the study means that the findings are not necessarily generalizable. The findings may be specific to, or dependant on the particular context in which the study took place (Robson 2002: 107). If the research is repeated with a different group in a different institution or with a different teacher, other factors may emerge. In addition, + ”the nature of this kind of research is that there is scope for alternative and competing explanations” (Denscombe 2002: 21). At the data analysis stage, there is the possibility that the explanations of the learners could be interpreted indifferent ways, possibly because of the preconceived hypothesis of the researcher.

A question may be raised as to whether this kind of research into cognitive processes ever really measures what it is attempting to measure. The main issue is ontological: the research process itself may affect the evidence, and the

evidence may not be a true reflection of learner cognition. The very fact of being interviewed about a paper can change the way in which the learners present themselves. Humans react to the knowledge that they are being studied, and there is the very real possibility that they will act differently from normal (Denscombe 2002: 19). They may, inadvertently or otherwise, describe what they think they did or would like to have done rather than what they really did.

I was aware that my presence may affect the learners' behaviour, as I was a stranger to them. Also the fact that they were working with me in a small group may have inhibited learners who did not want to appear less able than others. "Creating a positive relationship with the learners is crucial" (Cowie 2009: 169), so to this end it was made clear to the learners that this work was being done to identify problems with the method of assessment and that errors they made would be the fault of the examination and not theirs. They were identified as helpers in this process, and I made my gratitude clear at all times by saying things like *that is exactly what I need to know, or that is very useful information, thank you*.

7.7 Analysis

The sessions were lively, with the learners expressing gratitude to me for feedback and the opportunity to discuss their work. They were much more able to talk about the processes they used than I had expected. They told me why they had given certain answers and, in some instances, were able to say what they were doing wrong. Although their spoken language was quite restricted, they were able to communicate with gesture, pointing, running a finger across the page, and saying things like I confuse, no understand, and no see.

In general, the learners had least difficulty with Part 3 of the paper, which consisted of three short texts publicising new English classes. Of the six multiple choice questions, which involved scanning all three texts to identify specific information, only one (Question 12, discussed below) caused problems.

I will now take eight key questions that caused the most difficulty.

The examination begins with a series of questions on three related texts: a message from Maria to a friend requesting help with finding day care for her child and expressing certain requirements regarding time and location (Text A) and 2 advertisements for a day care centre (Texts B and C). Question 1 requires candidates to identify the genre of texts B and C.

Question 1 is a multiple choice question about genre. Seven of the eight learners failed to answer this correctly:

What are texts B and C? Tick one box.	
letters	4
emails	1
advertisements	1
No answer:	2

Five of the learners had not understood that the question was referring to texts B and C only and had looked at the top of the page for their clues. The two that did not answer said they had not understood the word *advertisement*.

Questions 2 and 3 ask for the address and the cost of each day care centre. Three of the learners wrote only the address and the cost of the centre that they thought was suitable. They all said that they had not understood the meaning of *each*.

Question 4 asks which day care centre is good for Maria and was answered incorrectly by seven learners, even though three had demonstrated the correct answer in their handling of question 2.

They were also required to write two reasons why the chosen centre was better. This question proved very difficult, with six leaving this part blank. The two that attempted to answer failed to grasp the concept behind the question, which was to identify the factors that applied only to the better centre. One gave a reason that applied to both centres (the cost), and the other did not refer to the advertisements, only Maria's needs: she needs to work; she needs a centre near her house.

Question 5 asks, "Maria thinks one of the day care centres is good. What does she do next?" All of the learners failed to realise that they should look at the three texts for the answer, and so they used world knowledge: 'take her daughter to the centre', 'go to the centre', 'pay for the centre' etc. The correct answer according to the text was to phone the centre.

Then there are questions about short messages. Two of these caused problems: *Where could you see these notices and instructions? Tick one box for each*.

Question 6:

Please write in blue or black pen	
on a form	5
in a shop selling pens	1
in a notebook	2

The learners who got this question wrong had focused on the words *write* and *pen* and not thought about the real life context.

Question 7:

Today's sport on back page	
in a sports centre	3
in a newspaper	5
in a book	-

The three who answered this one incorrectly said that they had matched *sport* with the answers and had read no further. They had not seen the word *page*.

There are then three short texts advertising English language classes. The questions relate to all three texts.

Question 8:

Which class is in the Learning Centre?	
A Reading and Writing class	
B Speaking and Listening class	4
C English and Computer class	4

The answer in the third text about the English and computer class, but the second text about the speaking and listening task contained the sentence: "The class is in room 106 – this is next to the learning centre." The five learners who ticked B had spotted *learning centre* in the first text they came across and had not read the rest of the sentence.

These answers given can be grouped according to the type of difficulty experienced by the learners – concept of the question (22 instances or 59.55% of answers), language of the question (5 instances or 13.5%), reading of the text (10 instances or 27%). See Figure 1.

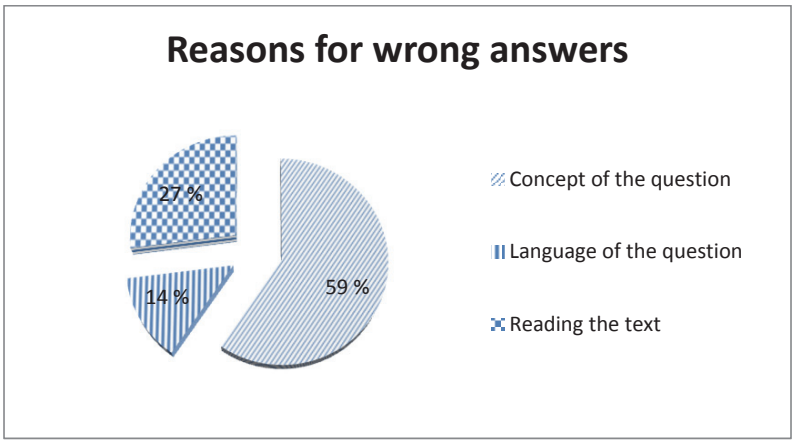


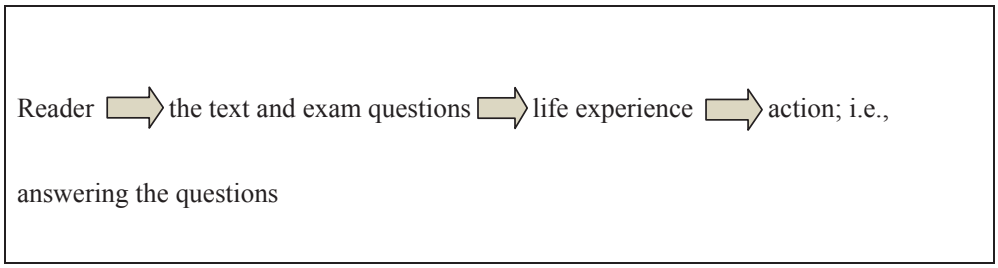
FIGURE 1 Reasons for wrong answers.

7.8 Argument

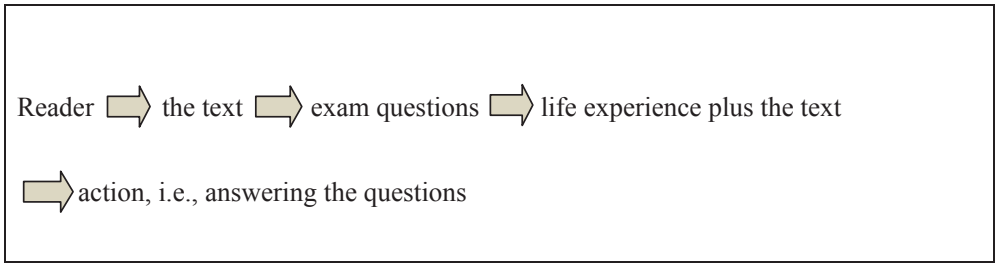
It would seem that the learners with a few exceptions have little difficulty understanding *the language of the questions* as they stand. Language difficulties that they expressed were at word level and not sentence level (e.g. *advertisement, each*). This would indicate that the language level of the questions is appropriate for these learners.

However, two key issues seemed to emerge. The lesser of the two is a consequence of *reading the text*. Predictably, due to their level of attainment, the difficulties some learners had with reading the texts were caused by the fact that they were still reading word by word and not taking in information in meaningful chunks, as indicated in answers to questions 6 and 8. It is possible for them to stop reading when they think they have an answer and not see words immediately following. It would seem that some of the sample are just beyond the alphabetic stage, as described by Frith (1985), where they are still sounding out words based on individual phonemes but have not yet fully reached the orthographic stage, where they recognise whole words and move through them at speed.

The biggest issue concerns the learners' interaction with the test, manifested through their grasp of the concept of the question. The learners in this small sample seemed to recognise that they needed to draw on their real-life experience and world knowledge in order to answer these questions but were engaging with the questions at the expense of interpreting the text and are approaching the task as follows:

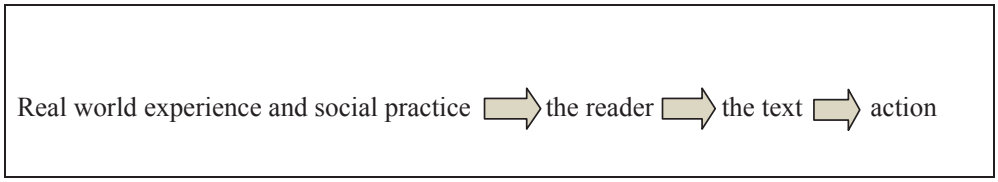


A reading test requires a rather different process, whereby the test taker approaches an exam with an open mind, brings in previous knowledge and experience where appropriate and knows how to use this information in a test. The experienced test taker is prepared for preconceived ideas to be confirmed or challenged by the text.



(In this model, the text and the exam questions could be reversed, according to strategy).

It could be argued that in the real world, the following process of social practice that leads the reader to and through the text, is more normal:



7.9 Conclusion

This was a very small-scale piece of research in a specific context and is, therefore, not necessarily generalizable to other contexts and other learners. It does, however, indicate that these low-educated ESOL learners were hindered by the conceptual construct of the reading test that they took. By the time they came to take the test, most of them had become proficient enough readers to take meaning from text, but they failed to demonstrate this because of the task set. To refer back to Koretz's three factors that undermine validity, it would

seem that the issue here is not the first "failing to measure adequately what ought to be measured" but rather the second "measuring something that shouldn't be measured" (Koretz 2008: 220). The texts relate to the background and experience of the learners, but some of the tasks set prevent the learners from demonstrating their understanding.

Although one of the key guiding principles behind teaching literacy to adults is that a levels of literacy are not necessarily a reflection of intelligence, it would seem that because of the lack of experience in reading and without the support of their normal social practice, these learners are not ready to relate the task to the information they have gained from reading and demonstrate this through reading and writing in the same way that more literate learners might. In other words, the complexity of the tasks, although these may well be within their real life skills, rendered it difficult for them to be accomplished in an examination setting. Therefore, there needs to be a review of testing methods for learners at this level in order to develop tests that enable them to demonstrate their true ability.

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8 CONSEQUENCES OF THE DUTCH INTEGRATION POLICY: LITERACY AS ENTRANCE CRITERION

Jeanne Kurvers, Tilburg University
Ineke van de Craats, Radboud University Nijmegen
Danielle Boon, Tilburg University

Abstract

This article describes how during the last decennia the Dutch integration policy changed from fairly foreigner-friendly into a policy that, in our view, seems designed to discourage low-educated people to immigrate to the Netherlands. According to the latest amendments in the language-related legislation, applicants not only must have acquired some spoken Dutch and knowledge of the Dutch society, but also reading ability in Dutch to get access and obtain a temporary residence permit. To test this reading ability, a new literacy test was developed and implemented. Since no courses are offered to prepare migrants for this entrance exam, the Dutch government provides a self-study toolkit. In this contribution, the new literacy test and the toolkit are described and analyzed to assess the appropriateness for true beginners. In our view, both do not take into account the double cognitive load involved in learning to read and write in a new language.

Keywords: integration policy, literacy testing, second language learning.

8.1 Introduction

Since the nineties of the last century, the Civic Integration policy of the Dutch government has developed from a more or less foreigner-friendly policy, which supported migrants in building a new life in the Netherlands, to a much more

restrictive policy, which requires migrants to pass several exams even before entering the Netherlands. This illustrates that proficiency in the national language has more and more become a cornerstone of the integration policy in the Netherlands (as in other European countries).

In this contribution, we first give an overview of the history of the Civic Integration legislation in the Netherlands since the mid-nineties of the last century (Section 8.2) and the recent amendments to these laws in 2012. In Section 8.3, we discuss the consequences of the most recent amendment to the Civic Integration Act: the Dutch Literacy test, which requires migrants to pass a reading test in Dutch to get an entrance visa for the Netherlands. Since no courses are provided by the Dutch government in the home countries of the migrants, a self-study toolkit has been developed, which migrants intending to settle in the Netherlands can buy and use to prepare themselves for the exam in their home-country. This toolkit is described in Section 8.3, in which special attention will be paid to the first 20 lessons aimed at beginning reading for non-literates. Both the literacy test and the toolkit will be critically analyzed from the perspective of the true beginner who is learning to read and write in a second language. In section 8.4, we present some statistics that illustrate how the latest amendments decreased the chances for low-educated migrants in particular to pass the new integration exam that includes the literacy test discussed above. Section 8.5 closes off with some conclusions about the impact of the recent amendments to the integration act: a more restrictive integration policy, especially affecting the unschooled and/or low-literate potential migrants.

Since the required proficiency is defined in levels of the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (Council of Europe 2001), we start by briefly introducing this framework.

The main aims of the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR) were to offer a frame of reference to evaluate the linguistic and communicative proficiency of people in another language than their mother tongue, to facilitate comparisons and cooperation between different European countries, to support learners, teachers, educational institutes, curriculum- and test-developers, and to create transparency in describing levels of proficiency for oral and written communication in several domains (Council of Europe 2001).

The CEFR distinguishes a qualitative and a quantitative dimension. The first dimension describes language proficiency in (among other things) several domains (e.g., school, family, work), functions (e.g., requests, explanations), situations (e.g., meetings, phone calls), locations (e.g., school, market) and roles (e.g., audience, participant in a discussion). The second dimension describes the level of efficiency, i.e. how proficient people are at using the language in the several domains and roles. Six levels are described, ranging from the lowest level A1, standing for the ability to communicate in short and simple sentences in a very familiar context, to the advanced and independent level C2, corresponding to near-native use of oral and written language (but see Janssen-van Dieten 2006 for a critical reflection on the implications for LESLLA learners).

8.2 Legislation on Civic Integration

8.2.1 History

Until the mid-nineties of the last century, there was no language-related legislation for admission and civic integration of migrants in the Netherlands, although many migrants did actually attend courses in Dutch as a second language or Dutch L2 literacy courses, provided by adult education centers. In several places, these centers also offered literacy courses in Turkish or Arabic, partly based on the assumption that learning to read is easier in a first language and learning Dutch as a second language might be more successful if people had already learned to read in their first language (Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990)[24]. Starting in 1998, an official integration policy with attendant legislation came into force, which subsequently kept being changed in the past fourteen years. Figure 1 presents an overview of the legislation on admission and civic integration in the Netherlands since 1998.

- 1998: Law on Civic Integration (WIN):
  - Obligation to participate in integration courses, no requirements with regard to the level to be attained
- 2000-2004: Changes in the public and political climate: preparing new legislation
- 2006: Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB)
  - Admission dependent on passing the exams on Spoken Dutch and Knowledge of Dutch Society
- 2007: Law on Civic Integration (WI)
  - Residence permit dependent on passing exams on spoken and written Dutch and knowledge of Dutch Society
  - Exam: central exam and practice assessments
- 2011: Amendment to Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB)
  - Spoken Dutch: criterion for passing raised to A1 level
  - Literacy test (GBL) added
  - No provision of courses, self-study toolbox
  - Costs: Toolbox € 110,- Exam € 350,-
- 2012 Amendment to Law on Civic Integration (WI)
  - Required level of Dutch A2 (future B1?)
  - Time-limits reduced to 3 years (+ 2 for unschooled).
  - Possibility of applying for dispensation for literacy requirements abolished
  - Central exam only
  - Funding stops from 2013 onwards

FIGURE 1 Dutch legislation on admission and civic integration.

[24] Estimations of the proportion of non-literate adult migrants at the time ranged from 15–20% for Turkish men and 40–45% for Turkish women, to 50–70% for Moroccan men and 70–90% for Moroccan women.

In 1998, the first Law on Civic Integration was passed, which required migrants to participate in courses of Dutch as a second language and familiarization with Dutch society and work in the Netherlands. All courses were provided by adult education centers with only minor costs for students. Familiarization with Dutch society and with work was regularly offered in a language familiar to the migrants, such as Turkish, Arabic or English.

In the period between 2001 and 2005, the public and political climate changed radically, due to major events like 9/11, the murders of Islam-critical politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and equally if not more critical controversial interviewer/film-director Theo van Gogh in 2004, culminating in anti-Muslim and anti-migrant populist political party like Geert Wilders' PVV (Party for Freedom). This change in climate is reflected in two new laws that were much more restrictive with regard to the admission of new arrivals (newcomers) and quite a bit more demanding as far as the requirements for civic integration were concerned than was the case in the 1998 law. These two laws were the Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB), which was passed in 2006, and the Law on Civic Integration (WI), which was passed in 2007.

The 2006 Law on Civic Integration Abroad required migrants from non-western countries wanting to settle in the Netherland to pass an exam on spoken Dutch and a test on knowledge of Dutch society (next to several other requirements). It introduced an entrance examination for the Netherlands: only those migrants who had passed the test on spoken Dutch at a level slightly below A1 (called A1-minus) and on knowledge of Dutch society were declared admissible to the Netherlands. The exam (a computerized phone-pass test[25]) is called the basic integration exam and is to be taken at the Dutch Embassy or Consulate in the candidate's country of origin. The Exam on Spoken Dutch (TGN) tests oral skills and consists of four parts: sentence repetition, answering short questions, naming antonyms of given words and retelling stories. The exam on Knowledge of Dutch Society (KNS) consists of 30 questions in Dutch (out of the 100 than can be prepared for) based on a booklet with 30 illustrations that are to be answered in Dutch as well. The questions include topics like geography, history, the Dutch constitution and legislative system, parenting and education, work and income, the health care system and the Dutch language.

In 2007, the second law was passed, the Law on Civic Integration (WI), which required migrants after entering the Netherlands to pass another three exams, two central exams (oral and written Dutch, and Knowledge of Dutch Society) and a local practice exam (assessments by certified assessors or portfolio proofs) before getting a permanent residence permit. In the practice assessments, candidates could choose assessments that were best suited to their role in daily life (for example related to work or parenting). Newcomers were

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25 The fully computerized exam, making use of automatic speech recognition, is taken by using a telephone connection that links the candidate to a computer at the ministry in the Netherlands. The candidate will hear questions through the headset and will give answers by speaking into the microphone.

required to pass the Level A2 (CEFR) exams (spoken and written skills) of the common European Framework of Languages. For long-term residents, level A1 for written Dutch sufficed. For refugees, only the requirements of the second law (WI) applied. The separate citizenship test, which existed until 2007, was replaced by the Civic Integration Exam. Migrants who had already passed another exam at a higher level (for example a regular high school exam or a State Exam on Dutch as a second language) did not have to take the Civic Integration Exam. Migrants with less than elementary education in their home country could apply for an exemption (dispensation) for the written part of the requirements to get Dutch citizenship, provided they could prove they had made a considerable effort trying to reach the required literacy levels. Migrants got three and a half years to pass the exams; unschooled migrants were allowed to take two more years.

8.2.2 Recent Amendments

Recently, there have been several amendments to the two laws introduced above. In 2011, the Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB), which regulates admission to the Netherlands, was adjusted: the criterion for passing the test on spoken Dutch was raised to level A1 (CEFR) and a new test was added: A literacy test.[26] The exam on Knowledge of Dutch Society remained unchanged. From April 2011, migrants who want to get an entrance visa for the Netherlands not only have to prove that they can speak and understand Dutch, but also that they can read Dutch in Roman script at level A1 of the European Framework, i.e., that they are able to read and understand simple and short texts in Dutch. No courses are provided, but instead a self-study toolkit has been developed (by order of the government) to help potential immigrants people to learn to read and comprehend written Dutch by themselves, with help of their relatives in the Netherlands (see also section 4). Taking the whole test costs 350 euros, which comes on top of the other costs migrants have to make to prepare themselves for the exam and to travel to a Dutch Embassy or Consulate in their country or a neighboring country. The self-study toolkit costs 110 euros. The website of the Dutch government states: "You can prepare for the basic integration exam with the self-study toolkit *Naar Nederland* ('To the Netherlands'). It contains all you need to learn to speak, understand and read in Dutch and to pass the basic integration exam abroad."[27] The toolkit consists of a DVD with the film 'To the Netherlands' and an accompanying photo book with an audio CD, a workbook, a learner's guide in Dutch and English (or some other language already available), a DVD with digital exercises, log-in codes for the online practice program and TIN-codes for two practice exams on spoken Dutch and literacy in Dutch. Students who want extra practice and want to do more practice exams can buy another four practice tests for 75 euros.

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26 Although in the explanatory memorandum to the 2006 law the Dutch Government stated that a test on written Dutch was left out of the law in order not to discriminate unschooled migrants for admission.

27 http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/inburgering

Candidates have to pass all three parts (Spoken Dutch, Knowledge of Dutch Society, and Literacy and Reading Comprehension) to pass the examination in full. "If you fail either part, you must retake the entire examination", so the official brochure *The Dutch Civic Integration Examination Abroad* (p. 13) clearly states, and every re-examination costs another 350 euros.

In 2012, the Law on Integration (WI) for migrants who have already been admitted and got a temporary residence permit was also adapted. The obligation to pass the exam now only applies to new residents, and no longer to long-term residents with low levels of Dutch. The time limit allowed to migrants to pass the exams has been reduced to three years (plus two years for unschooled migrants) and the possibility of applying for dispensation for the literacy requirements for migrants with less than six years of elementary education has been abolished. According to the ministry, the main reason behind this is that as a result of the adaptations to the Law on Civic Integration Abroad migrants are already supposed to be able to read Dutch at level A1 (but see below). Besides this, the funding for integration courses has been terminated completely (as of January 1, 2013 for new arrivals) and the type of exam for Dutch as a second language is reduced to one central exam only for spoken and written Dutch. The practice-related assessments are no longer taken and the exam is no longer adapted to the several roles migrants have in society (such as workforce, education or parenting).

Summarizing, in the new situation migrants need to pass exams on level A1 to be able to enter the Netherlands with a provisionary (temporary) residence permit, and within 3–5 years after arrival they need to pass exams on level A2 to be able to stay in the Netherlands and get a permanent residence permit. The Netherlands is not the only country changing its migration policy this way. The same tendencies can be recognized across Europe (see Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaet 2009) and the implications of the power of language tests are discussed more and more broadly (see for example Shohamy 2006).

In the next sections, we will explore more extensively the new literacy test and the part of the self-study toolkit intended for migrants who never went to school before and have to learn to read and write by themselves (for the first time in life) in Dutch as a second language.

8.3 The New Literacy Test

The new literacy test, called *Geletterdheid en Begrijpend Lezen* ('Literacy and Reading Comprehension') is one of the three tests migrants have to pass in order to be declared admissible and receive a temporary residence permit in the Netherlands. Like the other two parts of the exam (Spoken Dutch and Knowledge of Dutch Society), the exam has to be taken at the Dutch Embassy or Dutch Consulate in the country of origin.

The test consists of five parts:

- Word reading: four word lists
- Sentence reading: eight sentences
- Text reading: three texts
- Sentence completion: 28 sentences
- Text comprehension: three texts with questions

These five parts are included in the so-called phone-pass test (see footnote 2). The instructions in the learner's guide for practicing the computerized phone-pass test, first ask the student to enter the telephone number, after which the computer answers in Dutch *Dank u voor het bellen met het toetssysteem van Ordinate. Toets uw ToetsIdentificatieNummer in*. ('Thank you for calling the Ordinate test system. Please type in your Test Identification Number'). After this, the candidate has to enter the personal TIN-code he got, follow the instructions for each of the parts, and read out the words, sentences or texts after hearing a tone.

For word reading, the candidate is asked to read aloud four lists of Dutch words, ranging from short monosyllabic words like *gat* ('hole'), to more complex multisyllabic words like *grapje* ('joke'), *oplossing* ('solution') or *veranderen* ('to change'). Sentence reading requires the candidate to read aloud eight Dutch sentences, such as *Jan viert een feest op zeven mei* ('Jan has a party on May 7'), or *De kapotte bank staat nog in de woonkamer* ('The broken sofa (or couch) is still in the living room'). For text reading, the candidate has to read out loud three texts of about 50 words each in 30 seconds. One of the texts is written in a letter font that resembles handwriting. In sentence completion, the candidate is asked to read out loud 28 sentences and to complete the sentence with the appropriate word (to be chosen from three alternatives). For example: *Maarten koopt bij de bakker een …* bank, brood, vis (Maarten buys at the baker's a coach, bread, fish). *Ik heb heel hard gewerkt, maar nu heb ik een rustige…* drukte, kast, week ('I worked very hard, but now I have a quiet ... pressure, cupboard, week'). For reading comprehension, the candidate needs to read a text and answer a few questions about the text. An example is presented in Figure 2.[28]

Tekst
Oma heeft Lotte een mooi cadeau gegeven. Ze heeft Lotte een schrift gegeven. Alle vrienden van Lotte mogen erin schrijven. Haar beste vriendin Mila schrijft als eerste in het schrift. Sommige vrienden maken ook nog een tekening, zoals Anna. Zij heeft een paard getekend bij een klein gedicht. Lotte is heel blij met het schrift. Als ze later oud is, is het een mooie herinnering. Dan weet ze nog steeds wie vroeger haar vrienden waren.

Vragen
Van wie heeft Lotte het schrift gekregen?
Wie is de beste vriendin van Lotte?
Wat is het schrift voor Lotte als ze later oud is?

FIGURE 2 Sample text with questions (source: Ministerie van Binnenlandse zaken 2011).

[28] All examples are from one of the official practice tests that are included in the self-study toolkit, provided by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom relations.

The text informs the reader about Lotte who got a notebook from her grandmother and invites her friends to write something in it. Lotte is very happy with the notebook and assumes it will help her remember who her friends were, when she was young. The reader has to answer three questions: From whom did Lotte get the notebook? Who is Lotte's best friend? What will the notebook be for Lotte when she has grown old?

According to the test developers (Van Emmerik, Schot, & Tijssen 2011), the first three reading aloud parts measure accuracy and fluency. This part determines 50% of the score on the test. Sentence Completion and Text Comprehension are supposed to measure comprehension and determine the other 50% of the score. The literacy test is a computerized phone-pass test (a speech recognition device automatically generates a literacy score), because it had to fit in with the software and frame of the test already developed for spoken Dutch.

One could argue that perhaps speech recognition is not the most valid and reliable method to measure reading accuracy and comprehension for second language learners. For mother tongue speakers, accuracy and speed in oral reading are reliable predictors of beginning reading proficiency (Adams 1990; Byrne 1998). This however, is not automatically the case for beginning readers in foreign language. Due to differences in the phonological repertoires of the various languages, a test taker might be able to apply the alphabetical principle easily, being still unable to pronounce words as expected when they do not consist of sounds or sound patterns that are familiar to him.[29] As said before, no courses are offered to migrants who want to join their partner or family in the Netherlands, but migrants can buy the self-study toolkit *Naar Nederland* ('To the Netherlands') to prepare themselves with help of their partner-to-be or their family in the Netherlands. Another possibility that is offered at Dutch language institutes is that of visiting the Netherlands on a tourist visa and taking a four-week course that may cost up to € 840.

8.3.1 The Toolkit for Self-study

By order of the Dutch government, a self-study toolkit was developed to prepare the student for the exams on Spoken Dutch, Knowledge of Dutch Society, and Reading and Reading Comprehension. The toolkit consists of:

- Guidelines with instructions and on-line translations in several languages.
- For Knowledge of Dutch Society: a DVD with a film on eight topics, a book with stills of the video and 100 questions and answers, one for each of the stills.

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[29] One indication to this effect is that, compared to other nationalities, Chinese candidates passed the exam least often (59%) in the first half of 2012 (Moroccans showing a pass rate of 79%, Russians of 97%), a situation that is not very common for Chinese students in general (Van Esch, van de Grift, & Tazelaar 2012: 24).

- For Spoken Dutch, Reading and Reading Comprehension: a Workbook with an audio-CD and a DVD (or online exercises), 65 lessons with exercises and a wordlist.

According to the Guidelines, the first 20 lessons introduce the basics of reading and writing in Dutch in the Roman alphabet for the unschooled students, and the other 45 lessons aim at learning written and spoken Dutch up to the required A1-level. From lesson 21 onwards, the basic content is on reading aloud words and sentences and on sentence and text comprehension. On the DVD and the online version of the program, instructions can be read in one of the five different languages (English being one of them) that are currently available, and it is also possible to get an oral translation of words in one of these languages. In this contribution, we only focus on the first twenty lessons.

8.3.2 Teach Yourself to Read and Write in Dutch

The first 20 lessons provide a basic literacy course for candidates who either never went to school before or are literate in another script, and who are true beginners in Dutch as a second language. With those lessons they are supposed to learn the Roman script and the symbols for the numbers. According to the Guidelines, lessons 1-4 present basic information on numbers, colors, time and people: the symbols for the numbers from 1-20, the names of basic colors and the Dutch equivalents of kinship terms such as mother, daughter, child, and time concepts like day, hour and week. Lessons 5 to 19 pay attention to the following subjects: phoneme-grapheme correspondences, word recognition, reading aloud, sentence comprehension and text comprehension. Lesson 20 is a repetition of the letters and numbers.

The material includes fourteen different instruction icons for exercises, such as an eye for 'read', a mouth for 'repeat or read aloud', a hand with a pointing finger for 'choose', a pencil with a line for 'draw a line', a mouse for 'drag', the numbers 1, 2, 3 for 'count' and different arrows for 'left to right' or 'top to bottom'.

In the Guidelines, unschooled learners are addressed as follows: "For those who cannot read and write or those who use another form of script: In lessons 1 to 20, you will learn Latin script, all the sounds in the Dutch language and your first Dutch words. When you have completed these lessons, you can now read Dutch at beginner's level" (Guideline, p.25). To us, this sounds too optimistic. To illustrate why we have this opinion, we will now present an impression of the first few lessons (about numbers, colors and people) and show where things become – in our view – problematic. The instruction for pre-literates for these lessons in the workbook is as follows:

- "Listen carefully and repeat what you hear.
- Look at the pictures for the meaning.
- Do the exercises.
- Remember how to pronounce Dutch sounds." (Workbook p. 7)

The instruction looks simple, but experienced teachers know that it is not always clear to true beginners how to distinguish the intended meaning from other possible interpretations of a picture. And we wonder what a beginner is supposed to do when trying to 'remember how to pronounce Dutch sounds', particularly sounds that do not exist in his/her mother tongue. It is a well-known fact that late foreign language learners have difficulty acquiring the phonology and morphosyntax of a foreign or second language. Likewise, unschooled adults do not (yet) possess the skills usually measured in language aptitude tests, such as phonetic decoding ability or language analytic skills (Service 1992; Skehan 1998).

We now take a look at some of the exercises in Lesson 1. On the first page, the numbers 1–12 are presented on rummikub tiles against a background consisting of many more tiles (as shown in the bottom row in Figure 3). The second page adds pictures of numbers of persons. Figure 3 presents a part of the second page of lesson 1, with the accompanying e-learning exercises.

FIGURE 3 Lesson 1, second page (Workbook, p.10).

The Guidelines indicate this lesson as being a lesson about numbers. In the top-row of Figure 3, three pictures of different numbers of children are presented.

FIGURE 4 E-learning exercise lesson 1.

The accompanying online voice in the e-learning program (Figure 4) says for example *drie* ('three') and the online instruction asks the student to 'count the words' and tick the right number.

On the basis of the pictures one would expect something else, the most obvious task being to count the number of people or things shown in the pictures. But instead the student has to click on/tick the number of words he has heard. In the workbook, the instructions are symbolized by pictures of an ear (listen), a hand (tick) or a mouth (say/repeat). In short, the student hears the word three and has to choose the number 1, since 'three' is one word, or see three persons on the picture and has to tick the number 5. We think that this must be quite confusing for an unschooled student who thought this would be a lesson about Dutch words for numbers or numerals. Immediately below this, the learner sees another picture with three numbers on them, but now the accompanying voice says 'Het getal drie' (the number three), the accompanying instruction being to count the number of words and tick the number of words heard (three in this case). Now the student has to tick the number 3, not because that was the number indicated, but because he is expected to listen carefully and to mark word boundaries in one of the first clauses he hears in Dutch. 'Het getal drie' actually is an utterance with two stressed and two unstressed syllables. Nevertheless the beginning learner might interpret this outcome as fitting in nicely with his expectations about choosing the right number for the Dutch numeral that is heard. He might feel relieved: this is what he thought he had to do in the first place (learning the numbers and the spoken words for them in Dutch). In the third picture on this page, however, he sees a picture of two girls, but he has to choose the number 1, because the voice says *meisjes* ('girls') which is plural in meaning but still only one word.

The next online page presents the same type of exercises. The student sees the same picture with three children twice (see Figure 4), and is expected to choose as the right answer the number 2 for the first picture, because he hears 'three children' (which is two words). In the next picture (the same one) he has to choose the number 5 because now it says 'een jongen en twee meisjes' (a boy and two girls), which is five words. And to make things even more confusing for a true beginner, the next picture shows four persons, while the voice says 'Ik heb drie kinderen' (I have three children) which leads to the right answer 4.

In short, we think that exercises like these must be quite confusing to a true beginner starting on his first exercises in Dutch in a self-study toolkit. Or to put it less politely: In our view, everything that could have gone wrong in designing these first exercises actually did go wrong. The student sees pictures of numbers of people and of numbers in a sometimes confusing background, expecting to be practicing correspondences between numbers of people in the picture and the number he has to tick (associations between the number and the digit) or the association between a spoken Dutch word (drie) with either a picture of a number of three people, or the number/numeral 3. But what he gets instead is a mixture of spoken, visual and graphic representations of the number three, together with the instruction to do something completely

different: counting the number of Dutch words he heard. Even if the latter part had been designed properly, it would have been nearly impossible to count the words because it is hardly possible to hear word boundaries in a language you are not familiar with (Fromkin & Rodman 1993). Moreover, several studies have convincingly revealed that for illiterate people it is impossible to hear word boundaries even in their mother tongue (Olson 1997; Kurvers 2002; Onderdelinden, Van de Craats, & Kurvers 2009). People develop the ability to mark word boundaries as a result of having learned to read and write in a writing system that marks word boundaries by spaces. Moreover, if it had been possible to count the number of words in the Dutch utterances, the students could have carried out these exercises without becoming familiar with the Dutch words for numbers, because digits like 3 or 5 can be recognized without any knowledge of their pronunciation in Dutch.

Lesson 5 is the first lesson in the toolkit that pays attention to written words, to graphemes (letters) and phonemes (sounds) and to the relation between graphemes and phonemes. The lesson starts with five of the basic key words that are used to teach the alphabetical principle: -*mes* ('knife'), *bel* ('bell'), *kam* ('comb'), *bal* ('ball'), *kip* ('*hen*') and *lip* ('lip'). The words are short and monosyllabic, which we think is fine for beginning readers, but the choice for the combination of the first nine Dutch phonemes might have been selected more carefully for unschooled foreign language learners: the closed vowels /ɛ/ and /I/ and sometimes also /ɛ/ and /a/ are difficult to distinguish for first-time learners of Dutch, as is the difference between the voiced and unvoiced bilabials /b/ and /p/ for speakers of several languages in which these two are not distinguished (Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990).

The basic instruction in the workbook gives the following advice:

- Listen carefully and repeat what you hear.
- Look at the pictures and make sure that you understand what you hear and read.
- Do the exercises.
- Remember how to write the Dutch sounds (Workbook, p. 7)

The lesson is about the phonemes and graphemes of the six key-words presented before. In the workbook (and on the DVD), the student sees pictures that are alternately combined with sentences and words, and in the workbook the learner also sees written words segmented into single letters (*b-a-l*), into onset and rime (*b-al*), into (actually more often) something like the opposite of onset and rime (*ba-l*). Sometimes single words are written together with the article (articles differ in Dutch, depending on word gender). During the three different exercises on this page, the student successively hears sounds (*b-e-l*), onset-rime (*b-el*, but also *be-l*), words (*bel*), and sentences (*ik hoor de bel*; 'I hear the bell'). In our view it is problematic that the student, who has never learned to read and write before, has come to the fifth lesson and is now required to repeat, to count words, count sounds and count letters. And he also needs to

realize that he had better not look at the pictures too closely to get a grasp of the meaning, because it is not very easy to decide which picture goes with which utterance.

Another problem, in our view, has to do with comprehensible input for beginning second language learners. To illustrate this, we take a look at exercises 33 and 34 from Lesson 5 (Figure 5) and analyze them from the perspective of the learner.

Exercise 33:
Listen and count the words
The bell rings (picture on the right)
Could you open the door please? (picture on the left)

Exercise 34:
Listen and count the sounds
Read and point to the letter

FIGURE 5 Exercises Lesson 5.

In exercise 33, the student sees four pictures in a row (two are presented in Figure 4), one of them being a picture of a doorbell, the other one of a woman opening a door. The voice on the DVD says *Ik hoor de bel* ('I hear the bell'), and according to the instruction for lesson 5, the student has to look at the pictures and decide which picture fits this utterance. But the written instruction next to these four pictures is: 'Listen and count the words'. We already saw that it is hardly possible for unschooled learners at this stage to mark word boundaries in spoken utterances.

The exercise immediately after that (exercise 34) asks the student to focus his attention on the number of sounds in a spoken word and the number of letters: 'Listen and count the sounds. Read and point to the letter.' In exercise 33, the student has to count the words he heard; now he suddenly has to count the sounds he has heard. The implied suggestion that counting sounds is easy and can be done right from the start in beginning reading in an alphabetical writing

system betrays another telling misunderstanding about what it takes to be able to do this. A pre-literate person is not aware of phonemes as linguistic entities in spoken language. Learning that a spoken word consists of different sounds is actually one of the cognitively most challenging parts of learning to read, let alone learning to read in a second language with a different repertoire of phonemes (Adrian, Alegria, & Morais 1995; Bryant 1995; Byrne 1998; Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990). In another exercise in this same lesson, the student first has to listen to and read a sentence (*Ik heb het mes nodig*, 'I need the knife') and is asked to count the letters 'e' (this is only on the DVD) and immediately after that he hears the same sentence and has to report the number of words in that sentence.

The next example shows even more clearly how confusing we expect these exercises to be for beginning readers and beginning second language learners (Figure 6). The student sees four pictures in a row and hears four sentences, one going with each of the pictures (this at least we suppose is what is intended, because the general instruction is to match pictures with utterances). The sentence belonging to the first picture is *Kam je haar eens* ('Come on, comb your hair') while the picture shows a girl combing her hair. The sentence belonging to the second picture (a comb) is 'I need a comb' and for the third picture (again a comb) the voice presents the utterance 'I do not see a comb' (but we do see the comb in picture 3). In the paper workbook, the student has to circle the word *kam* ('comb') in the four sentences. This is a familiar word recognition exercise for beginning readers, but in the instructions for this exercise on the DVD and also in the workbook the student is also asked to count the words again.

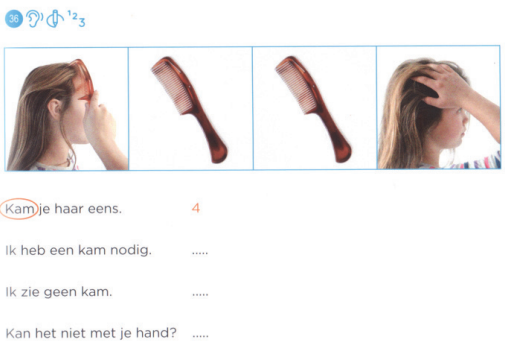

FIGURE 6 Exercise Lesson 5, workbook.

All ten lessons up to lesson 15 follow the same pattern. From lesson 15 onward, the first texts appear. They are short texts of about 50 words, with three to four multiple choice questions, as in the literacy test the toolkit is preparing for. An example is presented in Figure 7. The text is about a woman from Thailand, with a ten-year-old son, who is looking for a house in Amsterdam with a maximum rent of 1000 Euros a month.

Text	Questions:
Ik ben een vrouw van 40 jaar. Ik heb een zoon van 10 jaar. Ik kom uit Thailand Ik zoek een huis in Amsterdam. Huur tot 1000 euro. Per maand. Voor 2 jaar. Wie helpt mij? Bel mij. Mijn nummer is 064323869.	De vrouw komt uit o Thailand o Amsterdam De zoon is… jaar o 10 jaar o 5 jaar 1000 euro huur per … o maand o jaar

FIGURE 7 Text with questions, lesson 15 Workbook (p.102).

The text is written from the first-person narrative viewpoint. First-person narration, however, is not an easy viewpoint for unschooled readers and quite confusing for first- time text readers (Chall, Bissex, Conrad, & Harris-Sharples 1996). The 'I' in the text is not the same as the 'I' of the reader; to the reader, it is a he or she. The third person or narrator's viewpoint might have been easier for texts for beginning readers. Up to Lesson 20, the workbook presents only four texts, some of which are also presented in a handwriting-like font. We expect that this total of four texts up to Lesson 21 most likely will not be enough to fulfill the promise in the Guideline (p. 25): "When you have completed these lessons, you can now read Dutch at beginner's level." We think that true beginners in learning to read and write in a second language will need significantly more time and practice with more extended content and less confusing/more appropriate exercises to achieve the required level.

8.4 Some Statistics

In an evaluation of the Integration Exam Abroad of 2011 (Van de Grift, Remmerswaal, & Tazelaar 2012), some statistics are presented about the examinations taken before and after the implementation of the New Basic Integration Examination on April 1, 2011. We will show that these statistics confirm our expectation as formulated above.

In 2011, a total of 7122 toolkits were sold. In total, 6514 Examinations were taken for the first time (about 1200 fewer than in 2010), 3339 of which were taken in the three months before April 1, and 3175 in the nine months after April 1 (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Exams taken and pass rates, divided for low- middle- and high-educated

	Jan.-March 2011		April-Dec. 2011		Jan.-June 2012	
	Exams taken:	Pass rate:	Exams taken:	Pass rate:	Exams taken:	Pass rate:
Total:	3339	92%	3175	75%	2575	78%
Low-educated	783 (25%)	87%	628 (20%)	61%	454 (18%)	64%
Middle-educated	1451 (46%)	93%	1412 (45%)	73%	1116 (43%)	78%
High-educated	908 (29%)	97%	1077 (35%)	87%	947 (37%)	87%

(Based on Van de Grift et al. 2012, and Van Esch, van de Grift, & Tazelaar 2012)

Subdivided by educational level: before April 1, 783 low educated people (elementary school or less) took the Exam (about 255 a month), 1451 people with a middle (secondary school) education (500 a month) and 908 highly educated people (tertiary education) (300 a month). In the nine months after April 1, these numbers were 628 (70 a month), 1412 (155 a month) and 1077 (120 a month) respectively. The numbers have decreased by nearly 70% (from an average of 1100 a month, to an average of about 350), a drop that was probably mainly caused by the addition of the literacy test.[30]

The pass rate before April 1 was 92%; the pass rate after April 1 (although fewer people actually took the exam) was 75%. The chance of passing the exams for those who actually took them, decreased by 17%. If these data are specified for educational level, the data we get are the following: Before April 1, the chances of passing the exam were 87% for the low educated, 93% for the middle educated and 97% of the highly educated. After April 1, this pass rate was 61% for the low educated, 73% for the middle educated and 87% for the high educated. To recap briefly: while on average the number of people that actually took the exam decreased considerably, even this reduced number showed a decrease in the overall pass rates of some 17%, the drop for those with a low education being as much as 26%. We can safely add to this overview that it is highly unlikely that any of the completely unschooled potential migrants will have taken the exam, although exact numbers cannot be deduced from the data, since no further subdivision of the low educated category (standing for 6 years of education or less) is available.

The evaluation of the first half of 2012 more or less shows a continuation of the picture that emerged for 2011 (Van Esch et al. 2012). In total, 2575 exams were taken during the first half of 2012 (about 400 a month). Of these, a total of 484 participants were lower educated (a still smaller part of all candidates) and their pass rate was 64%, compared to the 87% pass rate for the highly educated and 78% for the middle educated participants.

30 For a small part, the reduction will be caused by the increase in the numbers taking the test in the last months before April 1 and also because it became clear that according to an already existing bilateral treaty between The Netherlands and Turkey, migrants from Turkey after September 2011 no longer could be obliged to take the Examination abroad.

8.5 Conclusions and Discussion

Since the mid-nineties of the last century, the Dutch Integration policy has developed from fairly foreigner-friendly into more restrictive. While until those years unschooled migrants were even offered mother tongue literacy classes to increase their linguistic awareness in order to facilitate the acquisition of the Dutch language (see section 2.1 above), the current policy is one that is unrecognizably different. To obtain a temporary residence permit, applicants now must have acquired before entrance not only spoken Dutch at A1 level and knowledge of the Dutch society, but also reading ability in Dutch at level A1. After this, within three to five years, a second examination has to be taken on spoken and written Dutch at level A2 of the CEFR, and a more advanced test on knowledge of Dutch Society. The free market principle has also entered integration policy: no free courses are provided by the government and from 2013 onward the migrants have to pay for the whole trajectory themselves.

The self-study toolkit that was developed by order of the government, as we have tried to demonstrate, does not take into account the perspective of the true beginner in learning and the double cognitive load involved in having to learn to read and write for the first time, and having to do this in a new language. Research has shown convincingly that learning to read is not just a matter of beginners being supplied with letters, written words and texts, and needless to say the process is obviously complicated further by having to learn to read in an unfamiliar language. The exercises and subsequent tests that are part of the current Integration Policy are, in our view, confusing and difficult, to say the least, and seem to be based on wrong assumptions about the (meta)-linguistic and analytical skills of unschooled learners and about true beginners in second language learning. The evaluations of the first year after the new legislation was passed seem to reveal that it is not so much the highly educated migrants (the knowledge workers) that are hampered by this new policy, but rather the unschooled and low-educated migrants. We have to conclude that since April 2011, the Dutch borders are practically closed to the LESLLA learners among the potential migrants. We have called this 'Double Dutch'[31]: while all practitioners in the adult education field have been working very, very hard for the last twenty years to develop a literacy framework for Dutch as a second language, introducing a portfolio to support teachers and students in contextualizing second language (literacy) teaching, developing tailor-made and practically relevant teaching materials and finding ways and facilities to continue schooling and professionalizing LESLLA teachers, the Dutch government decided in favor of an, in our eyes, extremely restrictive integration policy for unschooled and low-educated migrants.

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[31] Double Dutch, apart from its regular meaning in English, is also the name of a children's rope game in which one rope moves in one direction, and the other in the other direction. It also refers to a language game: only those who speak and understand the secret language (like Pig Latin, for example 'Depouble Deputch' for Double Dutch) belong to the in-group, the rest is excluded.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference of Languages
WIN	Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers (Law on Civic Integration of Newcomers)
WIB	Wet Inburgering Buitenland (Law on Civic Integration Abroad) (http://www.eerstekamer.nl/behandeling/20060131/publicatie_wet_3/f=/w29700st.pdf)
WI	Wet Inburgering (Law on Civic Integration) (http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/geldigheidsdatum_27-03-2013)
GBL	Geletterdheid en Begrijpend Lezen (Literacy and Comprehensive Reading)
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)
TGN	Taaltoets Gesproken Nederlands (Language Test Spoken Dutch)
KNS	Kennis van de Nederlandse Samenleving (Knowledge of the Dutch Society)
TIN	Test Identification Number

9 STUDYING IN COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL WITH LOW SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING PROFICIENCY

Mirja Tarnanen & Eija Aalto, University of Jyväskylä

Abstract

In this article, we report a case study on the Finnish as an L2 writing skill of weak writers in grades 7–9 of comprehensive school. The study is based on writing performances of 25 students who each completed four different writing tasks (i.e., 100 texts) and a questionnaire about their background information, self-assessment of writing and literacy practices. First, we discuss target language writing proficiency in the school context from the curriculum and pedagogical point of view. Then we present the results of the questionnaire data and focus on the performances of writers with A1 writing proficiency on the CEFR scale. The findings show that students with low writing proficiency in fact also write in various out-of-school printed and media texts. Further, despite a weak proficiency level the students are at some point able to produce texts and make meanings syntactically and textually. Finally, we discuss some implications concerning migrants and literacy-oriented culture in Finnish schools.

9.1 Introduction

Literacy skills are regarded as necessary skills in a knowledge-society but they are also very important skills in school as they work as a medium of learning, the writing skill particularly also as a medium of demonstrating learning. The

Finnish school[32], especially grades 7–9, can be considered to be linear and text-based, thus learning and teaching is mainly constructed through texts and writing, such as in text books and note-taking and completing tasks in written form (e.g. Luukka, Pöyhönen, Huhta, Taalas, Tarnanen & Keränen 2008). For L2 students, particularly with low literacy skills, this is challenging since writing is demanding in their mother tongue, let alone in an L2 (Schoonen, de Klopper, Huljstin, Simis, Snellings, & Stevenson 2003; Myles 2002). Although Finnish is both the language of instruction and the target of learning – students with a migrant background are provided with Finnish as L2 classes – the level of Finnish writing proficiency can remain very low throughout the educational system (cf. Asfaha 2009). However, there is very little evidence in Finland as to what kind of texts the migrant students with low literacy skills are able to write and what kind of literacy practices they have in out-of-school contexts. In this article, we look at reported writing practices and Finnish as a second language writing performances of migrant students (n=25) with low writing proficiency in grades 7–9 of the comprehensive school and discuss the linguistic and textual landscape of comprehensive school from a second language learner's point of view. In other words, we are interested in the qualities of the texts at the low proficiency level and the writing practices taking place in different sociocultural contexts.

The importance and relevance of language in teaching various subjects has often been underestimated or overlooked although recently it has become more widely recognized that the language of the subject represents the knowledge structure of that subject and language competence is thus an integral and inseparable part of subject competence (e.g., CoE 2011; Vollmer, Holasová, Kolstø, & Lewis 2007; Vollmer 2009). The language of schooling differs from spoken everyday language by being more specific, explicit, abstract and formal (cf. Karvonen 1995; Vollmer 2009; Saario 2012). Thus, academic skills needed for learning and demonstrating learning in the school require cognitive engagement and maximum identity investment (Cummins 2006). Cummins's academic expertise framework (2001) incorporates and emphasizes critical literacy, active self-regulated learning, deep understanding, and building on students' prior knowledge in order for learning to be able to take place. According to Cummins (2001) the focus of teaching should be firstly on meaning beneath the surface level, secondly on language being understood, not only as a linguistic code but as a power which functions for the achievement of social goals, and thirdly, on instructions which should create opportunities for all students to produce knowledge, create multimodal texts and respond to diverse social realities.

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[32] Compulsory education in Finland starts in the year when a child has his/her seventh birthday, unless the child requires special needs education. The scope of the basic education syllabus is nine years, and nearly all children subject to compulsory education complete this by attending comprehensive school. Basic education is free of charge for pupils. Textbooks and other materials, tools, etc., are free of charge and pupils are offered a free daily meal. In addition, school health care and other welfare services are free to the pupils.

Developing academic expertise, however, constitutes a significant challenge for many L2 students as non-language subjects, such as mathematics and history, are considered to be non-linguistic subjects, although the content of these subjects is constructed through language and learning happens through linguistic mediation (e.g., Schleppegrell 2006; Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox 2006; Vollmer 2009), as seen in the following excerpt from the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NBE) describing the History objectives for grades 7–9 (NBE 2004, 222):

The pupils will learn to

- obtain and use historical information
- use a variety of sources, compare them, and form their own justified opinions based on those sources
- understand that historical information can be interpreted in different ways
- explain the purposes and effects of human activity
- assess future alternatives, using information on historical change as an aid.

Most of the objectives are cognitive processes that relate to functional language, such as obtaining and using information, explaining purposes and assessing alternatives, and they demand multiple literacy skills. Consequently, the teacher should be able to support L2 students in developing the academic language and literacy skills they need for their classes. The challenges of supporting L2 students in school seem to relate to the fact that the students are expected to use language presenting knowledge that is formal, technical, and distanced from everyday life (Schleppegrell 2006).

9.2 Second Language Writing and Writing in the School

Second language writing is not only a target of learning but also a medium of learning in the literacy-based school, thus it is an important part of the academic skills needed for learning and demonstrating learning. However, it is presumably mainly taught in the second language classroom, which may impact on the practices and contents of teaching L2 writing (Ferris 2010). If teaching of L2 writing focuses on formal grammar instruction instead of process-oriented or genre-oriented writing instruction, it does not necessarily support the learning of writing, and academic skills (e.g. Truscott 1996). In general, even L1 writing instruction has been criticized as non-authentic and mono-modal in terms of its functions and genres, and as teacher- and accuracy-centred in terms of its assessment and feedback practices (e.g., Kalantzis, Cope & Harvey 2003; Luukka et al. 2008). L2 writing teachers may tend to emphasize grammar instruction and error correction, instead of allowing students to discover their ideas through a recursive process of drafting, receiving feedback,

and redrafting (Truscott 1996; Tarnanen 2002; Ferris 2010), which could support the writing skills and thinking skills needed for studying.

As a whole, the writing processes of both L1 and L2 are complex and based on various subskills (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987; Purves 1990; Grabe & Kaplan 1996). L1 writing studies have approached writing using different frameworks, such as the textual, process, social and socio-cultural ones (e.g., Hayes & Flower 1980; Reid 1993; Barton 1994). However, in order to understand writing holistically and as a part of academic skills, all of these approaches are needed. Figure 1 illustrates how L2 writing is understood in this article.

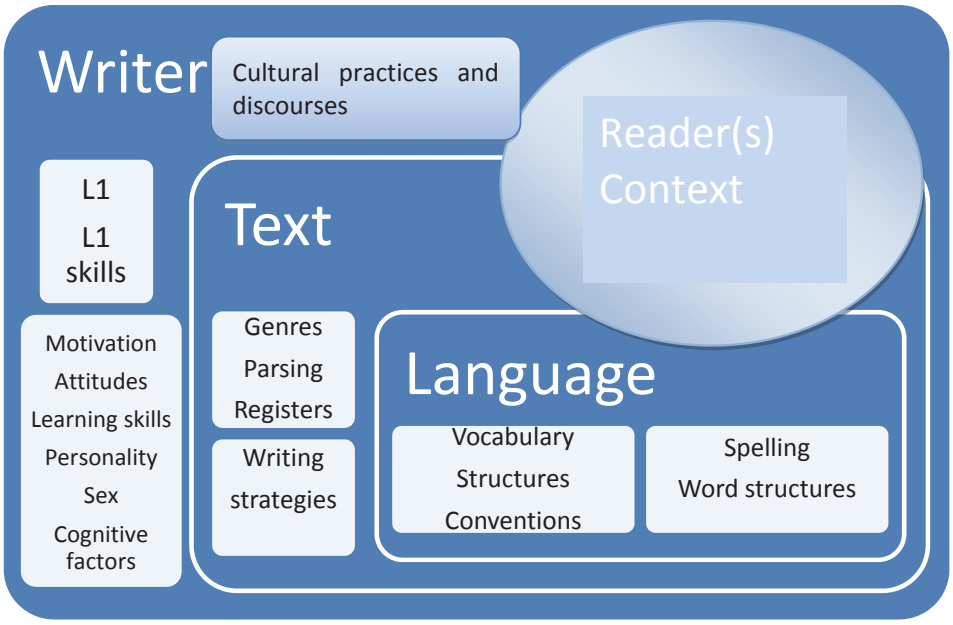


FIGURE 1 L2 writing as a multi-faceted phenomenon.

In Figure 1, writing is approached from the point of view of writer, text and language. Interactional and situational aspects of writing are included in Figure 1 although they are not central to this study but crucial when producing text. There are many studies examining the relationship between L1 and L2 writing and their findings have supported the idea of a positive relationship and evidence of transfer (e.g., Cumming 1989; Swain & Lapkin 1995). Writer-specific characteristics, also called individual factors, are categorized on the basis of previous studies such as age, motivation and cognitive factors (e.g. Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991). These characteristics may be important reasons why some L2 writers never achieve appropriate target language proficiency (Hyland 2001) and from a teaching point of view they can be considered pedagogically in teaching materials and feedback practices. Text-related factors might be overlooked in form-oriented teaching, likewise the basic idea of writing:

making meaning. Thus, the students should have opportunities for writing different genres and exercising different styles, using formal and informal registers and vocabularies for different purposes and readers. Finally, L2 writing can be considered as grammatical features of texts, in other words how the text is built up by using linguistic knowledge, vocabulary, syntactic patterns and spelling (cf. Hyland 2001). Grammar-focused teaching may stress the production of well formulated single sentences without paying attention to textual features, characteristics of the writer, context of writing or reader. In this article, we approach writing holistically and we understand it as a multi-faceted phenomenon combining both the cognitive and socio-cultural aspects and situated in terms of the context and purpose of writing (cf. Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič 2000).

9.3 Data and Methods

The study makes use of qualitative data (i.e. writing performances) and quantitative data (i.e. a questionnaire) in order to answer the following research questions: 1) How do learners with low writing proficiency self-assess their writing skill? 2) What kind of free-time writing practices do they report? 3) What are writers' linguistic resources in L2 at the A1 level? The data are part of two larger research projects, Cefling (2007–2009) and Topling (2010–2013), funded by the Academy of Finland. The Cefling project addresses fundamental questions of how second language proficiency develops from one level to the next, whereas the main objective of the Topling project is to compare cross-sectional and longitudinal sequences of the acquisition of writing skills in Finnish, English and Swedish as second languages in the Finnish educational system. In Cefling L2 Finnish and L2 English data were collected from young L2 learners in grades 7–9 by using a set of communicative L2 writing tasks (i.e., an email message to a friend, to a teacher, to an internet store, a story and an opinion). Each student completed from two to four tasks. The Cefling data consist of 527 writing performances completed by 230 students of Finnish as L2. Students' performances were rated by experienced and trained raters who used the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, CoE 2001) scale for writing, which is a compilation of several genre-specific CEFR writing scales (see Appendix 1). Those performances which were rated consistently by at least two out of three raters were included in the project data.

The qualitative data of this study is part of the Cefling data and consist of 100 texts produced by 25 students who each completed four writing tasks. These students were chosen since at least one of their performances was rated at the A1 level on the CEFR scale (see Appendix 1). All performances of seven of the 25 students were rated at the A1 level. Five of the 25 students' proficiency levels varied from A1 to B1.

The questionnaire, which also makes up part of more extensive project data, covers background information such as L1, languages spoken at home,

study years in the comprehensive school and self-assessment of Finnish language proficiency and literacy skills on the Finnish school scale of 4 (weakest) to 10 (strongest), as for example in seeking information, chatting, and also the frequency of writing of different texts during free-time. According to background information 19 of the participants were in grade 7, five in grade 8 and one in grade 9. The participants represented 12 L1s, as follows: Somali (7), Russian (5), Arabic (3), Vietnamese (2) and Albanian, Dari, Hindi, Kurdish, Polish, Thai, Hungarian and Estonian (1). As Figure 2 illustrates, their study years in the comprehensive school varied from under one year to nine years, thus some of the participants had arrived in Finland as teenagers and some of them had studied in a Finnish-speaking school from the beginning.

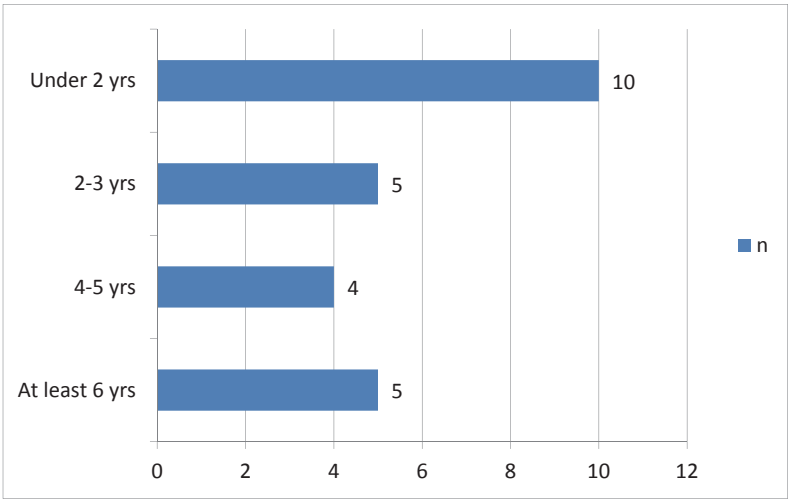


FIGURE 2 Study years of the participants in comprehensive school (n=24).

As the amount of data is limited the questionnaire data will be examined as frequencies. The aim of the qualitative analysis is to analyze the features of the performances in a holistic sense (cf. Heikkinen & Hiidenmaa 1999; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). The analysis can be characterized as linguistic text analysis, which is understood in this study as an analysis of linguistic form, function and meaning in the particular genre (see also the Figure 1). As mentioned above, the texts written by the participants represent different genres, such as informal and semi-formal messages and opinion. The categories of the analysis are based on Figure 1 according to the nature of the data. The textual features refer, for example, to register, task completion and conventions and linguistic aspects, for example, syntax, morphology and word structures (see Figure 1). The performances were analyzed using the ATLAS.ti program.

9.4 Results

9.4.1 Self-assessments of the Students

Participants in the study were asked to self-assess their language proficiency (i.e., speaking, writing, listening comprehension) on the Finnish school scale, which ranges from four to ten with grade four as the weakest and ten the strongest. Seven out of the 25 self-assessed their speaking skill as excellent (scores 9–10), 13 as good (scores 7–8), five as below average or weak (scores 4–6). Nine participants self-assessed their listening comprehension as excellent, ten as good, six as below average or weak. The participants self-assessed their writing skill most critically, apart from writing in social media, such as chatting, which were assessed as below average or weak by only two participants (see Figure 3). Most of the participants had experience of writing different genres except for four pupils with no experience of filling in forms or questionnaires, two of writing text in their free-time and one of searching for information. On the whole most participants self-assessed their writing skill across genres as excellent or good.

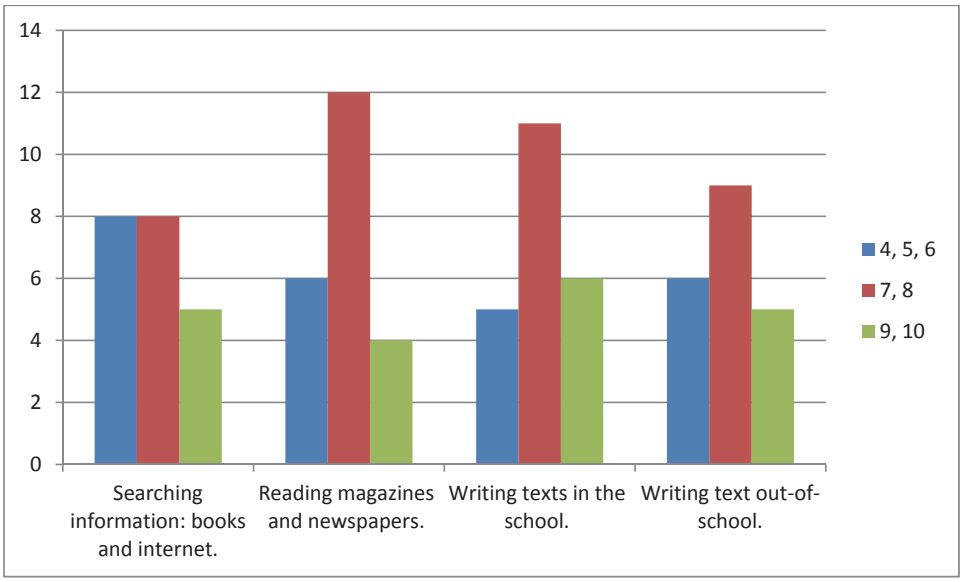


FIGURE 3 Self-assessment of literacy skills on the Finnish school assessment scale (4–10).

Figure 4 illustrates the self-reported writing practices of the participants in out-of-school contexts on a frequency scale (often – sometimes – seldom – never – no answer). One of the 25 participants did not answer this question. According to the self-report, the participants are most likely (often or sometimes) to write media texts (i.e., email messages, chat, text messages) even though they are not

written by two participants, and most unlikely to write diary entries or opinion and criticism, which can be considered school texts.

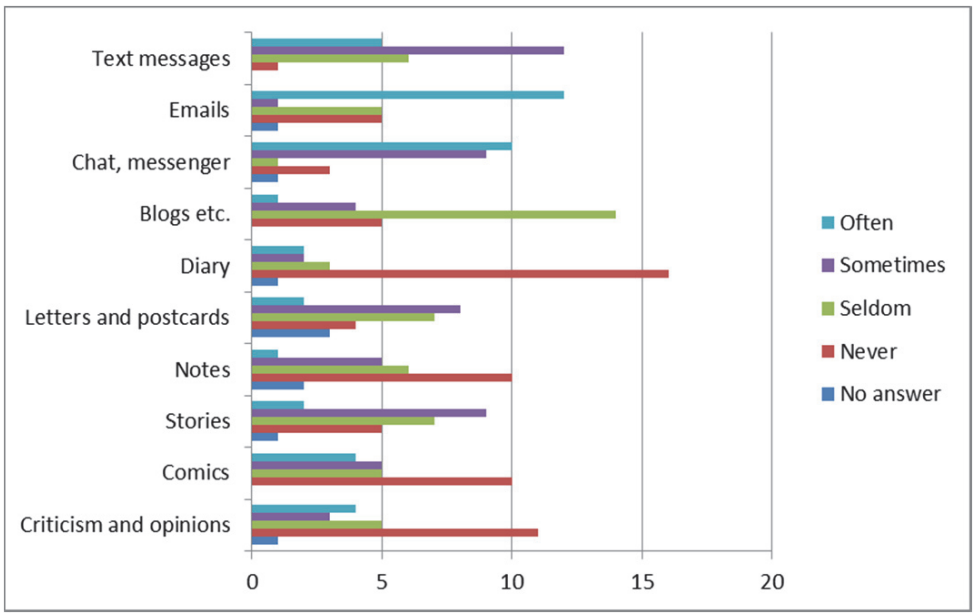


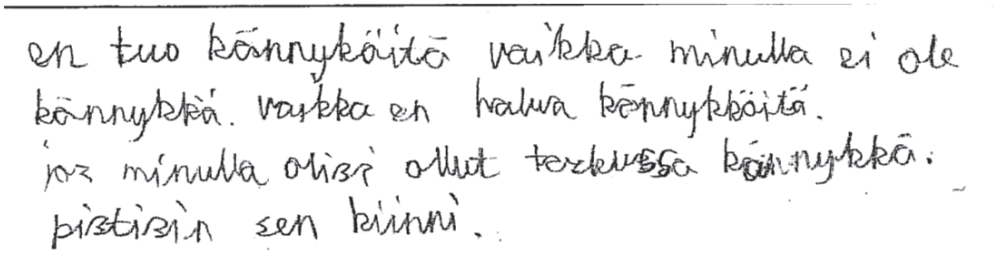
FIGURE 4 Writing in out-of-school contexts.

As Figure 4 shows, all genres are reported to be written often by at least one participant. Thus the participants seem to write also in out-of-school contexts despite their low writing proficiency. However, the participants may have understood the questions in the questionnaire in a different way or their commitment to answering the questions may have varied from one participant to another.

9.4.2 Outlining Writing Skills at the A1 Level

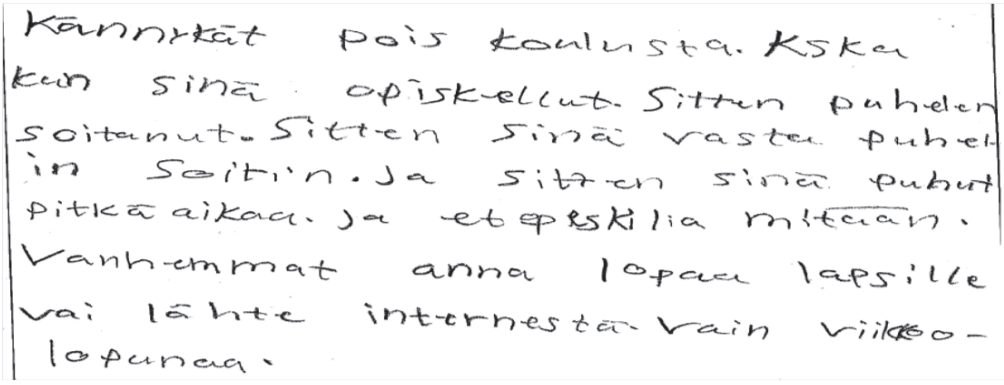
The findings of this study indicate that the writing profiles of A1-level writers vary a lot (see also Martin, Mustonen, Reiman, & Seilonen 2010). Due to space limitations, we shall describe this variation with two illustrative examples written by Pham and Khalil (examples 1 and 2 below). As examples 1 and 2 show, Pham seems to have a mastery of more complicated structures, e.g., using the conditional mood in the past perfect (*jos minulla olisi ollut 'if I had had' - - pistisin sen kiinni 'I would switch it off'*), whereas Khalil inflects words less and, overall, uses simpler structures. They both make efforts to tie the ideas together and make the writing coherent, Pham using the conjunction *vaikka 'although'* and Khalil *sitten 'then'*. As a whole, Pham's text consists of separate sentences and the overall idea remains vague while Khalil's text, despite its morphological deficiencies and limited connective means, is colloquial, quite

fluent and completely comprehensible. They are both in the 7th grade at school and, interestingly, Pham was born in Finland and has thus experienced his entire schooling in Finnish, whereas Khalil has studied Finnish for less than two years.



i do not bring mobiles although I don't have
a mobil. although I don't want mobils.
if i had had a mobile in the pocket.
i would switch it off.

EXAMPLE 1 Pham's opinion on the topic *Mobiles out of school!*[33]



Mobiles out of school. Becuse
when you did studied. Then phone
did rang. Then you answr the phone
ring. And then you speak
a long time. And you don't stuidy anything.
Parents gives children the permession
or leav the internet only in the weeksende.

EXAMPLE 2 Khalil's opinion on the topic *Mobiles out of the school!*

33 The English translations attempts to show the grammatical and orthographic errors present in the original Finnish.

Generally, it can be said that the A1-level writers have a sense of sentence and they produce whole sentences but the text may consist of separate sentences and often the task is only partly completed. The typical strengths and weaknesses of the A1-level performances are summarized in Table 1. It is notable that already at the A1 level writers use rather sophisticated and also rather abstract vocabulary, e.g., *hätätapaus 'emergency'*, *muistikortti 'memory card'* and collocations and other constructions, e.g., *rahat takaisin '[get] money back'*, *toimi huonosti 'malfunction'*, *kännykät äänettömänä 'mobiles on mute'*, *anna lopaa 'give permission'*, *tarvi korjata 'needs repairing'*. Mastery of the features of Finnish's rich system of verb and nominal inflection is naturally limited but is not solely restricted to the morphologically simplest forms, e.g., *osti 'bought'*, *kännyköitä 'mobiles'*, *pistisin 'I would put'*, *vanhempia, vanhemmat 'inflected forms of the noun parents'*.

It is noteworthy that despite the limited resources for text coherence a range of connective means is applied at the A1 level. The writers of our data use both subordinating and co-ordinating conjunctions, e.g., *että 'that'*, *koska 'because'*, *when 'kun'*, *jos 'if'*, *vaikka 'although'*; *mutta 'but'*, *ja 'and'*, *tai 'or'*, *sen takia 'therefore'*. The reader is guided with metatext through expressions like *no mitä 'well'*, *ja vielä muuta 'and so on'* and *sitten 'then'*. The writers are also sensitive to the situation as they vary their language use by applying the conditional mood, questions and compliments when appropriate, e.g., *anteeksi 'sorry'*, *olisin kiitollinen 'I would be grateful'*. Most writers seem to be aware of the conventions in beginning and ending a message, although often one or the other is missing.

In terms of deficiencies the texts are comprehensible on the sentence level but the subject matter is typically sparse and content-wise incomplete. There are weaknesses in the use of vocabulary and collocations and word inflection. The register can be commanding in situations where requesting would be generally more predictable, e.g., *anna 'give!'*, *haluan 'I want'*. Sometimes the text consists of separate sentences without any metatext. Spelling is unsystematic but the words are recognizable by the word form, e.g., *puuhelin* instead of *puhelin 'telephone'*, *opelaas* instead of *oppilas 'student'*, *tijädä* instead of *tiedä 'know'* and *äinä* instead of *aina 'always'*. However, only minor parts of the texts are difficult to understand, e.g., *han teit sale apua koe 'he do secratly help test'*, *puhelin olo kädessä 'telephone being in the hand'*.

TABLE 1 Features of A1-level performances

Strengths in writing on level A1: Linguistic and textual features	Deficiencies in writing on level A1: Linguistic and textual weaknesses
Metatext & coherence *no mitä 'well', ja vielä muuta 'and so on', sitten ' then'* **Conjunctions** both subordinating and co-ordinating: että *'that', koska 'because', when 'kun', jos 'if', vaikka 'although'; mutta 'but', ja 'and', tai 'or', sen takia 'therefore'*	**Lack of coherence** Limited means for coherence Separate sentences Sparse content Incomplete task
Vocabulary and collocations, constructions and language functions Idiomatic expressions E.g., *toimi huonosti 'malfunction'*, hätätapaus *'emergency', muistikortti 'memorycard', download documents, kännykät äänettömänä 'mobiles on mute'*	**Unidiomatic and incomprehensible use of vocabulary and collocations** A large variety of spelling mistakes
Declension and conjugation: Past tense forms of verbs, yes–no questions Large variety of nominal endings in singular and plural	**Problems in declension and conjugation** A large variety of mistakes in inflection at both morphological and syntactic levels
Register and style Interrogative sentences, conditional mood, compliments Conventions of messages	**Register and style** Requests formulated as orders in messages: *haluan 'I want', anna 'give!'* Lack of conventions in messages

It is noteworthy that descriptors of the A1 level in CEFR (CoE 2001) do not cover subordinate clauses and co-ordinate main clauses, which participants in our study use fairly frequently. Consequently, our data suggest that crucial factors in defining A1 skills range from deficiencies in textual coherence and contents to unintelligibility of the text and incomplete task. Major weaknesses in those skills determine the grade as A1, despite the characteristics of a higher level. Thus, from the very beginning the learner language contains in parallel both idiomatic and complex constructions and instability in basic structures (see also Reiman & Mustonen 2010). Our findings are in line with those reported by Martin et al. (2010) who through several sub-studies have discovered that many, even complex structures (e.g., subordination and transitive and passive constructions in Finnish) emerge earlier than is often thought to be the case and they are present already at level A1. Accuracy and flexibility in the use of structures develops, naturally, gradually step by step.

9.5 Conclusions

Finnish school culture tends to be very academic and text-centered, and most of the school texts are cognitively and linguistically demanding. It is evident that school tasks pose a considerable challenge for writers at the A1 level and need for guidance and support is obvious. The role of language skills is not fully recognized in school culture in general, and more specifically in various subjects. However, even native speakers of Finnish face linguistic difficulties in learning, not least because of academic skills needed for learning (cf. Cummins 2001). Actually, L2 learners are doing the school a favor since they force teachers, material writers and curriculum designers to become aware of the written nature of school culture and the linguistic challenges embedded in subject learning and, optimally, lead them to develop pedagogical culture and re-evaluate customary practices and core contents (cf. Vollmer et al. 2007; Vollmer 2009; Saario 2012). This is essential in developing literacies and effective learning and teaching for all learners.

Multilingual and multicultural learner groups demand more language sensitivity from the school culture. Language sensitivity poses a dual challenge: firstly, how to support those with limited skills in the language of schooling and secondly, how to promote plurilingualism and enhance learners' multilayered language repertoires. Overall, language skills should be more systematically identified and manifested across the curriculum in schools. At present, writing seems to be considered as an isolated technical skill or even as a command of target language structures and vocabulary rather than as a resource for learning and developing students' thinking (cf. Truscott 1996; Hyland 2001; Luukka et al. 2008; Ferris 2010). Lack of familiarity with the school genre and untrained learning skills are revealed as problems in writing and in ways of proving one's knowledge and skills (see e.g., Cummins 2001; Saario 2009; Rapatti 2009; Aalto & Tukia 2009). Language and contents cannot be meaningfully learnt in separation, but collaboration between school subjects and the teachers involved is essential, particularly for students with weak writing proficiency (see also Vollmer et al. 2007). The development of the core curriculum for basic education seems to follow similar tendencies in many European countries and also globally (see e.g. Hufeisen 2011). The raising of language awareness among all teachers and across disciplines is a central thread in developing pedagogical culture and teaching practices in a way that empowers students to fulfil their potential in school. In terms of writing skills this challenges our notion of text: instead of focusing on separate texts as products and end-results produced by individual students, we are encouraged to support the process of writing as a situated and social practice which binds students together and promotes the collaborative nature of knowledge construction.

On the basis of the self-evaluations, the participants in this study have confidence in their writing skills, as most of them considered themselves good

writers of school texts. They also write *often* or *sometimes* in their free-time. The results of the questionnaire are to some extent debatable as it is not self-evident that students have fully understood the questions and taken them seriously. Nevertheless, the results emphasize the notion of how important it is to expand the research focus from text analysis to writer-specific characteristics in order to take into account the hidden power of e.g., attitudes and self-confidence in learning, as well as the socio-cultural context of writing and the situated nature of it (Barton et al. 2000). Thus, these results raise the question of whether out-of-school writing could be used as a resource for school writing (cf. Kalantzis et al. 2003; Luukka et al. 2008). Students' expertise in writing might develop in a more meaningful way if the practices studied at school prepared them more directly for acting in out-of-school settings.

Support for learning is not first and foremost a question of resources but rather a question of how to use the resources flexibly and get the best out of them. Investment in the core processes of learning provides utility value throughout life as they socialize learners into the skills applicable outside school and enable them to use the skills developed in informal environments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

CEFLING rating scale (based on the CEFR levels)

	OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION	WRITTEN INTERACTION	CORRESPONDENCE & NOTES, MESSAGES, FORMS	CREATIVE WRITING & THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT
A1	Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.	Can ask for or pass on personal details in written form.	Can write a short simple postcard. Can write numbers and dates, own name, nationality, address, age, date of birth or arrival in the country, etc. such as on a hotel registration form.	Can write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live and what they do.
A2	Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.	Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need.	Can write very simple personal letters expressing thanks and apology. Can take a short, simple message provided he/she can ask for repetition and reformulation. Can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need.	Can write about everyday aspects of his/her environment, e.g. people, places, a job or study experience in linked sentences. Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences. Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences about their family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. Can write short, simple imaginary biographies and simple poems about people. Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points.
B1	Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.	Can convey information and ideas on abstract as well as concrete topics, check information and ask about or explain problems with reasonable precision. Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point he/she feels to be important.	Can write personal letters giving news and expressing thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music, films. Can write personal letters describing experiences, feelings and events in some detail. Can write notes conveying simple information of immediate relevance to friends, service people, teachers and others who feature in his/her everyday life, getting across comprehensibly the points he/she feels are important. Can take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems.	Can write straightforward, detailed descriptions on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest. Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text. Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined. Can narrate a story. Can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points.