Section 2: Strategies for the Classroom

Chapter 6 Outline

Introduction: Why are Teaching Strategies Necessary?

The Strategies

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Chapter

6

Strategies for Teaching LIFE

Objectives

To describe ten guiding strategies for working with Learners with Interrupted Formal Education

To demonstrate how these strategies apply to a learner in the classroom

Introduction: Why are Teaching Strategies Necessary?

Learners with Interrupted Formal Education (LIFE) have usually had limited or no access to formal education, but despite this, they will have acquired certain skills and strategies related to their individual life experiences. It is important to value and respect this previous learning and recognize the significance of these skills and strategies in their new countries. Most LIFE have had an enormous range of experiences in their lives, often including trauma or witnessing trauma, and all have managed to negotiate survival and to make their way to a new country. What they lack in formal education, they will often compensate for in courage, determination, and experience.

LIFE can face many challenges once they begin their lives in their new countries, as factors such as financial hardship and family responsibilities often impact their integration into society. These learners need the classroom to serve as a bridge between their past experiences and their lives in their new country. They must be supported in their quest to learn the language, literacy, and life skills necessary to achieve their goals. Consequently, LIFE need their instructor to be not only an instructor but a skilled guide, someone who can help them overcome the challenges related to living, working, and studying in a new country.

LIFE have diverse needs in the classroom, going beyond the ability to read and write, which can be challenging – and highly rewarding – for instructors. In this respect, listed below are ten guiding strategies for working with ESL literacy learners. The strategies reflect the diversity of this group and highlight how to ensure that learners are provided with an environment which will encourage them to succeed.

In this chapter, meet Adam, a learner from Somalia in a Phase II class. His struggles and successes with ESL literacy illustrate the strategies.

The Strategies

View Learners Holistically: Respect their past life experiences and their roles as adults. Understand the challenges learners face in adapting to life in a new country. Make the classroom a positive place where learners feel comfortable and confident. Viewing learners holistically also means understanding that they have lives outside of the classroom and may have barriers to learning. Create a program and a classroom that supports learners. For more information on supporting learners, see Chapter Five.

Adam is a twenty-eight year old refugee from Somalia with a wife and three children who has recently moved to Calgary. He had six years of previous formal education. Before coming to Canada, Adam lived in a refugee camp where he was trained to fill in forms because of his neat hand-writing. When he arrived in Canada, he was disheartened to realize that his limited literacy skills also limited his job opportunities and ability to provide for his family. At first, he was ashamed to ask for help. Then his instructor helped him access various immigrant-serving organizations and fill out forms for low-cost transit passes and subsidized healthcare. He is beginning to understand that he can learn how to do things independently by first asking for help. He now takes pride in helping his classmates to fill in their own forms.

View Learning as a Social Activity: Most LIFE are used to collaborative work and have an enormous amount that they can teach each other. Encourage partner and group work. Invite local community groups to visit the class and send learners into the community when possible. Foster a sense of belonging within the classroom and to the wider community. For more information on learning as a social activity, see Chapters Eight and Twelve.

Adam spent his childhood in his family's large rural compound where everyone made a contribution. Consequently, he works best in a group. He likes to work on tasks in class with Aisha, who has lived in Canada for ten years and knows a lot about getting things done but does not read or write as well as Adam. Through Aisha and volunteers who have come to help in the classroom, Adam is learning about the variety of resources that exist in the community. A class volunteer told him about available part-time jobs, and he has found out that his local community group has a program to help members write resumes. Now Adam has a part-time job where he can practice his English and support his family. He enjoys trying new things with his classmates, like ice skating. When he finds something he likes, he shares it with his family on the weekend, and he recently took his children to the ice rink for the first time. This makes him feel like a Canadian.

Teach Thematically: Create theme units that present related vocabulary, language structures, and concepts. Theme units motivate learners and give instructors a chance to recycle outcomes. Ensure that the themes are practical and interesting to the learners and incorporate topics and materials that relate to their needs and goals. Create simple, accessible materials, with basic formatting, a large font, and lots of white space. For more information on theme teaching, see Chapter Ten. For more on materials, see Chapter Nine.

A month ago, Adam's daughter brought home a note from school that he couldn't understand. His instructor helped him read the note, which told him that the school thought his daughter needed glasses. Adam was worried about the expense, but his instructor helped him read about a government subsidy program to pay for children's eye checkups and glasses and helped him fill out the relevant application forms. Adam's daughter got her glasses and is now doing better in school. This week, Adam's class is working on a health unit, and the instructor asked Adam to explain how he got glasses for his daughter. The school note and application forms for the glasses were too difficult for the class to read on their own, so the instructor made simpler versions to allow for class practice. Adam's instructor usually makes the materials for the class, which means they work with materials that are relevant to daily life, while suitably adjusted to the class reading level.

Create a Print-Rich Environment: Use charts, posters, pictures, etc. on the classroom walls to help learners absorb written language into their visual memory. Give learners practice arranging language patterns in a kinetic and sensory manner. A wall pocket chart is a good way to do this. Keep books of an appropriate level and picture dictionaries (or beginner dictionaries for higher levels) readily accessible in the classroom. For more information on a print-rich environment, see Chapter Eight and Section Three.

Adam has difficulty writing down what he wants to say. The right words don't seem to end up on his paper in the right order. It helps Adam when his instructor gives him scrambled sentences on flashcards so he can experiment with word order, reading the sentences out loud, changing the flashcards, reading the sentences again, and adjusting the word order until the sentences sound right. He likes to work on this with a partner, and if they both agree it sounds right, it usually is. Adam says seeing new vocabulary words and class Language Experience Stories on the classroom walls helps him to learn new words and phrases.

Create a Classroom Routine: Establish a regular daily routine. This helps learners to understand the importance of punctuality in western society and gives them a feeling of comfort and stability in the classroom. Maximize the effectiveness of the routine by varying and alternating activities according to learners' interest level and concentration span. Regularly

doing activities together helps learners appreciate their importance, such as filing papers in the right section of their binders. For more information on appropriate classroom routines for each Phase, see Section Three.

At first Adam was unsettled by the importance Canadians placed on time. He thought it was important to get things done for his family and friends but not to do things on a set schedule. Canadians seemed to put time ahead of people. Through his class he is starting to understand that Canadian culture is different from his own and that the people around him expect things to happen at a set time. While he still believes in putting people ahead of time, he has learned that there are some advantages to the western approach. Having a schedule means he knows when there will be homework correction and spelling quizzes, so he is always ready. He doesn't lose papers anymore, because he makes time to file things away in his binder after every lesson. Following the schedule of the class helps him feel organized and ready.

Start with Oral Learning: LIFE are nearly always more proficient at speaking than at reading and writing English. Always begin with the oral: teach new vocabulary and concepts orally before learners encounter them in print. Help learners recognize the words they already use. Allow learners to write the sentences they speak. Make learners aware of the patterns in language and the benefits of understanding those patterns. For more information on oral learning, see Chapter Eight.

Adam thinks English is easy to speak but really hard to read and write. He recognizes a lot of English words because he has seen them so often, but he finds it hard to figure out which English sound goes with which letter. When he tries to write down a sentence, he frequently leaves out a word that his instructor says is important. He is starting to read aloud what he has written to hear if it sounds okay, and he finds that is the best way to fix his mistakes. It is also easier to write about something after talking about it. He can't imagine how some learners in other classes can read and write well even though their spoken English isn't nearly as good as his.

Give Plenty of Time for Practicing Writing: Learning to write is like learning to swim; it requires a lot of actual practice. Provide learners with time in class for writing. Depending on the level, learners begin with copying, then move on to adding a few words to complete a template. They gradually advance until they can compose more independently. Teach learners to follow a writing process; let learners revise, edit, and make good copies of their work. For more information on teaching writing, see Chapter Eight.

Adam wants to be able to write letters to his landlord and his daughter's instructor, but he can't put his ideas on paper. His instructor has been giving him samples of letters where he can put in words and phrases to talk about his own situation. Gradually, he has been able to add in more and more of his own words. His instructor gives him a lot of help in class as he writes, and he sees that he is gradually becoming a better writer. If he has to send a letter to his daughter's teacher, he can copy from one of his model letters. Both Adam and his daughter are proud of these letters.

Respect Learners' Knowledge while Providing Them with New Understanding: Respect learners, their different cultures, and their understanding of the world. At the same time, expose learners to alternative ways of looking at things. Demonstrate the advantages of understanding concepts and strategies in keeping with living in a literate, technological society, but continue to value the skills and understanding that learners bring with them from their own cultures. Help learners develop the cognitive skills they will need to effectively deal with print. For more information on cultural understanding and cognitive development, see Chapters One and Twelve.

Adam never thought it was important to consider why something happened, to predict what was going to happen next, or to explain why he believed something. He wonders if worrying about these things changes anything, but Canadians seem to find the answers to these questions important. Adam isn't ready to talk about cause and effect yet, and he can't always put his reasons for doing things into words. It is much easier to explain things to his instructor because she gives him a lot of time to talk about a problem and she never gets annoyed. His instructor shows him ways to learn and to organize his ideas, and she understands that this is all new for him. He is beginning to see how similar things can be part of a group, and he is starting to classify things under generic terms. He is starting to recount events in chronological order. He looks for patterns in spelling words and sentences and can sometimes figure things out through a process of elimination. He reads over what he has written and checks off words in a word bank as he uses them. He thinks about what he is good at and what he must work on. He is beginning to learn new ways of learning.

Establish Outcomes: Outcomes provide motivation to learners and accountability to instructors and programs. Ensure that what is taught in class relates to a useful, relevant learning outcome. Accept that learners will progress at different rates. Celebrate all success. For more information on outcomes, see Chapter Three and Section Three.

Adam doesn't understand forms and notices as well as Aisha, but they both know it is important to learn how to read and use them. Aisha seems to understand what is on a paper even though she can't read all the words as well as Adam. Aisha just knows what is going on. Adam can write sentences a lot better than Aisha even though he cannot speak as well as she does. Adam and Aisha are very different in class, but the instructor says they are both good learners. Some of the learners in the class never had Adam's chance to go to school and they haven't lived in Canada as long as Aisha, so things are much harder for them. The instructor never gets annoyed when learners in the class can't do something, and she is always happy when someone does a good job. They can all concentrate on trying new things without worrying about failing.

Incorporate Technology: Introduce learners to different forms of technology as soon as possible. Encourage them to use technology and teach them that technology plays a large role in Canadian society. Remember that technology means more than just computers; for many learners, all kinds of electronic machines can provide a challenge, and, when mastered, be very helpful in their lives, including ATMs, ticket dispensers for public transit, microwave ovens, and so on. For more information on technology in the classroom, see Chapter Twelve.

Adam learns a lot from the programs he uses on the computer. He can match the spelling and sounds of words to pictures. He can experiment with the order of letters in words or words in sentences and get immediate feedback. He can fill in some information and the computer will write a story about him. It's fun to do the math and spelling games. He finds he remembers things better if he has seen them on the computer screen. He is also becoming familiar with the computer keyboard, and he is starting to write his own sentences. He knows he will have to use computers in the future, and he is happy that he is starting to learn something about them.

Conclusions

LIFE are not the same as mainstream ESL learners; they bring different strengths with them to the classroom, they have different needs, and they do not always learn in the same way. This can bring challenges to ESL literacy instructors, but also great joy, and if we are flexible and intentional in our approaches to our learners, we can create effective and cheerful classrooms. The strategies outlined in this chapter provide a framework for approaching ESL literacy and teaching LIFE; the coming chapters will discuss in more detail the nuts and bolts of teaching ESL literacy, including reading and writing, learning strategies, materials, themes, and assessment.

Although LIFE are quite different from mainstream learners, have different needs, and learn at a different pace, they achieve success in our classrooms and reach their goals for themselves. Every success along this path should be recognized and celebrated, both by the instructor and by the learners.

Chapter 7 Outline

Introduction: Theories of Teaching ESL Literacy

The Participatory Approach

The Whole Language Approach

The Language Experience Approach

The Competency or Performance Based Approach

The Functional Approach

The Communicative Approach

The Ethnographic Approach

The Task-Based Approach

The Project-Based Approach

The Natural Approach

Total Physical Response

Conclusions

Chapter

7

Theories of ESL Literacy Instruction

Objectives

To describe a range of theories used in ESL literacy instruction

To recognize that a combination of these theories can be used in an ESL literacy classroom

Introduction: Theories of Teaching ESL Literacy

There are a number of theories about ESL acquisition and ESL literacy acquisition, focusing on different ideas of how people best learn literacy in a second language. The role of theory in the classroom often depends on the background and interests of the instructor, and most instructors, regardless of their interests, tend to collect and use pieces of several theories in their instruction. This chapter is meant to provide an introduction to a range of theories in ESL and ESL literacy acquisition. While some of these theories are widely accepted today, not every theory listed here will resonate with every instructor. However, instructors will be able to recognize theories as they are discussed in other texts and in other places in the handbook and can choose which theories are most useful to them and their learners.

The Participatory Approach

Paolo Friere (1972) viewed teaching literacy as empowering the oppressed through education. He believed that education and knowledge only have value when they enable people to free themselves from the conditions that society forces upon them. This highly learner-centred approach seeks to build literacy through discussion of the learners' real-life issues and concerns. Initially, "generative words" are chosen to help learners begin to discuss these issues and concerns as well as begin reading (decoding) and writing (encoding). Learners and instructors can then sit face to face and engage in meaningful discussion. This approach stresses instructor and learner as collaborators. Learners and instructor use objects, pictures, and written texts to help them describe and examine relationships between the different aspects of the issue they are discussing. As they clearly articulate the problem, they are able to propose solutions. The instructor is seen as the facilitator of language learning and is an equal participant in the class, learning along with the learners. Learners become equipped to transform themselves and the society around them (Peyton & Crandall, 1995; Huerta-Macias, 1993).

The Whole Language Approach

Whole Language proponents believe that language should be learned from top to bottom. That is, language must be first considered in its whole and complete form before it is consistently broken down into smaller, decontextualized pieces. Language is a social process to be used for the purpose of interaction. Learners, whether children or adults, bring a tremendous amount of background knowledge to the classroom. Instructors must respect and value each learner's personal expertise and use it as a platform for building language skills. Like the Participatory Approach, Whole Language centres on the needs of the learner and considers the learner to be the driving force in the development of his or her language skills. The learner is encouraged to take risks, both orally and in writing. Function (the ability to communicate) comes first and form (standardized spelling, grammatical endings, etc.) follows. The Whole Language Approach emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach to learning. Both published and learner-produced texts are useful. Instruction focuses more on strategies for reading and writing, while issues such as spelling and grammar are taught in response to learner questions (Peyton & Crandall, 1995; Huerta-Macias, 1993).

The Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) is a teaching technique or strategy which is consistent with the Participatory and Whole Language Approaches. Language Experience capitalizes on the learner's background knowledge and allows instructors to provide target experiences designed to enrich language learning. Learners' experiences are dictated and then written down, either by the instructor or by another language learner. This can be done either as a whole group, in small groups, or one-on-one. The transcribed text is then used as reading material. There is some debate as to the instructor's involvement in correcting the text; some instructors argue that true language experience stories are entirely in the learners' own words, regardless of mistakes in grammar or structure, while other instructors prefer to help shape the text. Whichever approach is taken, the substance of the text comes entirely from the learners (Peyton & Crandall, 1995; Taylor, 1992).

The instructor can take learning deeper by developing vocabulary lists, using the text to produce cloze exercises, or focusing on other more mechanical aspects of writing. Many Learners with Interrupted Formal Education have strong oral language skills and a relatively weaker ability to translate what they know into a written text. This technique capitalizes on a learner's ability to verbalize his or her experiences and provides a way for reading and writing to grow naturally. The LEA also helps to solve a common problem in literacy teaching: finding age-appropriate reading material for low literacy adult ESL learners. LEA is a very common approach, especially at the lower levels of ESL literacy, because it allows instructors access to texts that are entirely based on the vocabulary of the learners, and it allows learners a chance to author and own their own texts.

The Competency- or Performance-Based Approach

This approach begins with the instructor asking the question, "What do the learners need to learn?" What follows is a list of "competencies" or task-based instructional outcomes, such as *The learner can read and follow signs in the environment.* Learner evaluation is based on whether or not the learner can perform the tasks on the list. The intent of this approach is learner-centerd in that each group of learners is assessed and instruction is based on their needs. (Peyton & Crandall, 1995) A good example of this approach is the CLB Literacy Document, which indicates what a learner must be able to do to be considered competent at a given Phase. For more information on the CLB Literacy Document, please see the Introduction, Chapter Three, and Section Three.

The Functional Approach

Life and workplace skills are at the heart of this approach to teaching. A needs analysis allows the instructor to assess which functional skills the learners need to learn. Learner outcomes are usually written as competencies and are sequenced according to priority. This approach focuses on skills the learners need in order to function at home or at work. Communicative and behavioural skills are combined with linguistic objectives. This approach tends to neglect the development of creativity in language and avoids social issues (Mora, 2008).

The Communicative Approach

Abstract concepts such as when, where, how far, and how much as well as culturally appropriate communication are the core of the Communicative Approach. Functional language such as apologizing, complaining, contradicting, and offering allows learners to communicate well with native English speakers. This approach will suit learners who want to become bi-cultural and who see learning English as a way of "fitting in" with the society around them. Like the Functional Approach, this teaching method tends to downplay the expressive and creative aspects of language (Mora, 2008).

The Ethnographic Approach

Combining aspects of the Communicative and Participatory Approaches, the Ethnographic Approach considers the socio-cultural aspects of language as well as linguistic and cultural awareness to be the focus of language teaching. This approach helps learners to become aware of how people communicate in their own lives and the community in which they live. Instructors use ethnographic strategies to examine the struggles their learners face. Learners become observers of language as it occurs naturally around them: on the bus, in the doctor's office, and in the supermarket. As learners identify what they need to learn, they become invested in language learning (Watson-Gegeo, 1998). This approach is more effective with higher-level literacy learners who have the cognitive and oral language skills needed to analyze the language they hear around them.

The Task-Based Approach

Task-based teaching primarily involves the importance of pair and group work as opposed to instructor-fronted instruction. The instructor provides learners with tasks that are intended to foster genuine and meaningful communication. These tasks are interactive and can concern topics that are new or unfamiliar to the learners. Most effective are topics that involve a problem or ethical dilemma of some kind. Participants must exchange information and opinions with each other and the task must have a specific outcome – such as making a decision by reaching a consensus. Information gap exercises where all learners have information to share with their group or partner are also effective as they require all participants to take roughly equal parts in

completing the task. Research indicates that learners who are working through these kinds of tasks speak in longer sentences and work harder to understand what others are saying (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003).

The Project-Based Approach

In this approach, learners are involved in lengthy projects instead of short-term tasks. Like the Task-Based Approach, projects are heavily dependent on pair and small group work and involve the pair or group solving a problem or producing a product. The learners must communicate clearly and cooperate to plan and achieve their goals. Also, like the Task-Based Approach, projects require learners to use both language and cognitive skills to deal with real problems. This gives language learning a real context and allows learners to practice skills they will need in their home and work lives (Moss & Van Cuzer, 1998; Gaer, 1998; Wrigley, 1998). For more information on Project-Based learning, please see Chapter Ten.

The Natural Approach

When learners enter the ESL literacy classroom with little or no English, the Natural Approach seeks to help them develop English in much the same way as they developed in their first language. This approach is meaning-based and allows learners to receive extended language input (listening and later reading) before requiring language output (speaking and later writing). Learners begin with single words and then move on to two and three word combinations. Finally, they are able to use whole sentences. The Natural Approach requires a safe and supportive classroom environment where learners are encouraged and their errors are not corrected (Illinois Resource Center, 2005).

Total Physical Response

Like the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response is a good choice for teaching beginning LIFE. TPR, as it is known, focuses on developing oral language through physical response to commands. This not only allows for extended exposure to English before the learners begin to speak but also helps learners to remember what they have learned through muscle memory. Children learn their first language through interaction with their family members. These interactions are both physical and verbal. When children begin to speak, they are rewarded by the positive response of the family members (Asher, 1995). In the ESL classroom, this approach relies heavily on language in the imperative case: “Sit down. Stand up. Close the door.” While this method cannot fill an entire language program, it can provide variety to a lesson and it

requires the full engagement of the learner. It also gets the learners moving around, often a welcome break to pen and paper work. TPR is a very common technique at lower levels, when learners are still developing concrete vocabulary. It is less effective at higher levels, as it is very difficult to use TPR to acquire abstract vocabulary.

Conclusions

This chapter outlines a number of different theories and methodological approaches to teaching ESL literacy. Certain methodologies will be more effectively used in certain situations with certain learner demographics. Many instructors use a mixture of approaches in their classrooms, piecing together an amalgam of techniques and emphases that bring out the best in them and their learners.

Chapter 8 Outline

Introduction: The Five Core Strands of ESL Literacy

Developing Oral Fluency, Vocabulary, and Background Concepts

Foundational Literacy Instruction

Reading Instruction

Writing Instruction

Strategy Instruction

Conclusions

Chapter

8

Methods and Techniques in ESL Literacy Instruction

Objectives

To describe teaching methodology in the core strands in ESL literacy: oral fluency, foundational literacy, reading, writing, and strategies

To recognize the needs of LIFE in the classroom

To share tips, tricks, and teaching strategies for an effective ESL literacy classroom

Introduction: The Five Core Strands of ESL Literacy

This chapter seeks to answer the question of how to teach Learners with Interrupted Formal Education and where to begin. In any ESL literacy classroom, no matter what the purpose of the program is, there are five core strands to consider: oral fluency, foundational literacy instruction, reading instruction, writing instruction, and strategy instruction. There are a variety of ways of approaching the teaching of these strands in an ESL literacy class; in this chapter we examine some of these methods and look into promising practices and helpful tips and techniques in deciding what needs to be taught, in what order, and how to do it. We also recognize that there are other ways to approach teaching; we do not examine every possible technique here, but absence from the handbook should not necessarily mean that a technique is ineffective or unsuitable. This chapter examines:

- developing oral fluency, vocabulary, and background concepts
- foundational literacy instruction
- reading instruction
- writing instruction
- strategy instruction

Developing Oral Fluency, Vocabulary, and Background Concepts

LIFE are learning to read rather than reading to learn. Although most educators see their lack of ability to read as the most important educational issue, it is really only a part of the problem. LIFE are principally oral learners; the majority of learning in their lives to this point has been done through speaking, listening, and watching. This means that LIFE are almost inevitably better at speaking and listening than reading and writing English. Effective ESL literacy instruction takes this preference for oral learning into consideration; in a good ESL literacy classroom, all new vocabulary and concepts are taught orally before they are taught in a written form.

The development of oral language is therefore crucial to LIFE, not only for their continued integration into and comfort in their new communities, but also because it provides the basis for the development of literacy. The development of oral language by necessity includes continued development of vocabulary. Often it is not enough to teach vocabulary, however, without also teaching a number of background concepts to give the vocabulary context and meaning, as well as categorization and spatial relationships so that LIFE can organize their learning. So, in addition to developing oral language, LIFE need to be taught continued vocabulary development, background concepts, categorization, and spatial relationships, in additon to simple facts and content. All of this learning is equally important as, and a crucial step in, developing reading and writing.

Why Begin with Oral Language?

LIFE come to class lacking many basic skills in reading and writing. It seems natural and productive to spend most of the time focusing on these areas rather than on their listening and speaking skills, which are often relatively high. However, developing their oral skills actually enhances their written skills. Since these adults are learning to read as opposed to reading to learn, it is crucial to first teach them vocabulary and concepts orally before moving to print. This means teaching through their strength, oral communication, and then moving to their weaker skill, written communication. It is also important because many of the approaches used in teaching reading and writing rely on the learners reading their own words. Oral competency must be developed before learners can transition into reading and writing. Before teaching literacy-related activities such as reading texts, completing cloze exercises, or organizing sentence strips, the instructor begins with an oral discussion. Learners can talk while the instructor writes down what they say (using the Language Experience Approach). The language they speak becomes the text which they will later read. This technique provides a way in, or a bridge over the gap between oral and written language. Discussing the topic and activating learners' prior knowledge also helps reading comprehension. The oral work is used as a scaffold for the literacy component.

By reinforcing learning with listening and speaking as well as reading and writing, instructors also accommodate different learning styles. Many LIFE are audio or kinesthetic learners and learn best when listening or moving. By giving them plenty of practice in oral work in the classroom, their oral fluency improves and their newly learned vocabulary can be recycled and reinforced.

Developing a Rich Vocabulary

In order to be able to communicate both in speaking and in writing, learners need to develop a rich vocabulary. Ideally, this vocabulary is generated from the learners' needs so that it is

personally relevant. Before new words are taught in writing, they should be taught orally, perhaps related to pictures or other words the learners know. Synonyms for the words can be used to aid in memory and understanding (big, large, huge, enormous, gigantic, vast). Sometimes the new vocabulary item can be acted out, for instance, with the instructor slumping down in a chair to show the new word "relax". ESL literacy instructors should always be ready to play a bit of the clown in the classroom, demonstrating the meaning of words when an oral explanation won't work. If you can make your learners laugh, it's even better, catching their attention and interest and lowering their stress levels.

For Foundation Phase and Phase I learners, Total Physical Response (TPR) can be a useful tool for learning concrete vocabulary. In TPR, learners are given oral commands which they must physically follow, such as "touch your toes" or "stand up." The physical response to the language helps learners activate muscle memory. Because most LIFE are oral learners, clapping and singing can also be used as a bridge to more difficult tasks. For instance, clapping out syllables helps the learner first hear, then say, the new word. Singing can be used to introduce and reinforce new vocabulary, improve fluency, and learn set phrases. It is also a low-stress learning activity for many learners.

After many instances of hearing and using a new word in speaking, learners then encounter the word in print where they learn to read it and finally to copy or spell it, depending on the level. New vocabulary will need to be heard and said in many different contexts before being fully acquired and becoming part of the learners' repertoires. Thus, the instructor must be diligent at recycling the word into future lessons and encouraging the learners to use the word orally and, eventually, in their reading and writing. This vocabulary enrichment will aid the learners enormously in their reading comprehension.

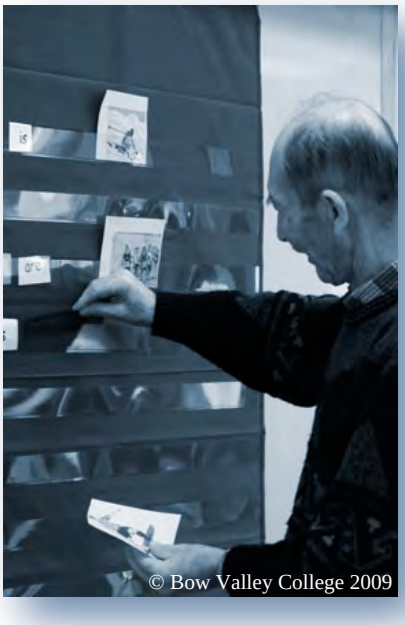
Developing Background Concepts

ESL literacy instructors teach not only vocabulary and fluency, but also the background concepts that give this vocabulary context and meaning. Because of their limited formal education, many LIFE lack various concepts that are generally taught in school. It is usually in formal schooling that we learn, for instance, about forming hypotheses or analyzing grammar into discrete units of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. It is also generally in school that we develop an understanding of science, geography, and the universe. Many cultures teach history orally, but this is often a very localized history, so LIFE may also lack an understanding of the wider world. Since LIFE may not have encountered many of these concepts before, they will need to be specifically taught them. Without fully understanding meaning, vocabulary acquisition becomes a less than useful exercise in rote memorization.

In higher-level literacy classes, LIFE need to be able to use the abstract concepts they encounter, but without identifying and understanding these concepts, the learners simply end up decoding without any understanding (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). In order to teach these concepts, the instructor must first identify what the concept is, then break it into sequences which slowly progress from concrete examples to more and more complex and abstract concepts, all the while recycling the vocabulary and the literacy skills (Muir, 2003). Concepts and understanding will slowly be built up and expanded upon with repeated exposure.

Developing Categorization and Classification

Two particular concepts that LIFE may lack are categorization and classification, both of which build essential blocks in the development of abstract thinking (Feuerstein, 1980). To prepare for this abstract thinking, LIFE need to be able to organize and integrate new information into what they already know, and categorization and classification are both methods of doing this. Categorization must be formally taught in a concrete, step-by-step manner. Beginning in Foundation Phase, instructors can introduce the concepts of same and different, with different being the easier concept to understand. After mastering the visual discrimination needed to make simple comparisons of same and different, categorization can be introduced. An effective way to teach categories is to use basic charts with two or three columns and a picture or word bank. A good place to begin is to use two categories of vocabulary the learners already know and that are obviously distinct, such as clothing and food. As the concept of categories is acquired, more difficult distinctions and more categories can be introduced, again, going from oral to written.



In an effective ESL literacy classroom, learners gradually learn to apply different principles of classification and become aware of grouping and regrouping according to their needs. Games such as UNO or Crazy 8s can be introduced to teach “one-step differences” where two cards are identical except for one single thing they have different. Simple concrete exercises are used, such as classifying cars and bicycles as subsets of the set vehicles. Experience has taught us that abstract classifications, such as classifying nouns, verbs, and adjectives as parts of speech, can be introduced at Phase III. Classification across hierarchies can be taught using a family tree and then moving on to more abstract classifications such as creating a paragraph outline. Again, using vocabulary that the learner has already acquired, the instructor can move from the spoken

to the written, from concrete to more abstract, introducing a few new vocabulary classification words to assist in the tasks.

Developing Spatial Understanding

Spatial concepts like map reading, perspective, and scale may also need to be taught. Initially learners will need to develop the concept that a two-dimensional picture can represent a three-dimensional object. In lower levels, LIFE may have difficulty recognizing a line drawing as a representation of, for example, a person. Many learners are also unfamiliar with using maps and diagrams. They may be unable to point to their country on a globe or identify rivers or other land marks that they know by name. In order to understand maps, they may need to be taught scale and perspective. Indeed, they may lack not only the vocabulary but also the relative system of reference necessary to describe spatial relationships; both the vocabulary and the reference system must be taught step-by-step in order to be able to successfully work with images and read maps and diagrams.

A starting point, once LIFE have learned a few prepositions, is to use realia. Using miniature furniture or farm equipment, the teacher can instruct the learners on where to put what. By Phase II, the instructor can draw a "map" of the farm or kitchen on the whiteboard. The learners can then move magnetic furniture or farm equipment around following the instructor's directions. The learner progresses in being able to follow directions using three-dimensional objects to manipulating two-dimensional objects to finally "reading" a diagram or map.

Increasing Knowledge and Understanding

In addition to these concepts outlined above, LIFE may lack what we think of as basic facts. For instance, they may not know much about their own country as this is not something they have been taught. Although they may be able to provide a bit of information when prodded, it is not always something they have consciously thought about, and they will need to be made aware of

the importance of an understanding of the world in their new home. The learners may not know that the earth rotates around the sun, that a cold is caused by a virus, or that a whale is a mammal. They may not know very much about aspects of science and experimentation or prediction and hypothesis. If the learners are in an ESL literacy program that focuses on academic readiness, they will need to be taught to approach science with curiosity.

Conclusions: Developing Oral Fluency, Vocabulary, and Background Concepts

Becoming literate is more than simply learning to decode. Learners have to become active participants in their reading. This is done by continuing to develop their vocabulary, which will lead to improving their reading comprehension. They also need to develop critical concepts such as classification, spatial understanding, and basic knowledge of the world. Oral work is used to scaffold this literacy development by working from the oral to the written and breaking down the tasks into manageable chunks in a slow and steady fashion.

Foundational Literacy Instruction

Foundational literacy is literacy at its most basic form; beginning foundational learners have no literacy whatsoever and need to be taught a range of skills before they can begin to "read" and "write" in its strictest sense, including the directionality required for following text, the understanding that text has meaning, the fine motor skills required to hold a pencil and make shapes with it, and the ability to distinguish between same and different. Foundational literacy is beginning literacy; in this chapter, it is separated from the other stages of literacy because it requires teaching an initial set of skills before learners can pick up a pencil or open a book. The other parts of this chapter deal with literacy beyond the foundational level, divided into oral, reading, writing, and strategy instruction.

Most ESL instructors are probably quite comfortable walking into a new class, doing a warm up activity to get to know the learners, and then opening up a text book or handing out an activity to begin the lesson. When teaching the foundational adult, however, instructors step outside that comfort zone. They face a group of adults who can barely tell you their

Foundational literacy, also called pre-literacy, is the very lowest stage of literacy development. It includes the skills that learners will need to develop before they can begin to work with text, such as fine motor skills, visual discrimination, and the recognition that text has meaning. Learners who have never held a pencil before or who have never needed to distinguish between marks on a page will need to spend time developing hand-eye coordination and an understanding of same and different.

names and cannot write their names down, let alone open the book to the correct page. In a foundational literacy class, the instructor must figure out how to teach adults who are more than likely sitting in a classroom for the first time. Teaching foundational literacy can appear to be a daunting task, but there is also great joy in the foundational literacy classroom as learners pick up pencils for the first time and begin their development of literacy. For further information on Foundational Literacy, please see Chapter Thirteen.

This section focuses on important aspects of teaching foundational learners:

- what is foundational literacy?
- an effective foundational literacy classroom environment
- developing fine motor skills
- developing visual discrimination
- learning that text has meaning
- suggestions for supporting foundational learners
- developing oral communication

What is Foundational Literacy?

Foundational learners have few literacy skills whatsoever in either their first language or in English and may not even realize that literacy is essential in everyday communication in their new country. In terms of the CLB Phases, foundational learners are at the very beginning stages of Foundation Phase. Foundational "denotes a period of initial encounter with the behavioural practices of literate people at a personal and community level" (Gunn, 2007). This means that foundational learners are encountering literacy, and literate people, for the first time. These learners may be from foundational societies where the language has no written code, or they may simply have had no opportunity to learn to read or write. They almost always come from societies where the spoken word is used more commonly than the written word to relay information (Achren, 2006). It is in the foundational literacy classroom that these adults will begin the very first steps to developing literacy.

Because we do them so automatically, we are often unaware that reading and writing are very complex processes. According to research done in the field, reading can be broken down into four separate components (Burt, 2008): alphabetic (what we commonly think of as phonics), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Foundational learners not only lack the knowledge of these four components, but also more basic skills which form the building blocks to reading, such as fine motor skills, visual discrimination, and the realization that print has meaning.

Foundational learners face an enormous task in the development of literacy. Before they can begin to learn to decode and build a sight word vocabulary, and well before they begin to make meaning of longer sections of text, these learners need to know that print conveys meaning and that it has a direction of left to right and top to bottom. If the learners are totally unfamiliar with reading and have never been around books, they may have to be taught how to hold a pencil and how to sit for long periods of time in a chair. They will also need to develop the concept that line drawings represent real, three-dimensional objects, a good step in understanding that lines on paper convey meaning. Foundational learners are unlikely to have had any exposure to formal classroom instruction and the classroom setting, so all classroom expectations will be new to them, such as waiting while someone else speaks and watching the instructor. It is also likely that these learners do not yet have a good command of spoken English, and that will also need to be taught.

An Effective Foundational Literacy Classroom Environment

Research has shown that rather than having foundational learners integrated into a regular beginners class where they will rapidly fall behind (Gunn, 2007), it is much better to have a classroom dedicated specifically to foundational literacy (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2007; Jangles Productions, 2006; Bell & Burnaby, 1984). These learners need consistency, so having the same instructor for the duration of the class is also important (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2007). Most researchers strongly advise small learner numbers, since foundational adults are not independent learners. Inside the classroom, there is also a lot that an instructor can do to make an appropriate environment for effective learning. Instructors should create a print-rich environment if possible, with posters, word banks, language experience stories, and anything else that can help support learners posted on the walls. The materials used and posters displayed on the walls need to be both suitable for adults and culturally appropriate. Although unable to read or write, foundational adults have a wide range of knowledge and experience; they have raised families, farmed, and navigated their way through our complex immigration and refugee system. As one researcher argues, teaching "is most effective if it is tied to the lives of the learners and reflects their experiences as community members, parents and participants in the workforce" (Wrigley, 1993). The physical classroom and the materials taught should reflect this.

Generally, foundational adults have immediate language needs and, since it is unlikely that they are going on to academia, the curriculum can focus on these needs. Common needs include using public transportation, going to the doctor, and learning the

names of the streets in their community (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2007). Finding existing classroom material for these integral settlement themes aimed at foundational adults, however, can be challenging. Similar to other ESL literacy levels, much of the materials have to be instructor-produced in order to ensure their appropriateness for the adult learner with no reading skills. Fonts must be large, clear, and consistent, while the page itself needs a great deal of whitespace. The use of authentic material, such as grocery store flyers or government ID, links the learning to the learners' lives, although this material must usually be modified by the instructor. In general, textbooks and pre-packaged materials are of limited use; even those designed for a literacy classroom often have to be modified into smaller units with several versions to be repeated (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2007).

In an effective foundational classroom, the three main skill areas that need to be specifically taught are fine motor skills, visual discrimination, and the realization that print has meaning. In addition to these skills, oral language development, especially vocabulary building, will also need to be taught.

Developing Fine Motor Skills

Learners who have never held a pen before will need exercises to increase manual dexterity, hand-eye coordination, and fine motor skills. Writing in the air or in sand helps develop these skills before learners are able to grasp a pencil. Some learners benefit from using their fingers to trace over larger letters (like magnet letters). Many experts recommend gradually progressing from writing with markers on flip board paper to writing with pencils on smaller unlined paper. Whiteboards and blackboards are also good to practice fine motor skills on, with the added benefit of being able to erase anything the learner is not satisfied with. This reduces the risk of the task as the learner can control what stays on the board; being able to erase mistakes makes it less of a risk to make a mistake. Some learners who have rarely used their fine motor skills may take a bit of time to feel comfortable using a pencil, while others, who have perhaps done fine needle work, will make rapid progress. Once the learner is able to comfortably hold a pencil, pseudo-letters are often used to practice writing motions. This involves the learner practicing drawing circles and lines until they are comfortable enough to practice writing actual letters. Learners are usually eager to begin practicing real letters right away, in which case an ideal exercise is for them to practice copying their names. This is a meaningful exercise,

much more so than copying pseudo-letters, and one that has immediate relevance for the learner.

After pseudo-letters or name-writing practice, the learner can move on to forming all the letters of the alphabet, both capital and lower case. There are various teaching philosophies on the exact order of teaching the letters and on whether to teach capital or lower case letters first, and each method has its advantages, so the instructor and the learner can decide together. Learners often like to copy eveything around them once they have caught on to using a pencil. In addition to copying their first and last names, they can copy their addresses and phone numbers, even doing so in a simple form. It can be helpful if the instructor types up a reference sheet for each learner with his or her personal information in a large, clear font and affixes this to the learner's binder or some other permanent spot. This way, with the instructor's guidance, the learner can continue to practice this meaningful and authentic task throughout the duration of the term.

The learners' name, and perhaps even other family members' names and their country, can be made into simple cloze exercises with a single letter missing, thus providing repeated opportunities to learn to spell these important words. Over weeks or months, the original is moved further and further away as the learner's skills improve. Learners progress from copying immediately beside or below the original, to copying from a separate paper on the desk, to copying directly from the board or overhead. Sitting at a desk and using a pencil is an intense activity and can be quite taxing on both the body and the mind, so it is crucial that it only be done for short bursts of time before moving on to other activities involving movement or oral practice.

Other exercises which are less intense, yet continue to develop pre-writing skills are cutting, folding, colouring, and drawing. For example, the class can make posters for the classroom walls by making collages of magazine pictures. One good example of this is to have learners find pictures that feature a particular colour, following a lesson on the names of the different colours. Alternatively, the learners can take turns drawing pictures on the board while the instructor calls out simple vocabulary items such as a flower or banana. This usually leads to laughter, which is a great destresser and shows the learners that learning can be fun.

Developing Visual Discrimination

Visual discrimination is an important pre-reading skill and one that must be explicitly taught. LIFE may have little experience with paper and pictures. Line drawings may have little meaning. Even at higher levels of literacy, LIFE can have difficulty interpreting line drawings or cartoons. By Phase III, they are often able to recognize that a series of lines represents a person, but they might not understand that it's the same person in each frame of a cartoon. Instructors should begin working with drawings and images early on in the development of literacy. The concepts of same and different are also introduced at this stage to teach visual discrimination, with different being the easier of the two and introduced first. The concept of different can be introduced first using real objects (three pens and one pair of scissors) and then with pictures on a page, then shapes, and finally letters. In an effort to minimize the cognitive burden on learners, the instructor should use consistent practices, such as always asking learners to cross out the different item.

At the same time as learners are becoming familiar with individual letters, they also need to acquire a bank of sight words. For instance, they need to recognize their name, along with other important words such as 911, EXIT, name, and OPEN (differences in capitalization are intentional). These sight words are learned as a chunk or shape and memorized in the same way literate learners do. Generally, foundational learners also have a desire to learn the alphabet, as this is what they associate with learning to read. Some time can be spent on putting individual ABC flashcards in order. For more beginning learners, magnetic letters are easier to manipulate than cards. This is a useful activity to introduce directionality as well.

Learning that Text has Meaning

In addition to practicing penmanship and recognizing letters and sight words, learners need to become aware that, like the spoken word, written text conveys meaning and can be used to tell a story or give information. Walks around the school can be used to draw learners' attention to print around them as instructors point out any words they see such as STOP, PUSH, PULL, or EXIT. Instructors can create a print-rich environment by having the learners put up labels around the classroom for words like door, chair, whiteboard, and window. Learners' photos can be pinned on a world map with a string connecting the photo to the learner's country. City maps can be used to show learners their streets. Once learners have a dozen or more vocabulary words, the instructor can introduce the idea of matching picture cards to words. This can be done as a classroom-wide activity where the cards are matched on a magnetic whiteboard and then gradually progress to an activity where the learners do the matching individually or in pairs at their desk. The instructor is there to provide hints if needed so that each learner has a feeling of success.

Instructors can also vary the ways that activities are completed, depending on the focus of the activity. Manipulating cards and pictures is much less taxing for the learners than doing a worksheet matching exercise because, with cards, there is no writing involved, so the learner can fully concentrate on matching rather than on letter formation and copying.

To teach directionality, small sets of three or four pictures can be sequenced in a left to right, top down direction. Using the learners' lives, simple LEA (Language Experience Approach) stories can be written on the board. The instructor can read the story several times and then do a choral reading with the learners. Learners can be asked to point to or circle a certain letter or word (like their name or another familiar word). Words can be erased so that the learner supplies the missing words and the instructor writes in the supplied word. All of these sorts of activities help learners make the connection between words and meaning.

Suggestions for Supporting Foundational Learners

Because foundational literacy learners lack experience with formal education, there are many things the instructor can do to facilitate learning. Many learners have never had an eye test and may need glasses. The middle-aged learners may need reading glasses, and even those who have glasses may not be in the routine of having them with them all the time for school. It is helpful to keep a few pairs of drugstore reading glasses in the classroom for these times. Creating routines in the classroom schedule helps learners feel comfortable and assists them in their learning. Because of their unfamiliarity with the classroom and western society in general, learners may need help internalizing the concepts of time and punctuality. This will need to be taught in class.

Repetition and review are important to all ESL learners, but for the foundational learner they are essential, since foundational learners are not able to go home and look up a word in the dictionary or reread their notes. The instructor is often the only reference guide for the learners, and the classroom is usually the only place where learning can take place.

Interspersed with all of these tasks, there should be frequent breaks and changes in pace to help maintain the learners' concentration. Clapping games, singing, and board games help break up all this intensive mind work.

Developing Oral Communication

Although this section has outlined a number of skills in the development of literacy, the foundational learner also needs to be taught meaningful oral communication. Learning the

spoken language is crucial as this is the main form of communication with this group, and they are good oral learners. Developing oral language is also a critical step in developing literacy. For a further discussion of developing oral communication and vocabulary, see the "Developing Oral Fluency, Vocabulary, and Background Concepts" section earlier in this chapter. One researcher sums up the value of learning English very succinctly: "Learning to speak English is one of the first steps they can take to get control of their lives" (Croydon, 2005).

Conclusions: Foundational Literacy Instruction

Foundational learners are at the very beginning of a long process of acquiring literacy. They need to develop specific skills before they can be expected to open a book to page one and begin reading, or pick up a pencil and write their names. This includes developing fine motor skills, developing visual discrimination, and learning that print has meaning. As learners progress and acquire these skills, they can begin the process of building a sight word bank and copying letters. Foundational literacy can be challenging to teach, but also highly rewarding, as the world unlocked by literacy becomes visible to learners for the first time.

Reading Instruction

Most adult educators are used to the idea of reading to learn, mostly because educators themselves are generally highly adept at learning and engaging with information and ideas from text (for example, the process instructors and program coordinators go through when they read a handbook on ESL literacy). The role of reading in ESL literacy instruction, however, is entirely different. Learners with Interrupted Formal Education are in the stages of developing literacy: they are learning to read. This means that ESL literacy instruction must be quite different from mainstream ESL, where instruction uses book-guided exercises about rules, organizational patterns, and hypothetical situations. This is very abstract. Where do we start when we are faced with a classroom of adult learners who see the alphabet as meaningless squiggles? These learners have often led very practical lives focused on the tangible here and now; they have had little schooling but have adapted successfully to a hands-on training mode of learning. We must consider who these learners are. What are their strengths? What new skills do they need to acquire? How can we make language and literacy training hands-on and concrete?

Reading is a complicated process and there is a whole series of skills that LIFE will need in order to develop literacy. Not all learners begin at the earliest stages of literacy development, but for the sake of understanding the overall progression of learning to read, this section begins with the most basic skills and moves forward from there. However, reading is a highly involved process, and every learner is different, bringing different abilities, strengths, and challenges to the classroom, so these skills should not be viewed as a series of steps, where one is completed before another is begun, but rather as elements in fluid development. Learning to read includes:

- developing sight words
- recognizing phonetic clues
- understanding sentences
- sequencing and directionality
- using reading strategies

Developing Sight Words

LIFE usually have poor phonological awareness, and it can take them quite some time to catch on to decoding words using phonetic strategies (i.e. sounding out a word). Rather than starting reading instruction with phonics, instructors should begin with building a sight word vocabulary (a bank of words they recognize without decoding; literate readers read almost entirely through recognizing sight words.). LIFE will need quite a repertoire of sight words to read with any facility. When you are working with LIFE, start with words from their own experience: their own name, brand names, or signs. Only work with words the learners understand orally. Go for walks and read signs, such as push, pull, exit, and stairs. Make labels for everything in the classroom: door, window, or desk. Pick out words from flyers. Have learners cut out pictures to make their own picture dictionaries, labeling pictures with your help.

As learners are developing sight words, always keep checking that they can discriminate the sound of the words they are using from other words, and that they know the meaning of the words. Through tracing, copying, seeing labels, and drilling with flashcards, students learn to recognize the configuration of familiar words. It is still necessary to make sure the learners are aware of the precise word, for example the difference between “Calgary Foods” and “Cargill

Foods." Check that learners have an accurate concept of a word's meaning. Do they understand the differences in the relationships between "under" and "over." "up" and "down,: and "top" and "bottom?" Learners who are developing sight words benefit from a lot of opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of vocabulary through Total Physical Response.

Phonetic Clues

Although most practiced readers read almost entirely through recognizing sight words, readers still need phonetic understanding. This helps not only in reading, but also in the development of listening and writing. Work on building up sight vocabulary while introducing the use of phonetic clues for word recognition. First, work on letter recognition. Learners may confuse M,N,W; E,F; and b,p,d (differences in capitalization here are intentional). Practice visually and aurally discriminating between problem letters, alone and in words. One difficult area is that learners may not hear the exact English sound that corresponds to the English use of the letter. The English sound may not be in the repertoire of sounds for their first language. Thus, pronunciation and listening are vital to learning to read. Show them the position of the tongue, lips, and teeth for English phonic sounds. Work on auditory and visual discrimination with minimal pairs, such as cat/sat or pat/pan. Use initial, medial, and final sounds as clues, but don't decode words phonetically right from the start. Trying to decode an entire word as a beginning reader can be a bit disheartening; it is important to recognize that many, many English words have irregular spelling and are difficult to decode phonetically (light, for example). Rhyming words help learners recognize similar patterns of letters in similar sounding words.

Understanding Sentences

When learners begin to read sentences, they tend to read word by word, slowly and deliberately. When a text is approached this way, the reader is focused on individual words and does not piece the words together into meaningful phrases. This means that they don't understand what they are reading. However, LIFE almost always hear language holistically, focusing on meaning, not analyzing individual words. In fact, learners are not always aware that oral phrases are comprised of individual words. "Whasyuname" might seem like one discrete language item, not a structure of four individual words, "What is your name?" Introduce phrases and short sentences right from the beginning. Encourage learners to read phrase by phrase, not word by word. This process is called chunking. Through chunking, learners' reading comprehension will improve more quickly.

In order to build the connections between words and to make meaning from longer phrases and sentences, use Language Experience Stories (LEA) as the first texts. In LEA, learners dictate

what they want the instructor to write on a flip chart to create a story. Because the language comes directly from the learners themselves, the ideas, structure, and vocabulary are perfectly tailored to their comprehension capabilities and interests. Every phrase is meaningful. LEA stories demonstrate to learners how spoken ideas translate into print. For more information on LEA, please see Chapter Seven.

Sequencing and Directionality

Sequencing and directionality are two skills that experienced readers may take for granted, but they are absolutely crucial to beginning learners and will need to be taught explicitly. Some beginning learners have trouble with left to right progression and have a tendency to skip words. This generally means that the learners are having trouble controlling eye movements. Arabic or Farsi speakers have an added difficulty in that any literacy training in their native language has been right to left. There are a number of ways to deliberately teach learners sequencing and directionality. Have learners put pictures into order from left to right. Ask the learners to sequence phrases on flashcards from left to right into English sentences, and then have the learners read them. Put a small piece of cardboard under the line of the text to encourage the eye to follow a line. Read with the learner while using a finger or pencil to follow the line, making sure the learner is actually reading. In this technique, called paired reading, the instructor adjusts his or her reading speed so that the instructor and the reader speak together.

> Help learners with eye-tracking by providing strips of cardstock to lay beneath the line they are reading. This helps learners understand how lines work on a page and trains their eyes to follow a line.

In the beginning, the simple mechanics of reading is a great challenge. The eye must be controlled to move from left to right in a straight line. Other skilled tasks, such as carpentry or sewing, demand that the eyes sweep all over the work. As the reader's eyes move along this straight line, he or she must repeatedly recognize one letter configuration, similar to many other such configurations, as representing a particular word. Then the reader has to note if there is an "s" on the end to show there is more than one. The eye has to take in these words in chunks or phrases because words depend on the words around them for meaning. After the reader's brain has managed to take in all these complex perceptions, the brain has to make sense of it. With all that is going on, the learner must become an "active" reader. The deliberate use of reading strategies – ways of decoding and making meaning – will help LIFE to become active readers and to progress as learners.

Once LIFE have developed a basic sight word bank and have learned some decoding strategies, the next most important step in learning to read it to actively use reading strategies. The meaning embedded in text is never self-evident, although it may seem that way to proficient readers who have long forgotten their early struggles with reading. Learners must acquire a variety of strategies and techniques to become effective readers. The actual number of strategies that good readers use is staggering, but initially it is a good idea to focus on several core strategies. When teaching strategies, be as obvious and explicit as possible. Choose one or two strategies to highlight at a time, and draw the learners' attention to the use of these strategies, showing the learners when they can use a strategy, how to use it, and when they have done it correctly. For a further discussion of strategies, see "Strategy Instruction" later on in this chapter. We have included some of the more important reading strategies here.

Identify the Purpose of the Text: When learners begin to use their literacy skills for everyday living, they must be able to identify the purpose of a text. Are they reading to find a piece of information, to get instructions to complete a task, to understand an opinion, or to be amused by a human interest story? Are they looking through the newspaper to see if there is anything interesting? Discuss with the learners the purpose of a text and the best way to read it. Should the reader skim, scan, visualize, or summarize? Bring several different kinds of texts into the classroom and discuss their use. LIFE should be encouraged to think about reading in different ways as soon as they start to read simple short paragraphs, at Phase III.

Activate Prior Knowledge and Make Predictions: Active readers link new information to previously acquired information and take an active role in making meaning from a text. Help learners to become active readers. Establish that reading for comprehension is the goal, rather than simply decoding. Predicting the ideas in the text before starting to read teaches learners to add the new information in the reading passage to the old information in their heads. Help learners make predictions from all the clues available. Discuss the title or illustrations. What does this tell us to expect in the text? Brainstorm likely vocabulary. After the learners have read a bit of text, ask "wh-" questions to check on comprehension and discuss whether their initial predictions were correct. Get the learners to predict what will come next. Let them read most of a story and predict the ending.

Use Contextual Clues: Active readers also figure out the meaning of new words using contextual clues. Give the learners a passage with an unfamiliar word underlined. Have the learners look for clues in other descriptive words, verbs, and location phrases in the sentence to lead them to the meaning of the word. Lead the learners through a process of figuring out the meaning of the word by asking a series of questions: What does it look like? What do you do with it? Where do you find it? Give the learners fill-in-the-blank exercises, making them focus

on contextual clues. When teaching learners to use contextual clues, it is important to know that a learner must be able to read over 90% of the words in a text before they have enough context to be able to understand the missing 10%. When focusing on teaching a strategy, choose a text that will be reasonably easy for learners to understand so that the challenge becomes the use of the strategy rather than understanding the general meaning of the text.

Scan: Scanning is a process of reading faster than usual to find specific pieces of information. Active readers often scan for information in ads, notices, and timetables. When scanning, the eye does not move from left to right along a line but sweeps the format, looking for specific words and numbers. In order to follow text at all, beginning readers have been practicing a very controlled left to right eye movement along a straight line, starting at the top left corner, and they may be resistant to practicing a new eye pattern. However, once LIFE become reasonably proficient at left-right directionality, they should be taught to scan. They will need lots of practice scanning formatted writing, such as ads, notices, and timetables, before they start to scan paragraphs for information, because embedded information in sentences and paragraphs is much harder to find.

To find information in a paragraph efficiently, the reader has to scan the text for the key words that will lead to the passage with the right information. Once learners are ready to scan paragraphs, teach them to use logical strategies to find information in a text. Discourage trial and error guessing. This process will also help with overall comprehension. Learners must understand what they are looking for before they begin to scan a paragraph for information. Teach learners to find:

- words that refer to people to find out “who”
- time phrases to find out “when”
- phrases with location prepositions to find out “where”
- phrases with “by” or “with” to find out “how”
- phrases that match cause to effect to find out “why”

A good step is to teach learners to predict the kind of words that will lead to the information they are looking for and then have them scan for those words. With practice, learners become more efficient at finding information in text. At higher levels of ESL literacy, make sure that learners comprehend what they are scanning for by asking questions using synonyms or slightly different phrasing. Teach them to find the part of the text that matches the right meaning rather than simply the right sequence of words.

Skim: Skimming is reading faster than usual to find only the main ideas of a text. Finding the main idea in a text is not only a goal in itself but also the first step in improving retention of detail. Have the learners skim a passage for the gist. Discuss it with them so that they are quite

sure of the broad meaning. Then have them do a second reading for the details. There are different ways to skim a text, such as focusing on key words or reading the first and last sentences of the paragraphs.

It is not easy for beginning readers to make the connection from words and individual sentences to the main idea. Have learners match word banks of eight or ten words to statements of main ideas. Discuss their reasons for linking a particular idea to a particular word bank. Highlight key words in a short paragraph, uncover the paragraph just long enough for learners to read the key words, cover the paragraph, and then discuss what could be the gist of the text. Do a newspaper scavenger hunt with more advanced learners, in which they must find a happy story, a tragic story, a sports story, and an international news story.

Make an Outline of the Text and Summarize: Outlining the order in a piece of writing helps inexperienced readers to retain what they have read. Learners who can't retell the sequence of events in a narrative have little sense of chronological order and don't see the pattern of organization in the story. Help learners build these skills. Give them a story that comes with a sequence of pictures. Copy the pictures and cut them up, and have the learners write a caption for each picture that tells the part of the story the picture illustrates. After this, the learners can move on to sequencing the written passages without the pictures. Next ask the learners to retell the whole story. See if they can take the next step and summarize the story.

Reading Strategies
Identify the Purpose of the Text
Activate Prior Knowledge and Make Predictions
Use Contextual Clues
Scan
Skim
Make an Outline of the Text and Summarize
Use Inference
Recognize Other Points of View
Visualize

Use Inference: Many LIFE need encouragement to imagine the hypothetical and to go beyond a self-referenced world. They may not understand the impersonal "you." When asked, "How do you get to The Bay?" they might respond, "I don't go to The Bay. I never shop there." Such learners often find only a very literal meaning in a text and miss the inferences. Start discussing inferences using statements with easy meanings to infer: "If you go out, make sure you have your umbrella" means it is probably going to rain. Continue to develop an understanding of inference. Even learners at lower levels can understand simple inference; this understanding should develop as the skills of the learner and the complexity of the texts grow.

Recognize Other Points of View: Many LIFE are used to a fatalistic view of the world and have never wondered "what if?" and "why?" These learners may have trouble linking cause and effect if it is outside their immediate experience. Often they graft their own moral views and

opinions on to characters in a story, unable to comprehend that someone might think differently from them. This makes it difficult to understand different points of view, which also means that it is challenging to differentiate between fact and opinion. However, all of these strategies are necessary steps to becoming good readers. Give learners examples of factual information and personal opinions and discuss how they differ.

Visualize: Since many LIFE have not had the luxury of spending time on imaginative speculation, they might need encouragement to visualize characters and settings in their mind. Good readers make movies in their heads while reading a story, so encourage your learners to find evocative photographs in magazines to illustrate their vision of the story. This is an important step in reading for vicarious experience and personal enjoyment.

Conclusions: Reading Instruction

As LIFE evolve as readers, they need instructors who expose them to texts that expand their understanding, who spark their imagination, and who are truly interested in discussing the learners' observations and opinions. When teaching LIFE to read, begin with building a sight word bank of important, familiar words. Remember that all vocabulary must be mastered orally before it is attempted in print. As the learners' sight word banks develop, begin teaching decoding skills, and then comprehension skills. Reading is much more than decoding letters and words, although decoding is also important; true reading comprehension involves a complex cooperation of skills as LIFE learn to make meaning out of text.

Writing Instruction

The human mind has been pre-wired to make sense of language, and everyone goes through an unconscious process of patterning communication to make it comprehensible and effective. School formalizes this process, teaching learners the often arbitrary rules of grammar as well as conventions of rhetoric. LIFE, however, haven't been in school long enough to develop abstract concepts of the way language works. This is actually an advantage for those who have a "good ear" for language and can quickly pick up the rhythms and sound patterns of spoken English. Many LIFE are very fluent in spoken English and have a wonderful colloquial quality to their speech. They haven't been bogged down, over-monitoring every sentence for grammatical accuracy. On the other hand, the process that generates their oral language often fails them as soon as they pick up a pencil. There are a number of things to consider when teaching writing, including:

- letter and word formation
- composing sentences
- writing topics
- spelling
- correcting writing
- composing paragraphs

Letter and Word Formation

Some learners have difficulties with letter formation and need time to form letters carefully. Have learners do various activities to practice fine motor skills such as cutting, pasting, and handling small pieces of paper. Copying also plays a very important role in acquiring writing skills and allows beginning learners to get a proficient piece of writing down on paper using a model. In everyday life, accurate copying is of utmost importance to record essential names, addresses, and telephone numbers. In the beginning, while letter formation is still a chore, spend the most time on very practical tasks, such as filling out information forms. A common ESL literacy activity is labeling pictures to reinforce new vocabulary, but labelling can actually be a very tedious chore, and matching exercises reinforce word recognition more effectively. Learners can draw a line to match pictures to words or glue pictures beside words. If you want learners to focus on word recognition, don't distract them with the chore of producing written letters, for they are two very distinct tasks to the beginning writer.

Composing sentences is an ongoing challenge, even for learners who are quite fluent in English. To effectively use language for writing, a person must see how words relate to each other. The formal study of language in school teaches these relationships between words, but most LIFE have never analyzed language in this way. LIFE with very low levels of formal education are often unaware that sentences are made up of individual words. As mentioned previously, they see communicative expressions in blocks such as "Howaya?" or "Wadzamatta?" This is one of the reasons why these learners will copy phrases letter by letter without spaces between words. Not only are they totally absorbed with letter formation, but the break between words is insignificant for them. Remember that LIFE have acquired their skills through hands-on training. Don't let difficulties with the mechanics of writing become a barrier to learners composing their own sentences. They can put together words that you have already printed and cut out. Arranging flashcards in pocket charts or on a magnetic white board is ideal. Learners may need a lot of experience manipulating flashcards into sentences before they can go through the process mentally.

Writing Stories, Making Books

This activity takes place over several lessons and involves each learner creating a book. After spending some time discussing folktales from their childhood and looking at some sample published stories, learners are encouraged to tell their classmates a familiar folktale. The learners then write their stories down, with support as necessary. Next, the instructor helps the learners edit their stories for clarity, taking care to ensure that learners' voices are maintained.

The next step is making the physical book. This is done out of cardstock, paper, and scrapbooking materials, with yarn or string to bind the book together. The learners design the covers and copy their stories into their own books. Once the books are completed, the instructor can invite another class to visit, so that the learners can share their work. This bookmaking project allows learners to experience the entire writing process: generating ideas, writing, revising, editing, publishing, and finally sharing their stories.

Language Experience Stories (LEA) let LIFE create stories without worrying about the mechanics of writing. The learners dictate what they want the instructor to write on a flip chart to create a story. The theory of LEA holds that stories are written down exactly as the learners dictate, grammar mistakes and all, since pure LEA stories are meant to be a tool to teach beginning reading skills, using only the language in the learners' experience. When LEA is used for writing instruction, however, the instructor must decide to what degree grammar mistakes should be corrected. There is a concern that ignoring structural problems reinforces the learners' mistakes, but on the other hand, changing the learners' language frustrates their attempts to author stories. The instructor must balance

adjusting language for teaching purposes with showing great respect for learners' efforts. Corrections should come from the learners in a spirit of collaboration and changes should be approved by the original author.

LIFE construct sentences most effectively by following their own oral patterns, not by applying abstract grammar rules. Unfortunately, they tend to hear only the stressed words in English and often miss the unstressed words. The verb "to be," articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs do not usually mean much to them. They don't have the grammar sense that would make them aware that there must be something in the spoken sentence that they aren't hearing clearly. They focus on a sentence as a purely communicative tool rather than as a grammatical entity. Making them hear all the elements in the sentence and getting them to incorporate those elements into the sound patterns in their heads will prove more productive than pounding grammar rules into their heads.

In order to teach all the elements of the sentence, try teaching pronunciation at the sentence level, making learners aware of the rhythm of the sentence, including stressed and unstressed words. Tapping out a rhythm can be an effective tool. Scrambled sentences on flashcards also make learners deal with all the elements in a grammatical sentence, even the unstressed prepositions and auxiliary verbs. By physically arranging flashcards into sentences, LIFE can compose, focusing only on meaningful sound patterns without the distracting worry over letter formation and spelling. They can easily experiment with various patterns until they find one that is correct. The flashcards are easily switched around and leave no hardcopy of their failed attempts, so this is a low-risk activity. The learners are encouraged to try.

Punctuation is best explained to literacy learners while a text is read aloud, especially at lower levels. Periods come where the voice drops and stops. Commas come where the voice stops a little bit but doesn't drop. Question marks come when the voice stops and goes up. LIFE generally won't appreciate that a period comes after a complete thought with a subject and a predicate until the later stages of Phase III. Long before then, teach punctuation as a part of pronunciation.

Writing Topics

What to write about can be as much of a problem as how to write it. It is hard for learners to feel enthusiastic and creative about writing when they have little confidence in their ability. Guided compositions let learners write about themselves without the worry of generating ideas and structuring work. Give the learners a series of questions, have them answer questions in complete sentences, and then have them organize the sentences into paragraphs. Composition can also be guided by a series of pictures. Have learners take their own series of photographs to inspire a personal story of a party or field trip. The picture sequence takes care of chronological order. Celebrate the learners as authors by collecting their stories into booklets with attractive formats and illustrations. Have learners create simple stories related to their heritage and collect them into booklets for their children or to share with other classes so their writing has a meaningful purpose.

Getting Started
A dream...
My favourite place...
My sister/brother...
My first day in Canada...
Someone who taught me something...
The weather...
What I do every day...
My house in my country...
A day when I was happy...

What not to write can also be a problem for practical tasks. Summarizing is usually associated with note-taking, but the skill is needed for much more basic everyday tasks, such as efficiently writing down the essentials in a phone message. Learners should be able to start with a transcript of a phone message that they boil down to the essential message, taking out the social niceties and extra detail. After that, they can listen to a simulated taped message over and over again to take down an effective message. Making choices about what to put in and what to leave out in brief messages prepares learners to work at sticking to the main idea when they write paragraphs. Many LIFE come from cultures with a strong oral tradition, and staying strictly on topic is not a prized characteristic in their literature. The impersonal logic of English prose is foreign. Lots of discussion before writing and introducing techniques such as idea mapping and brainstorming will help learners to stay on topic.

Spelling

Like all writers of English, spelling is a problem. Even native English speakers often have difficulties with spelling and regularly use dictionaries or the spell checker on the computer. Encourage learners to check spelling just like everybody else. Start with picture dictionaries and move on to word lists and then learner dictionaries. Be aware that it will take them a long time to write anything if they rely on copying every word from a word list or a picture dictionary. Learners must also be encouraged to take risks and try spelling on their own or use inventive

spelling. Using what phonics they know and spelling syllable by syllable often works. Thinking of a rhyming word they know how to spell and changing the initial consonant is a good strategy. Learners need to acquire a bank of words they can spell and some class time must be devoted to spelling.

There are various techniques for studying spelling; the best technique for each class will depend on the learners' level and preferred learning style. Visual learners will look at the word, putting a photograph of it in their memory, close their eyes and visualize it, and then check to see if they have it correctly in their visual memory. Aural learners will repeatedly spell the word out loud to set the pattern in their aural memory or spell syllable by syllable phonetically. Kinesthetic learners benefit from writing the word over and over again. As learners progress, spelling rules for silent "e," adding endings after long and short vowels and silent "gh" will help. Encourage learners to experiment with various methods until they find one that brings them success.

Correcting Writing

Learners in ESL literacy classes need to have time in class to write as the instructor constantly circulates, giving encouragement, advice, suggestions for revision, and guided support. Correction should be immediate and positive, as opposed to correction in pen handed back days later. Class volunteers give learners more encouragement and individual attention. In the end, there is really only one way to become a good writer and that is to write. To become better writers learners must write, check, revise, rewrite, check, revise, rewrite, and so on and so on.

An excellent tool for learning writing is a dialogue journal. This is a journal that goes back and forth between the learner and the instructor. The topic of the journal varies depending on the learner and the instructor; either one can bring up new topics or ask questions. The focus of the journal is on communication through writing, rather than correct grammar and spelling, so the instructor should model correct usage rather than correct the learner's writing. This is most effective if the learners are often reminded to read their instructor's writing carefully and look for words for spelling or patterns for sentences. In a true dialogue journal, the instructor contributes as much as the learner, choosing how much to reveal to the learner in terms of his or her personal life. As learners develop as writers, however, they are often capable of writing several pages in a sitting in their journals. In this case, the instructor must balance workload and effective responses, choosing how much to reply (Peyton & Reed, 1990).

Composing Paragraphs

LIFE progress from copying to filling in blanks in models to composing sentences to composing paragraphs. The more learners have to write independently, the greater the burden is on the learner. Begin the process of learning to compose paragraphs with discussing topics; in a paragraph, all sentences must be about the main topic. Learners can write beginning paragraphs by answering a series of questions and stringing their answers together to make a paragraph. When they feel comfortable with this, progress to simple paragraphs about highly familiar topics, such as what they do each day, or a description of a member of their family. From there, learners can learn the parts of a paragraph, including the topic sentence, supporting arguments, examples, and the concluding sentence. Models are highly useful in teaching paragraph writing. Show learners as many models as necessary, taking apart the models and examining how each sentence fits into the whole.

Tips for Use

Title page for a dialogue journal

Helps learners identify expectations

Dialogue journals provide an excellent opportunity for regular fluency writing

Introduction to a Dialogue Journal

What is a dialogue journal?

A dialogue journal is a place where you have a conversa
writing. Your teacher will give you time in class to write in yo
write back to you in your journal. You can then write back to y
conversation, in writing.

This is a chance to practice your writing. You can experiment and try out new words or new forms. If you are learning something in class, you can practice using it in your dialogue journal. Your teacher will not correct your grammar, but will model correct spelling and correct grammar for you. Read your teacher's writing carefully! If you have made a mistake, your teacher might use the word correctly.

What should I write about?

You can write about anything you like. You can talk about your thoughts, your home country, Canada, a movie you saw, a book you're reading – anything you like! You can share your thoughts with your teacher. You can also ask your teacher questions or tell your teacher about a problem you're having in class. Your teacher will do his or her best to help you.

Your teacher will keep your journal and everything you say confidential. This means that he or she will never tell anyone what you write in your journal, and will never show it to anyone without your permission.

Writing is a life-long process of learning; this is true of all writers, no matter how old they are when they begin to write. There are several overriding factors in teaching LIFE to write. The first is encouragement; learners should be helped to build their self-esteem and the worth of their voices. Celebrate their writing, no matter what level; publish it and encourage them to share it with others. The second is to view writing as communication rather than an academic exercise. Writers will progress faster if they understand that there is a purpose to what they are writing. The third is to teach LIFE to follow a writing process, depending on the level. Encourage learners to get ideas, plan their writing, write a first draft, revise for ideas, edit for language and structure, and then to make a final copy. The final key factor in teaching writing is to give learners time: writing takes time and practice. Let learners do most of their writing in a supported atmosphere in class. Don't assume that they have a quiet place for writing outside of the classroom. Provide lots of time and opportunities to write. LIFE will progress as writers – they simply require an effective environment and time to explore their voices.

Strategy Instruction

For Learners with Interrupted Formal Education, it is not only content that is missing from their educational experience. Learning strategies and problem-solving, organizational, self-management, and reflection skills are continually revisited in a formal educational setting, but are understandably absent from the experiences of learners who have not been "in class."

Bridging these gaps, however, is not an insurmountable task. Adult learners appreciate and rightfully demand transparency in their learning. Teaching learners strategies is effectively giving them the tools to become better writers, readers, speakers, and listeners, and at the same time providing them with a behavioural checklist for benchmarking their own learning.

Consider this handbook. Its purpose is to assist in the development of effective curricular programming for LIFE. It will be used as a reference guide in the same way that strategy information will be put into practice

by learners. In teaching strategies explicitly, instructors enable learners to ask and answer the following questions:

- Am I learning well?
- How do I know if I'm learning well?
- How can I learn more successfully?

Promising Practices in Teaching Strategies

Don't Overload Learners: Teach strategies one at a time. This gives learners a chance to absorb the strategy into their learning process, so that they are actually using it and benefitting from it.

Revisit and Recycle Strategies Throughout the Class: Touching on a strategy once or twice is only empowering if the learner understood and applied the strategy the first and second times it was presented. Continue to explicitly use strategies after they have been taught. Draw learners' attention to when they could use a particular strategy, or to whenever they have used a strategy effectively. Reinforce learning.

Make Strategies Accessible: Focus on teaching a strategy and ensure that the introduction is accessible to all LIFE. Make it obvious and transparent. When teaching a reading strategy, for example, choose a text that is relatively easy for the class to understand, so that the focus is on the use of the strategy and not decoding the meaning of the words. For example, when teaching inference, choose a story that the entire cohort will understand, and where the inference is obvious:

> *Jack woke up and got dressed. He looked out of the window and sighed. He wasn't happy. He put on a sweater and his raincoat. He pulled on his rubber boots. He got out his umbrella.*
> Instructor: *What is the weather like outside?* Elicit responses.
> *How do you know?* Elicit responses.
> *You just used a strategy that all good readers use.*
> *It is called inferring.*
> Define and repeat with another text.

Of course, not all LIFE will be able to have this discussion because the range of speaking ability is so diverse. However, there are many ways to introduce strategies, even at lower levels.

Taking five minutes at the start of each session to talk through the timetable for the day, or having learners organize their binders for the last five minutes of every session, are repeated activities that hopefully, through extensive modelling and repetition, become habits. The benefits of these habits should become apparent to learners without having to explain why when the learners don't have the language to be able to enter into that discussion. As learners become increasingly proficient in oral English, they will be able to engage in discussions about strategies.

There are many strategies that are possible to use in reading, writing, and learning throughout the ESL literacy Phases. Practiced readers and writers – people who have had the opportunity to have a formal education – use hundreds of strategies when dealing with text and learning. We have chosen to explore some key strategies for each of these three areas. These lists provide a good starting place for learners and their instructors.

An Overview of Reading Strategies		
Name of Strategy	**What Does the Learner Do?** **What Does the Learner Ask?**	**Why is the Strategy Effective?**
Previewing and Predicting	*Before reading a text, look at: pictures, the title, subheadings, captions – what information does this tell us? What could this text be about?*	Helps recall information, provide context, and generate vocabulary. Encourages active reading.
Self-Monitoring	*Do I understand what I'm reading? What can I do to help my understanding? Go back and re-read; find meaning of some words and then re-read; read on to see if there is more helpful information.*	Helps learners identify why they don't understand and encourages them to use the text and context to find clarity.
Visualizing	*When I am reading, can I make a movie in my head? What can I see? What are the characters doing?*	Helps learners tap into visual experiences and memories to draw parallels, provide context, deduce meanings, and make predictions.
Retelling	*What happened at the beginning/middle/end? Who are the characters in the story? What happened in the story? Does this remind me of other stories I have read? Anything in my own life?*	Helps learners sequence, prepare for discussion, and evoke personal connections from experience that enable inference.
Scanning	*What do I want to find out? What are the key words that will help me find that information? Just look for that word. Am I looking for a date? Read quickly to find numbers – don't read every word.*	Helps learners to quickly find specific information in a text.

An Overview of Writing Strategies		
Name of Strategy	**What Does the Learner Do?** **What Does the Learner Ask?**	**Why is the Strategy Effective?**
Copying	*Look at the words on the board and the words on my paper. Do they look the same? What is different? Are the words in the same place? Do I need to move the words?*	Learners begin to analyze their writing, improve their writing, and self-correct mistakes.
Activating Prior Learning	*Before starting to write, look around the room at posters and signs. Can I see anything that is helpful? Can I find anything that I know I need to practice? Is there a picture to help me remember the previous days' learning?*	Provides learners with starting points, removes concerns about spelling, and reduces the pressure that learners can put on themselves to remember everything.
Brainstorming	*Find pictures, draw images, write words that I think of when I talk about a subject. Ask classmates to explain their choices. Did this give me some new ideas?*	Prepares learners for writing by collecting and evaluating all of their ideas about a topic, as well as providing starting points.
Organizing Ideas	*Circle the most important information from my brainstorm. What do I want to say first? Why? Will my reader know what I am writing about? What is the next thing that I want to write?*	Enables learners to explain and justify their ideas and opinions, and listen and evaluate the opinions of others.
Reading Aloud	*Before I start writing, what do I want to write? Say it out loud to a partner. Does my partner understand? Did he or she make some constructive comments? Did what I say have a beginning, a middle, and an end?*	Allows learners to practice and repeat, to edit, to listen for mistakes, and to peer edit before writing.

An Overview of Learning Strategies		
Name of Strategy	**What Does the Learner Do?** **What Does the Learner Ask?**	**Why is the Strategy Effective?**
Organizing a Schedule	*What is the number of my classroom? What time does class start? What days do we have computer lab? When is the college closed? When is my homework due?*	Enables learners to manage their learning and be prepared, as well as transfer these skills into home and community life.
Organizing Binders	*Where does this activity go? What kind of work is it? What other work is it similar to? Where can I find my work from last week? Where can I find that sentence that I was proud of?*	Learners begin to group, separate, and sort the different streams of their learning.
Asking for Help	*Do I understand? Does my partner understand? Is anyone in my group able to explain this to me? Can the instructor help me and explain this information in a different way? How can I let my instructor know that I am confused?*	Encourages participation, encourages ownership of their own learning, and ensures that misunderstandings are tackled at the source.
Sharing Understanding with Others	*I think this because...this is my opinion because...I agree...I disagree...In my home country...Last week...Did you mean...I think what you mean is...*	Enables learners to explain and justify their ideas and opinions, and listen and evaluate the opinions of others.
Reflecting on Work	*Select a piece of work from the week – am I proud of it? Why am I proud? What did I do differently? How could I improve this piece of work even more?*	Helps learners evaluate their own learning and identify their areas for development, and enables them to celebrate their successes.

Instructors should be prepared for the fact that the importance of strategies may not immediately resonate with learners. It may take a period of learners questioning why they are doing this before they can fully appreciate the purpose and benefits. This approach to learning could be new to many learners. Ensure that you are giving the time and meaningful reasons to use the strategies that you are introducing in class.

Without knowing *how to do*, we cannot *do* to the best of our abilities. Explicit strategy teaching plays an invaluable part in the empowerment of learners. When learners are taught the tools for success, they can then use them to thrive in the classroom and in their communities.

Reading Strategies: Learner Self-Assessment

Tips for Use

Student reflection of reading strategy use

Increases independence and ownership of learning

Student Name: _____

Check one box for each statement.

My Reading Strategies	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1. I **make predictions** and read to find out if I was right.			
2. I **re-read** the sentences before and after a word I do not know.			
3. I **look quickly** for information without reading everything.			
4. I look for the **main idea** and try to **summarize** the main events in my own words.			
5. I try to **retell** the story in the correct order.			

Which strategies do I want to practice more often?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Tips for Use

Helps instructors track outcomes and units

Improves planning and accountability

Strategy Outcomes Overview – for Instructors

Strategy Outcomes		Units			
		#1	#2	#3	#4
Reading	1. Predicts and checks predictions				
	2. Rereads to increase comprehension				
	3. Scans for information				
	4. Looks for the main idea (and summarizes at adv level)				
	5. Retells a story (in sequence)				
Writing	1. Thinks and talks about topic before writing				
	2. Plans and/or brainstorms ideas				
	3. Puts ideas in order/organizes writing				
	4. Uses topic sentences				
	5. Edits and revises writing				
Language Learning	1. Groups/classifies words according to meaning				
	2. Highlights new vocabulary				
	3. Keeps a record of useful vocabulary				
	4. Asks for help and correction				
	5. Guesses meanings of new words from context (adv only)				
Test-Taking	1. Reviews before the test				
	2. Arrives early and prepared (with pen, pencil, eraser, etc.)				
	3. Looks over whole test before beginning				
	4. Reads instructions carefully				
	5. Checks answers				

Conclusions

This chapter has given an overview of the core strands in an ESL literacy classroom: oral fluency, foundational literacy, reading, writing, and strategies. It has discussed promising practices in teaching these strands, focusing on what to teach in what order, and tips and techniques for teaching. It is important to remember that not all LIFE are at the same level; ESL literacy covers a broad range of abilities, and learners will bring different strengths and needs with them to the classroom. Although the sections of this chapter have generally presented each strand in the order in which things should be taught, remember that learners will start at different places and will take different amounts of time to master skills and strategies and progress to the next level. For a more detailed discussion of each CLB Phase of ESL literacy, from Foundation Phase to Phase III, please see Section Three of this handbook.

Chapter 9 Outline

Chapter

9

Choosing, Adapting, and Designing Materials for LIFE

Objectives

To recognize the importance of appropriate materials in the ESL literacy classroom

To demonstrate what effective materials for ESL literacy look like

To show the advantages and challenges of modifying different kinds of materials

To show the advantages and challenges of using instructor- and learner-created materials

Introduction: Materials in the ESL Literacy Classroom

The term *materials* refers to the tools that are used in a classroom to support learning different skills and strategies. This can mean books (probably what most people traditionally think of when they think of learning materials), hand-outs, worksheets or workbooks, and models of writing, but it can also include manipulatives such as vocabulary words on cardstock or flashcards; scissors, paper, and glue; counters for teaching numeracy; and all kinds of realia (objects from real life, including authentic texts such as letters or flyers). One of the great challenges for the ESL literacy instructor is to find materials that are appropriate for the learners. There are three considerations when choosing materials for the ESL literacy classroom. Materials should be appropriate for:

- ESL learners
- adult learners
- LIFE

Instructors can either find, adapt, or design materials for their learners, and most ESL literacy instructors end up doing all three, with an emphasis on the creation of their own materials. This chapter examines the necessity of modifying materials for the ESL literacy classroom, then looks at a number of sources of materials, examining the benefits and challenges of each source.

What Do Effective ESL Literacy Materials Look Like?

Effective materials for an ESL literacy classroom must take a number of things into consideration in order to provide clear, understandable, level-appropriate supports for learning. ESL literacy materials should:

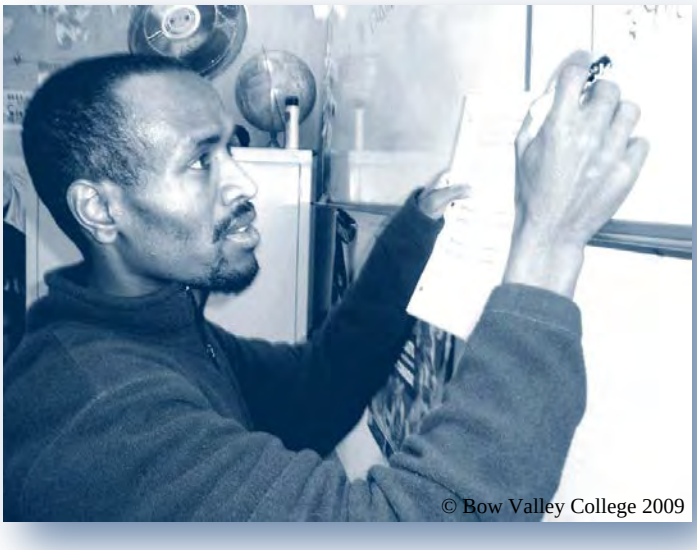
- include clear instructions
- be relevant
- be consistent
- be scaffolded
- recycle and reinforce outcomes and vocabulary
- be built around the strategies used in the classroom environment
- be connected to classroom tasks
- include plenty of white space

- use a large font size, depending on the level of the learners
- in lower levels, use a clear, consistent font, that resembles printing and doesn't have serifs, such as Century Gothic
- be laid out clearly and consistently on the page
- be visual
- use authentic drawings or pictures that are specific and relevant to the topic
- use progressive activities and tasks, building from one competency to the next
- promote access to resources and build independent strategies
- support and develop different strands: listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- be centred on the learners or directed by the learners
- support learner independence as much as possible

Scaffolding and the Need for Modifying Materials for ESL Literacy

One of the most significant terms used in ESL, but most specifically in ESL literacy learning, is *scaffolding*. Scaffolding is the way in which an instructor approaches, organizes, and delivers a lesson; it also forms the underpinning for the creation and use of any material for the classroom. Scaffolding means exactly what it describes: a series of incremental supports for learning, providing opportunities for learners to move towards independence with greater competence, confidence, and the use of strategies. It means providing a system of support for learners as they develop their skills.

Effectively scaffolded materials allow instructors the opportunity to pinpoint and accurately assess an individual student's learning, as the learner begins to transition from dependent to independent learning tasks. Scaffolding allows instructors to monitor the amount of support a learner requires and flags when the need arises to gently remove these supports, allowing learners to develop increased confidence and competency. Scaffolding is directly related to the modification of materials for the ESL



literacy classroom: material is modified to build support – or to scaffold – learning activities in order to empower the learners and increase learning.

The skills, needs, and background experiences of LIFE are always different. This is true no matter how learners are streamed into levels, and in the context of ESL literacy learning today it is especially true because many programs are only able to provide one or two ESL literacy classes at a time, meaning that the classroom contains several levels. The main avenue an instructor has to connect learners to challenges appropriate to their language level is through the integration of modified material into the program and the scaffolded delivery of tasks.

Materials are never the actual focus of an ESL literacy class. Instead they should be the backdrop, and, as a backdrop, allow the learners to concentrate their full attention on the lesson. The instructor and the learners should not have to spend time on the explanation of unknown ambiguities in the materials. Good material support can expose what the learner hasn't experienced or doesn't know. All of this lessens the distractions, making it easier to follow instructions and stay on task. Organization is integral. You need to have a sense of your own instructional direction. Allow for contingency planning. For the learner, interacting with good materials is the first step towards autonomous learning and is highly motivating.

Modifying Materials: Where to Begin

With material, there is a difference between development and modification. Modification allows you the opportunity to tailor your material to your learners (their needs and interests) and to the theme or topic in class. Modification also lets you support the content of the class and your teaching objectives. The development of material – in other words, creating materials from scratch – is similar to modification, but it generally requires a larger time commitment. Designing your own materials can take a long time, but it also allows you complete control over the form and content.

Whatever the motivation is to seek out great materials, remember that they are the supportive piece to your teaching, not in place of your teaching. They serve to reinforce or expose your objectives as the driving force behind content. They add to the overall contextual depth to your lessons. For such a subtle job, they can certainly be time-consuming to create.

When you're considering materials, ask yourself a series of questions:

- What is your thematic direction?
- What is your lesson objective?
- Are you focusing on form or function?

- Are you teaching a particular strategy?
- How can you best meet your objectives?

Once you've picked a piece of material that will work with your lesson, your teaching, your topic, and your learners, you will need to figure out what kind of material it is you're modifying:

- Where did you find the resource?
- Where can you find material, visuals, or realia on this topic?
- How can you ensure that visuals are authentic, relevant, and meaningful to your learners?
- How can you make sure they will support your outcomes and build proficiency?

Once you have the blueprint, you can then begin to look at how to build in scaffolding to best direct your learners on their journey towards increased independence. There are various categories of materials to facilitate this journey and an abundance of resources to choose from. The next sections examine these types of resources, their strengths and challenges, and the ways they can be used, explored, and modified.

Using and Adapting Authentic Materials

What are authentic materials? They are anything that exists in the real world for native speakers of English, including newspapers, flyers, utility bills, letters from the government, or common forms. Depending on the level of the learners, a large amount of modification might be necessary, but the authenticity of the materials should be sustained as much as possible.
It is also important to connect this material to a greater theme within the classroom environment. Connecting authentic materials to the theme in the classroom helps learners to make the transition from classroom learning to a wider picture of what they can do outside the class, as they are connected to real experiences relevant to their lives. Once a learner is able to connect in this way, he or she can tackle the more detailed and cognitively demanding processes involved in learning: the development of language, literacy, and learning strategies.

The modification of authentic material for LIFE requires attention to structure, vocabulary, and theme, as well as the division of the material into isolated, scaffolded chunks. Scaffolding the material involves breaking down the bigger picture into manageable, teachable elements that connect to a set of processes and strategies for the learner to re-use throughout the duration of the unit. This material has to be recycled and repeated.

There are many advantages to using authentic materials in the classroom, but they present a number of challenges as well, especially at lower levels of ESL literacy. Even at the lower

levels, however, authentic materials still need to be considered, although they may need to be completely reconstructed to make them accessible for learning.

Authentic Materials in the Classroom: A Newspaper Exploration

As a guided reading element within the classroom, Phase II/III learners explored their local newspaper, which was connected to the overall unit theme, but which was well beyond their independent reading level. However, the activity was intended to support how to look for information and how to read with greater independence (a newspaper being one type of text with specific formatting, therefore needing different strategies to tackle it). The goal was not to read an entire newspaper, but to practice certain reading strategies.

The first task dissected the newspaper into section headings, and the learners then brainstormed and shared background knowledge by guessing what they thought might be found in each of those sections. Cultural comparisons between their countries and Canada were also explored – are sports the same? Is fashion the same? Students learned previewing strategies and the importance of titles, pictures, captions, and text layout in North American newspapers. Lastly, learners chose sections of the newspaper that were most interesting for a closer examination.

In this activity even the smallest tasks need to be made explicit: holding the newspaper the right way, the direction of reading, what to look for, how the text is formatted (columns compared to pages of written text). These series of tasks were broken down into manageable units of learning and then acted as a springboard into a multitude of activities that integrated the use of the original material. All of this language, these strategies, and all of this structured, scaffolded material connected the learners to the task. It provided a means to interact with resources that were meaningful to them as learners as well as residents and citizens. It supported their interests and curiosity in a way that had manageable outcomes for each individual.

Strengths of Using Authentic Materials

Authentic materials reflect real life in the new country. This is a wonderful advantage to bring into your classroom and make accessible to your learners. Learners know when they are being given something that is authentic and respond to it by making an immediate connection between the material used in class and the context of their own challenges in living in a new culture. The real-life context of the materials motivates learners and demonstrates the value of developing literacy. Choosing authentic materials can also work to support learner needs inside the classroom, as long as they are modified to work with the lessons being taught.

Learners often view authentic materials as less "classroom-like," reporting that these materials help them to adapt to their new country. For some LIFE, this means connecting with a type of material that they were able to function with in their home countries. This is worth noting, as it increases learners' confidence and their feelings of competence as adults.

Authenticity also enriches the delivery of lessons. This works because learners have seen the material before – a phone bill, for example – but even authentic materials that are new to the learners have an advantage, as they provide an opportunity to create meaningful background experience and develop prior knowledge in the classroom before learners encounter these materials in their everyday lives.

The inclusion of authentic material integrates instruction in language with greater cultural understanding, engaging learners in the learning process, because it builds on their ability to seek out elements of materials that they will understand and invest in. For learners, the outcomes are tangible. It may take a lot of support and time to get them to independence; however, they are the first to realize that success. To be able to do something they couldn't previously, and to have the underlying strategies to transfer that learning into a different context, is a motivating success.

Challenges of Using Authentic Materials

There are also a number of challenges in using authentic materials for ESL literacy. Authentic materials can be complicated and difficult for learners to tackle in their original format, so they must be broken down into strategic or linguistic segments. Deciding on these segments and the outcomes of learning can be a lot to adapt and account for. Material geared towards an English-speaking audience can also be difficult to break down and scaffold.

Tips for Using Authentic Materials

Almost everything about authentic materials will need to be adapted before using them in the classroom. Often materials must be considered in smaller chunks of learning that, once assembled, involve completion of the entire piece.

From a linguistic perspective, authentic material can be used, but must be thoroughly modified. Keep the materials as authentic as possible, but modify all language content, including vocabulary and structure.

From a strategic perspective, it's not necessarily about the modification of material as much as the modification of the approach and delivery of the tasks. Use the materials in a way that exposes the strategies needed to accomplish the overall activity. Breaking down an activity into

a series of smaller, interconnected tasks can facilitate the development of process and organization. This means that the instructor will need to:

- provide background information.
- rewrite the material.
- reformat the writing in terms of font style, white space, and font size.
- consider the quantity of material.
- consider the layout on the page.
- consider expectations of tasks.
- be consistent.

Authentic Materials in the Classroom: A Visual Map of Downtown

In a class Foundation Phase learners, one activity involved teaching the learners to get from point A to point B within the downtown core. Maps and explicit sets of written directions were well beyond the reading ability of the learners. So, the instructor supported the map activity, language needs, and learner independence by creating a visual map, with actual photographs of landmarks learners would pass, to reach their destination. Sequential ordering, a checklist, photos, and very basic repeated language cues, as well as practice prior to departure, made it an effective lesson in map reading. The students learned direction vocabulary and had an opportunity to culturally connect with their city.

Using and Adapting Mainstream ESL Materials

Mainstream ESL materials refer to materials that are intended for adult ESL learners with a previous former education: in other words, ESL learners who do not have literacy needs. These materials require that the learners who interact with and use the texts have prior background knowledge and academic skills and strategies. The instructor needs to provide the learners with a bridge in order to be able to effectively interact with these materials. Mainstream ESL materials can be used in higher-level ESL literacy classes, such as Phase III classes, with minor modifications, but when used in lower levels more modifications will be necessary.

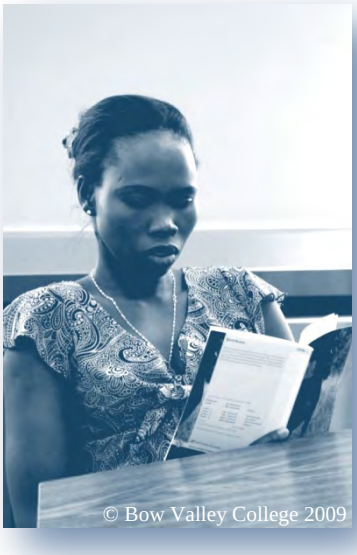
Strengths of Using Mainstream ESL Materials

There are some clear advantages to using mainstream ESL materials in an ESL literacy class. A lot of the ESL-specific material already exposes the global challenges of being new to a culture and the experience of integration, which will resonate with LIFE as well. There is a focus on getting to know the culture of the new country and no background knowledge of the new culture is assumed. These texts are also usually organized thematically and often combine language with function and pragmatic pieces for communication.

Modifications still need to be made to mainstream ESL materials because these materials make assumptions about the level of education and learning strategies that learners bring to class. The modifications needed are usually compartmentalized, such as changing the nature of the questions that accompany a reading, or altering the vocabulary in an exercise.

Challenges of Using Mainstream ESL Materials

In using and adapting mainstream ESL materials, try not to reinvent the wheel. If the materials will work, use them, but remember to recycle vocabulary, strategies, and outcomes, so that learners have an opportunity to practice tasks until they master them. The biggest challenge with mainstream ESL materials is that they are often too complicated or too cluttered (too much on one page, for example), along with issues of font and font size, level of vocabulary, and the content and format of questions. Try revising in terms of format by reducing the clutter, increasing font size, and adding white space. The materials also might not match exactly what you're doing in class; some ideas may have the grammatical element you're looking for but not within the right thematic context, while other times it is the opposite – the topic matches, but the level of grammar or language development doesn't.



One thing to consider is how you want to spend your time in the classroom. Often a great deal of time and a number of questions can be saved by making simple changes in vocabulary. An example of this is an instructor who used a recipe in her class from an American textbook. The recipe called for quarts instead of litres, which led to a long discussion on different measurement systems and a good deal of explanation, all of which could have been avoided with a simple revision.

However, these discussions can provide excellent teaching moments, so it is up to the individual instructor to decide how focused they want the lesson to be.

Tips for Using Mainstream ESL Materials

Mainstream ESL materials generally require less modification than authentic materials, as long as the instructor picks and chooses what to use carefully. The best advice is to select small pieces that work with what you are doing in the classroom, rather than trying to make a pre-packaged unit fit the needs of the learners.

Still, there are some things to keep in mind. When adapting mainstream ESL materials:

- Ensure that the layout is appropriate, including font, font size, and white space.
- Check that the vocabulary matches the level of the learners.
- Break the material into smaller, more manageable pieces.
- Consider using part of an activity: for example a reading text without the accompanying questions, or a vocabulary activity without the attached grammar.

Using and Adapting Adult Literacy Materials

Adult Literacy materials refer to materials designed for Adult Basic Education (ABE). The difference between ABE and ESL literacy is that ABE is designed for native speakers of English who have literacy issues. In today's society, the reality is that many learners in ABE are ESL learners; however, they have advanced oral fluency in English, and the focus of ABE is the development of literacy, rather than literacy and language. Adult literacy materials need little in terms of modification, as they are broken down and scaffolded as much as they can be. For lower levels of ESL literacy, this material is ideal, because it starts with the fundamentals of learning. The modification of these materials may come more into effect when using them for higher ESL literacy levels, where pieces will need to be adapted so they fit more cohesively into the overall learning plan.

Strengths of Using Adult Literacy Materials

Adult literacy material is already structured for use with different levels of literacy learners. The material is modifiable; however, most often it doesn't need to be. Lesson plans or thematic plans sometimes need to be tweaked to accommodate the inclusion and delivery of material specific to

ESL literacy. This tends to work the opposite as with authentic materials, as much of the material in literacy has already been modified for these learners, so it doesn't require as much adaptation, just tweaking for smoother transitions within class and between activities.

Challenges of Using Adult Literacy Materials

There are very few challenges in using adult literacy materials in an ESL literacy classroom as long as you know what to select. One possible challenge is that adult literacy material is designed for native speakers or for speakers with near-native fluency, so the vocabulary and the approach to building vocabulary is different than in ESL literacy. This challenge is fairly easily met through careful selection of materials and slight adaptations.

Another possible challenge is in the purpose of the materials. Many materials for adult literacy are more learning theory-based than thematic, and so it can be difficult to choose what to focus on and develop within the lessons. However, meeting that challenge lies more in the selection of, rather than the modification of, material. The modifications may have to come from the actual overall lesson plan, rather than the material being considered. For example, if an activity revolves around building certain sight words, then it is often easier to change the focus of the lesson to reflect these words (or to select an activity that better matches the lesson plan) rather than change the words in the activity.

Tips for Using Adult Literacy Materials

The main challenge in using adult literacy materials is in selecting activities and materials that are appropriate to the themes and strategies you are developing in the classroom. However, there are often a few subtle differences between adult literacy materials and ESL literacy materials.

When using adult literacy materials:

- Pay attention to vocabulary and how vocabulary is taught: ESL literacy learners will need to learn all vocabulary orally before encountering it in print and will not be able to rely on pronunciation or oral patterns to know when what they've read "sounds right."
- Consider the sight words and how they fit into the themes you are teaching.
- Consider adapting materials by using manipulatives such as flashcards, realia, etc.
- Expose the strategies that are necessary for using the materials and make these explicit to the learners.

Using and Adapting Children's Literacy Materials

Children's literacy materials refer to nearly all materials for children, as they are designed for beginning readers, albeit usually native speakers of English. There is mixed feeling among most ESL literacy instructors regarding how appropriate it is to use children's materials in an adult ESL literacy classroom; some feel that including children's material is demeaning to the intelligence and experience of the adult learners, while others feel that there are ways to incorporate children's material effectively with some levels of modification.

Strengths of Using Children's Literacy Materials

There are a number of advantages to using children's material in ESL literacy classes. Children's materials are designed for beginning readers and already take low levels of literacy into consideration. The length, difficulty level, grammatical structures, and strategies supported are conducive to all literacy learners and the material doesn't overwhelm learners. Children's materials also generally already follow the layout principles for supporting literacy: they use a large, clear font, include lots of white space, and support the text with visuals, so adaptation of the text is minimal.

The materials also break down the fundamentals of literacy as learned from the perspective of native speakers, which adds an element of authenticity in itself with regard to learning. Since authenticity leads to greater learner motivation, this is another clear advantage to these texts. These texts also have the advantage that they can be used authentically in the lives of any learners who have children; a student who learns to read a children's story can take this story home and read it to his or her children, providing an opportunity for immediate return on the investment of learning and a way to connect literacy with something most learners hold very important – their families. There is an added advantage that encouraging learners to read with their children passes literacy learning on to a further generation; the learners' children will also reap the benefits of increased literacy in their homes.

There is another clear strength to children's materials that is not often found in adult materials, whether they are designed for ESL, literacy, or a combination of the two, and that is the focus on the sound and rhythm of the language. Children's materials often target specifics in language

acquisition, including rhymes, adjectives, simple tenses, and basic vocabulary, and often repeat vocabulary and structures. These materials are usually meant to be read aloud and in this way focus on the way English sounds, including pronunciation, cadence, stress, and intonation. They also promote cultural understanding.

Children's materials do not simply refer to books or stories. There are a lot of tactile products that are accessible and easily modifiable for use within an ESL literacy classroom. These tools and manipulatives include dice, card boxes, charts, games, etc. All of these children's resource materials can be used in creative ways. If you make these visual, tangible, and tactile materials a part of the classroom culture, learners won't feel as sensitive to the nature of the resource. Games are an excellent way to build an understanding of the expectations in western culture regarding fair play, turn taking, and following rules, as well as supporting the development of logic.

Challenges of Using Children's Literacy Materials

Content in an ESL literacy class needs to be age-appropriate, authentic, and relevant. This can be difficult to achieve with adult learners and is one of the main concerns in using children's materials in an adult setting. These materials tend to be of moderate interest and low in content, so when using them with adults, it is important to increase the interest level and make the materials relevant and meaningful to the learners. This is the piece that usually requires modification: the buy-in.

Visuals in children's materials often pose a challenge, since they can be childish and may insult adult learners. However, graphics are always modifiable. Insert authentic pictures, where possible, rather than using the original graphics.

The content level should also match the maturity level of the learners. This means that you will need to carefully select materials. Some topics are highly relevant for adult learners, but others, such as a talking turtle, or rabbits playing peekaboo, can be frustrating or insulting. LIFE have life experiences, they have thoughts, they can make connections, and they understand concepts, so it is important to recognize their maturity and meet their needs in the classroom.

Tips for Using Children's Literacy Materials

Using children's materials in an adult setting is challenging. The key is to find the balance between the benefits and the pitfalls. You will need to carefully select what you use, as clearly

not all materials will be relevant or suitable for adult ESL literacy learners. There are some things to consider:

- Use pieces selectively.
- Choose content to fit context and modify the visuals accordingly.
- Focus on structural specifics, cultural elements, or the musicality of language.
- Keep the learning relevant.
- Explicitly show learners that they can use these materials with their own children.

Children's Materials in the Classroom: From Readers to Writers

A unit on identity was greatly supported with the inclusion of a children's book about Canada (*M is for Maple*, an alphabet book about Canada and Canadian culture). The expectation of the task was for learners to be able to make cultural comparisons. These were shared in a rotational activity around the class, where learners visited the four corners of the globe to compare and contrast each other's countries with Canada. The learners shared stereotypes, experiences, fond memories, and famous facts.

The next step was for learners to consider the ABC's of their country and create a book similar to what was read, discovered, and discussed in the children's book. The text and language requirements were simple (with one sentence per page), but the connections made and the concepts surrounding the importance of culture were complex and suitable for the learners at this level (including lots of vocabulary to articulate what they truly felt and thought). The children's book offered a tangible avenue to explore culture and create something of their own, as these learners moved from being readers to authors of their own stories.

Using Instructor-Created Materials

Many ESL literacy instructors spend most of their preparation time creating materials for class. This comes both out of necessity – sometimes it can be extremely difficult to find materials that are suitable and relevant to the needs of the learners – and out of the clear advantages to making something themselves – instructor-created materials are tailor-made to a specific group of learners and can tie in exactly with what has been happening in class, right down to the exact vocabulary and the names of the learners. Often instructors find that modifying materials can take quite a lot of time as well and that it is easier to simply start from scratch.

Strengths of Using Instructor-Created Materials

Instructor-created materials are effective, because they are tailored to the need, level, and thematic context of the classroom. The fact that these materials are made explicitly for a group of learners at a specific time means that they fit seamlessly into the instruction, creating cohesion. They also allow instructors to recycle vocabulary, strategies, and outcomes, and give the instructor a high degree of control over the focus of the lessons.

These materials also often reflect the interest and needs of the learners and can serve as a way of integrating other kinds of materials, which perhaps need significant modification, suggest an idea to develop and deliver, or require further expansion or support. The road to perfect material development never seems to end, but the process itself informs teaching style, affects the underlying rationale behind lessons, and keeps the instructor accountable to objectives set at the beginning of the lesson, class, or semester.

Instructors may have concerns about sharing the materials that they have created with other instructors, but while there are sometimes good reasons to keep materials to oneself, the process of sharing can benefit all involved. We see the ability to share and build on each other's work as a clear strength of instructor-created materials. Instructors have great ideas, and instructor-created material should be shared, presented, and collected whenever possible. Instructors should feel flattered when their material is borrowed and modified to suit a different set of learners in a different classroom environment. When shared, good ideas can often be developed into great ideas, and these benefit all involved: the instructors, who receive professional development and an increased awareness of different approaches; and the learners, who benefit

from material that is constantly being reworked to make it more accessible, interesting, and effective.

Challenges of Using Instructor-Created Materials

The only challenge in creating your own material, is, quite simply, time. Creating material takes a significant amount of time. It can also become infinite. As you teach more and more, you might build up a collection of materials, but often these materials will need to be re-worked for a new set of learners, or else they lose the advantage of being directly relevant to the people in the class and what is being taught. Organizing and filing these masterpieces can also become a bit of a management nightmare. We recommend binders, plastic containers, zip-lock baggies, and lots and lots of paper clips. The question of time is one area where program coordinators can be supportive; in the field of ESL literacy, we are in desperate need of programs that recognize the importance of supporting instructors, in terms of salary, stable work, professional development, and paid time for preparation.

There is some challenge in sharing materials between instructors. One of these challenges is the difficulty of sharing materials with someone who teaches in the level directly before or after yours, and thus someone who has taught or will eventually teach the same group of learners. In this case, modification of the material will be necessary. When modifying someone else's materials, instructors should try to strike a balance between making the appropriate changes and maintaining respect for the original and the original author.

Tips for Using Instructor-Created Materials

The most important considerations in creating your own materials are generating ideas and thinking carefully about what you need to create and why. To get new ideas, keep your eyes and ears open, both inside the classroom and outside of it. Ideas can often come from your everyday life as you encounter different tasks yourself and think about how you might create a similar situation in your classroom. As with any new material, never abandon something if it doesn't work the first time. Revisit it and try again. Critically reflect on what didn't work and try to find a solution. It is important to stay on track: stay current, experiment, be creative, and reflect on the good as well as on the not so good. The outcomes of this reflection should inform approach, organization, preparation, pre-teaching, and the selection of materials for the next go-around.

There are some things to keep in mind when creating your own materials:

- Be consistent with activities, format, and process, so learners can follow expectations and be comfortable with their learning.
- Be open to learner feedback on something that you have developed. Direct feedback and suggestions from learners can be invaluable.
- Remember to recycle and repeat key vocabulary, strategies, and outcomes.
- Make use of the main advantage to instructor-created materials: keep it directly relevant to the learners in the class.
- Remember format, font, font size, white space, and clear visuals.
- Laminate so it can be resued.

Instructor-Created Materials in the Classroom: An Effective Novel Study

At the beginning of a novel study, one Phase III ESL literacy instructor developed a transparent, comprehensive learning package to pre-teach the plot of the overall novel, including the use of lyrics, music, a visual montage, an oral group discussion to activate background knowledge, and a key focus point on different strands (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). It took a lot of work and a lot of time; however, the activities created a virtually seamless transition into the reading of the novel.

Using Learner-Created Materials

Learner-created materials refer to anything that is created by the learners themselves and then used in further lessons. There are clear advantages to the use of learner-created materials in the classroom, both for the learners and the instructor, but instructors should be forewarned: using learner-created materials in the classroom means that the instructor must be on his or her toes during the lesson, prepared to deal with the unforeseen and make the most of teaching moments. Using learner-created materials is recommended for experienced instructors and instructors who are good at improvising and thinking on their feet.

Strengths of Using Learner-Created Materials

Materials made by learners can be connected, meaningful, and fully integrated into lesson objectives. From a time management perspective, using these materials is probably the most highly efficient, interactive, and effective technique there is. The trick is to be highly creative in terms of expected output from learners and to have the ability to think on your feet, making adjustments to activity expectations if and as they arise. Also, lots of pre-teaching is a good idea, as it can capture and identify the need and interest of the learners and set the stage for an effective lesson.

There are a number of advantages to using learner-created material in the classroom. Having learners participate in the process of creating means that they are already learning, retaining, practicing, and reinforcing the material before they begin to work with it. Learners also experience ownership and accountability for their own resources, notes, and material. When using learner-created materials, encourage learners to refer back to what they have made for follow-up assessment, reinforcing the strategies and skills attached to creating material.

Learner-created material can be connected to the creation of a portfolio. Having learners select pieces for their portfolios at the end of each thematic unit supports decision-making, independence, and self-confidence, through the process of selection, rubric input, self-reflection, and sharing their learning with others. Portfolio assessment using learner-created materials makes the process of assessment more effective, transparent, and inclusive. For a further discussion of portfolios, see Chapter Eleven.

Challenges of Using Learner-Created Materials

Using learner-created materials in the classroom is highly challenging. It can sometimes seem tempting, appearing to be easier than creating materials yourself, but using these materials requires far more work and input from the instructor than working with any other kind of materials.

The greatest challenge in using learner-created materials, however, comes during the creation process itself, and that is dealing with the element of surprise. Learners do not always interpret instructions the way that the instructor intends them to be interpreted. Sometimes this is a wonderful thing; learners can bring an entirely different understanding of the world with them to the classroom, which can spark discussion, comparison, and analysis, as well as a lot of joy and laughter. It does mean that the instructor needs to be open to an entirely different set of outcomes than planned. Using learner-created materials effectively requires the ability to deal with change and quickly adjust plans.

This element of surprise stresses the importance of pre-teaching. Making expectations for outcomes explicit is integral to learner-centred success. Model a sample product. Often the idea of what constitutes good work is nebulous to the learners. Show them a sample of something effective, so they know what to work towards. Using models takes the mystery out of instructor expectations, which are shaped by culture and background. Assumptions – both by the instructor about the learners and by the learners about the instructor – are often misguided. During the process of using learner-created materials, the instructor's assumptions about what is self-explanatory and how something should be interpreted will be exposed and challenged.

Tips for Using Learner-Created Materials

If you are interested in using learner-created materials in your classroom, begin slowly, both for yourself and for the learners. Start with a small project and reflect on the process, examining what went well and what could be improved. Most of all, stay focused and flexible in the classroom. There are some things to keep in mind:

- Model the task for the learners.
- Show a sample piece in order to clarify your expectations.
- Explain to the learners why they are doing this activity.
- Make the instructions transparent.
- Scaffold the activities, working in small pieces toward a polished final copy.

Learner-Created Materials in the Classroom: A Learner Teaches Herself to Remember

As support for vocabulary development, learners often track and record vocabulary lists, which can be used for spelling tests or as a tool for copying or writing. However in order to retain new vocabulary, learners must find ways of connecting the words to something meaningful and useful in their own lives. One learner created a vocabulary dictionary based on personal relevance and connections to her life, including references she could understand, pictures cut out from magazines, and other things that had value for her. This literature, created for her own use, retention, reference, and learning, was a tribute to the power behind learner-created material.

Ideas for Materials

Authentic Materials
grocery store flyers
phone bills
newspapers

Mainstream ESL Materials
Word by Word Basic (Longman)
Very Easy True Stories (Longman)
Basic Reading Power (Longman)

Instructor-Created Materials
flashcards
forms
learner photo stories

Children's Literacy Materials
Scholastic First Picture Dictionary (Scholastic)
My Red Book (Osu Children's Library)
M is for Maple (Sleeping Bear)

Learner-Created Materials
LEA stories
spelling dictionaries
dialogue journals

Adult Literacy Materials
Grass Roots Readers (Grass Roots)
Milestones in Reading (Curriculum Associates)
Kitchen Math (Grass Roots)

ESL Literacy Materials
First Words in English (Linmore)
ESL Literacy (Longman)
First Class Reader! (Alta)
This Really Works: Survival English (Tutorial Services of Ontario)
This Really Works: Basic Numeracy 2 (Tutorial Services of Ontario)

Suggested Materials for Each ESL Literacy Phase

Foundation Phase	
Instructor-Created/Found	Published/Commercially Available Materials
flashcards and flashcard pocket charts simple forms with first name, last name, telephone number, and address worksheets for copying and for matching capital and small letters word searches and cloze exercises bingo games realia such as flyers, food containers, etc. magazines and poster board to make posters and collages	*Very Easy True Stories* (Longman) picture dictionary magnetic ABC boards 4 to 9 piece jigsaw puzzles dice, board games (with ABCs or simple pictures) maps
Phase I	
Instructor-Created/Found	Published/Commercially Available Materials
flashcards and flashcard pocket charts stories worksheets simple forms scaffolded writing materials	*English Express* (www.englishexpress.ca) *Grass Roots Readers* (Grass Roots Press, Edmonton Alberta) *Gatehouse Books* (Gatehouse Media, Manchester, England) *The Page Turners Collection* (PRACE, Australia) *Adult Phonics Stories* (Multi-Cultural Educational Services: www.mcedservices.com) maps

Phase II	
Instructor-Created/Found	Published/Commercially Available Materials
flashcards and flashcard pocket charts ads, forms, and notices stories simple crossword puzzles games	*A Canadian Conversation Book: English in Everyday Life* (Prentice Hall) *Look again: Pictures for Language Development and Life Skills* (Alta) *Picture Stories*: *Language and Literacy Activities for Beginners* and *More Picture Stories: Language and Problem-Posing Activities for Beginners* (Longman) *All New Very Easy True Stories, Easy True Stories,* and *More True Stories* (Longman) *Amazing Canadian Newspaper Stories* (Prentice Hall) maps
Phase III	
Instructor-Created/Found	Published/Commercially Available Materials
sample writing models stories forms crossword puzzles, word searches, and codes	*Basic Reading Power, Reading Power, More Reading Power, Advanced Reading Power* (Longman) *Canadian Concepts 3-5* (Prentice Hall) *Milestones in Reading B-D* (Curriculum Associates) *What a Life!* and *What a World!* series (Longman) *Penguin Easy Readers,* Levels 3-5 (Penguin) maps

Conclusions

Materials provide the backdrop and the backbone to classroom instruction; they are the tools that instructors use for teaching and learners use for learning. It is the instructor's responsibility to find the right tools to make this learning effective and productive, challenging enough to push learners to go further, yet supported enough so that learners can reach their goals, develop increasing confidence and independence, and have an opportunity to learn how to learn.

There are a number of different ways that instructors can find good materials for an ESL literacy classroom. There are some commercially produced ESL literacy materials available, but not many. Most instructors find that they need to assemble a collection of materials themselves, creating some things from scratch and adapting and modifying other things to make them suitable. Instructors might consider using authentic materials, mainstream ESL materials, adult literacy materials, children's literacy materials, instructor-created materials, and learner-created materials. Each of these sources come with advantages and challenges. No matter which kind of materials an instructor chooses (or more likely, which kinds of materials), one thing is certain: effective ESL literacy instructors are masters at creating and adapting materials for their learners.

Chapter 10 Outline

Introduction: What is Theme Teaching?

Identifying Thematic Units for Study

The Importance of Theme Teaching

Scaffolding

Recycling

Spiralling

Planning for Thematic Teaching

Developing Project-Based Units of Study

Conclusions

Chapter

10

Developing Theme Units and Projects

Objectives

To recognize the importance of theme teaching in ESL literacy

To emphasize the need for involving learners in the selection and development of themes

To demonstrate the value of scaffolding, recycling, and spiralling

To show one way of planning a thematic unit

To introduce project-based learning

Introduction: What is Theme Teaching?

Theme teaching is the organized grouping of materials, learning activities, and vocabulary around a common subject matter. The power of theme teaching lies in its ability to connect learners to their various communities (classroom, home, workplace, place of worship, neighbourhood, or larger cultural community), empower them with the language and skills to be successful within these communities, and ultimately enable them to transform themselves to reach their goals.

The key to connecting, empowering, and transforming learners is the selection of meaningful and relevant thematic units of study, such as going shopping, personal banking, and health (incorporating trips to the family doctor or dentist). Effective educators have long recognized that when learners perceive content as helpful, their interest peaks and they are energized.

It is critical that instructors recognize the talents, experience, and knowledge of all learners, and, while that is not the focus of this chapter, it is worth reinforcing. Instructors need to create different opportunities for learners to contribute (oral, visual, computer-based, or written methods) and also ensure that brainstorming and discussion are part of every session. Instructors will always be surprised to see what learners bring to the table, and must be prepared to tap into that knowledge.

To foster a successful learning environment, learners must feel that they are able to share what they know. Activities that make comparisons between home countries and new communities are rich with opportunities for learners to showcase knowledge. All learners are experts on "home" and all learners have experiences of "new," so effective instruction should allow for talk about the familiar in preparation to talk, share, and write about the less well-known. As for the unfamiliar, and determining curriculum content, the starting point of this process is to involve learners in shaping the thematic units of study.

Identifying Thematic Units for Study

ESL literacy instruction empowers learners. All learners arrive in the classroom with personal goals. These goals can range from being able to understand and communicate with people at the supermarket, the bank, the doctors' office, or their child's school, through to being able to complete high school upgrading and move on to career programs or further study. Being able to understand spoken and written language and communicate ideas orally and in writing enables learners to take greater ownership of their current lives and the future they envision for themselves. There is, therefore, an onus on instructors to build real-life content into curriculum.

Groups of learners differ tremendously, even within a single setting over a period of time, and therefore it is difficult for an instructor to accurately predict what will be meaningful to learners before meeting them, although certain thematic units are generally universally relevant, such as money, health, or housing. It is important for instructors to work with learners to identify the pertinent issues of their lives, communities, and workplaces and use these themes as the foundation of curriculum (Auerbach, 1992). There are many ways to facilitate the selection of these themes, from the choosing of drawings or photographs of real life scenarios, through to the discussion of areas where learners would like to expand their vocabulary and improve their skills. Common themes of study include units centered around: employment, health, banking and personal finance, shopping, the environment, and cultural customs. For further information on learner needs assessments, please see Chapter Two.

Remember that theme units are effective because they are relevant to the learners; if the theme is irrelevant, then it loses its key advantage: the ability to motivate learners. In order to create relevant themes, an instructor must be aware of cultural as well as individual differences in the classroom, and pay particular attention to the specific learners sitting in the room. For example, animals may be a highly relevant theme to many LIFE, while pets may not. However, it's important not to get trapped into stereotypes; the best way to avoid stereotypes is to view learners as individuals and listen to their particular needs and interests.

Themes to Consider
Shopping
The Environment
Money, Banking, or Credit Cards
Food
Canadian History
Other Cultures
Housing
Family
Medical Care
Children in Canada
The Law
Rights and Responsibilities
Employment

The familiarity and commonality of these themes among the lives of learners encourages participation and provides opportunities for learners to be experts. Participatory curriculum development is an investment at the beginning of a period of study ensures that learners will "buy in," as what they are about to study and learn has value to them. Through participatory curriculum development,

learners are sent a message that is critical to their adaptation to western culture and their development of literacy: their voices, thoughts, opinions, and needs have value. For more information on the participatory approach, please see Chapters Three and Seven.

The Importance of Theme Teaching

Theme teaching allows learners to develop and build knowledge and understanding and to practice and repeat skills to secure learning. It also provides opportunities to reflect on progress. Theme teaching is important because it provides real-life contexts in which to deliver specific outcomes in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and life skills. By changing thematic units within a period of study, instructors can recycle outcomes in a fresh context. As outcomes are recycled and learners have repeated contact with information and skills, they produce work of greater complexity and accuracy.

Theme teaching allows instructors to use three key strategies: scaffolding, recycling, and spiralling. This book is not suggesting that each is a technique followed in isolation, but rather that all three are necessary to set learners up for success (Leong & Collins, 2007). In the sections that follow, overlaps between the three techniques in daily teaching practice will become apparent.

Scaffolding

As the name suggests, scaffolding is quite literally giving structure to support knowledge and understanding as it develops. When new information is introduced to learners, they will need instructor support to work with the material to reach an outcome. Over time, the instructor provides fewer scaffolds and the learners produce work that is more involved and do so more independently.

For example, consider that an instructor is beginning a new thematic unit concerning public transportation. Ultimately, the instructor wants learners to write advice for newcomers to the city – helpful things that they should be aware of (that the learners wish someone had told them upon arrival). The final outcome may be writing sentences with imperative verbs, but in order to reach this outcome, the activities need to be scaffolded.

The instructor starts with a brainstorm around a series of images and objects (tickets, timetables, coins) and elicits vocabulary from learners. Depending on the level, this could be English vocabulary, or words in their first language that are phonetically transcribed by the instructor and then translated into English alongside. The instructor asks if the images could be grouped

together or ordered in a sequence. The instructor collects the resulting information for display in the classroom and for use during subsequent teaching and learning sessions. This starting point and information may be referred to by learners throughout the unit as they recycle and use the new language (see "Recycling").

A series of potential activities to reach this outcome has been suggested in the following table. With each of these successive activities, the instructor is providing the support necessary for learners to take new steps. With scaffolding, understanding is built in supported steps, so that learners have the greatest chance of success and the least chance of feeling panicked or unprepared. As the vocabulary and content of the theme becomes more familiar, learner understanding and confidence grows. The key to building familiarity is recycling.

Sample Scaffolded Lesson: Public Transportation

Outcome: Write five pieces of advice on using public transportation.

Class 1

- Brainstorm vocabulary (immediately and prominently display for ease of reference).
- Canvass learners for stories of experience (positive and challenging).
- Invite learners to compare transportation here with transportation in learners' home countries.
- Conversation pairs: learners share a transportation experience with one another, using the brainstorm results to recycle new vocabulary. Model with a volunteer.
- Learners copy new vocabulary into a unit dictionary and glue in a corresponding image.

Class 2

- Vocabulary crossword
- True or false questions using objects and brainstorm results from the previous lesson (e.g. [Hold up a bus ticket] "True or false? I need to give this to the bus driver?")
- Picture stories: distribute photos of people using public transport. Model Q and A: "What is she doing?" "She is paying the driver." Learners orally describe each scenario and take turns asking questions and answering.

Class 3

- Use pictures from the previous session in cloze sentence exercises. "She has a _____in her hand."
- Vocabulary bingo

Class 4

- Spelling test
- Distribute the pictures again with a series of questions underneath: "What is he doing?", "What is she looking for?", "Where is she sitting?". Learners write their own sentences using the previous day's cloze exercises as a point of reference.

Class 5

- Introduce the final product: to write advice for newcomers to the city.
- Distribute a brainstorming template to learners with the word *advice* in the centre.
- Learners record five pieces of information that newcomers should know (in words, in pictures) and are encouraged to refer to their work from previous sessions as a starting point.

Recycling

The positive benefits of repeated practice (recycling) when learning new information is that learners build familiarity, understanding, and confidence. As such, recycling forms an essential part of theme teaching. Learners require time to practice skills in order to successfully achieve their goals.

In the scaffolded sessions above, the recycling of vocabulary, implicit grammar points, and scenarios occurs in every session. The overriding theme allows learners to use material in similar but slightly different contexts. Brain research demonstrates that repeated contact allows learners many opportunities for their own learning moments – to take new material and use it successfully and, more importantly, with meaning for them (Sousa, 2006).

Recycling alone is not enough to guarantee learning. Formative assessment is crucial if instructors are to establish whether new content is understood or just memorized. For example, asking learners at the bottom of their spelling test to select two vocabulary words and use them in sentences in their own words will quickly demonstrate their level of understanding. To be transformative, content must be understood, not just memorized by rote. Many numeracy learners who learned their times tables by rote may know that 4 x 6 = 24, but not all will understand that multiplication is a quick way to perform repeated addition, can be done in any order to achieve the same product, or that 4 groups of six equals 24. Just because something is repeated doesn't mean that it is understood.

Having a central theme for the session's activities provides many opportunities to reuse, reinforce, and recycle the previous sessions' learning. In order to avoid over-repetition or reduce learner motivation, with each successive activity the instructor's expectations need to be higher and the challenge for learners increased.

Spiralling

The name spiralling suggests a cyclic, circular process and to some extent this is true in teaching as well. Imagine a tornado, with the smaller rotations happening at the bottom and the wider rotations or spirals happening at the top. With spiralling, instructors return to content that has already been delivered and understood, but upon each return, more information is included, and the learners are pushed a little bit further so that the extent of their understanding is greater.

While recycling and spiralling may seem to be very similar, a key difference between them is the period of time over which they occur. Spiralling is a longer-term endeavour (over the course of a semester, or over the course of several semesters) where outcomes are revisited. An outcome that reads "Write simple, short texts" cannot be achieved in the space of a week. Instead, it will

come up many times within a theme unit and then appear again in the next theme unit of study. The theme will be different and relevant, so learner motivation should remain high. Additionally, learners will recognize the outcome, will be developing a growing number of strategies to meet the outcome, and will have greater success meeting the outcome with each spiralled re-introduction.

Planning for Thematic Teaching

Begin planning theme units of study by conducting a needs assessment of your learners and involving them in the curriculum process. Who are they? What are their common needs? What do they need to help them be successful in their various communities? What do they want to learn?

Once the assessments and discussions have taken place, outcomes need to be decided upon. Ask "What do I want the learners to be able to do when the theme is introduced and as the theme is developed, and what should the final outcome or product be?" The outcomes may be specific to the program, or be taken from documents like the CLB Literacy Document, but will be similar across all of the themes that are taught – providing essential opportunities for scaffolding, recycling, and spiralling. At the end of a theme unit, learners should reflect on their work and the progress that they have made since the introduction of the new theme.

Sample Theme Unit

In this theme unit, learners explore cause and effect on the environment, both locally and globally. Learners write sentences and make a presentation on the issue of their choice. The unit concludes with a longer written text about an environmental issue that the learners feel is important.

This unit is appropriate for learners in Phase II Developing. It should take about two weeks of full-time classes to complete the unit. Note the level of scaffolding and recycling in this unit plan.

Sample Theme Unit Plan: The Environment

Introducing the Theme: Building Environmental Vocabulary

Reading & Writing Outcomes:

- read and respond to short, simple texts
- write sentences to express an opinion

Speaking & Listening Outcomes:

- give brief descriptions

Strategic/Life Skills Outcomes:

- use the internet to find information

Numeracy Outcomes:

- work with positive and negative integers (temperature)

Brief Lesson Descriptions

1. Create word wall of vocabulary – add/refer to it throughout unit.
2. Read, discuss, and compare various short texts on the environment.
3. Reuse vocabulary to write sentences about a significant environmental issue.
4. Nature task photo journal: rivers, buildings, dumpsters, etc.

Developing the Theme: Giving a Short Presentation

Reading & Writing Outcomes:

- read simple short articles and identify main ideas
- write and deliver a two-minute presentation

Speaking & Listening Outcomes:

- express dissatisfaction

Strategic/Life Skills Outcomes:

- create documents on the computer

Numeracy Outcomes:

- problem solving with money (recycling, bottle depot, bottle drives to raise charitable funds)

Brief Lesson Descriptions

1. Discuss local and global issues: causes and effects.
2. Read and answer questions from articles related to environment.
3. Teach interview language/create interview template.
4. Discuss: Which environmental issue is the most serious? Why? What action can we take?
5. Reuse vocabulary for written text on results of discussion.
6. Create tri-fold board or poster about environmental issue to assist in presentation.
7. Reuse vocabulary for group presentation: Our Environment.

Final Product: Writing a Simple Short Text	
Reading & Writing Outcomes: • write simple short texts (descriptions; articles) **Speaking & Listening Outcomes:** • understand factual detail in oral texts	**Brief Lesson Descriptions** 1. Review/practice unit vocabulary and grammar with crosswords, quizzes, etc. 2. Reuse vocabulary to write: _____ is an important issue because _____. 3. Refer back to previous work to write a personal response/action plan related to a specific environmental issue.
Tools	
New Vocabulary & Concepts • environmental vocabulary • environmental issues • expressing an opinion • giving reasons • capturing ideas with photography: photographing environmental issues • measuring temperature • giving a group presentation	**Language Structures** • _____ is an important issue because _____.
Resources and Materials • thermometer • short appropriate texts on the environment • internet access • materials for a presentation: tri-fold or poster board	
Assessment The learners are assessed throughout the unit in their abilities to meet the outcomes. Where suitable, they can choose one or two tasks to be included in their portfolios. For further information on portfolios, please see Chapter Eleven.	

Developing Project-Based Units of Study

Theme unit teaching also presents fantastic opportunities for collaborative group efforts. While individual skill development is important, it would be unwise to overlook the positive learning and development opportunities afforded by group project-based work. After all, problem solving, debate, and teamwork have a place in all of the communities to which LIFE belong. Project-based learning provides opportunities for learners to develop additional skill sets that will also empower them to make changes.

If the theme being studied is health care, a group project-based activity could centre around a multi-media presentation on how to avoid getting a cold or the flu. At the end of the project, small groups can present a computer-based slideshow to the larger group, detailing important information to consider and be aware of when opening a personal bank account. After the presentation, the group would reflect on successes and opportunities for development.

The project itself could have a number of group work-related outcomes that reflect, or contribute towards, the outcomes of the program.

For example:

- demonstrating active listening skills
- sharing ideas and opinions
- managing time effectively
- working with others
- using technology
- integrating life skills with academic learning

Additionally, and importantly, projects give learners alternative opportunities to showcase skills and knowledge. This is crucial in building self-esteem and encouraging participation towards the program as a whole. One learner may bring a raft of technical expertise while another may have a natural talent for public speaking. Project-based work provides further opportunities to build communities within classrooms.

Conclusions

Theme-based teaching allows instructors to give meaning and relevance to material taught in the class. Vocabulary becomes not just vocabulary, but the necessary tools to talk about something important; a writing task is not simply an assignment but a skill that can be taken and used in the community. The pay-off for thematic teaching is motivation: learners are hooked into learning because they value what they are being taught. Theme-based teaching also has a number of advantages for the instructor. It allows instructors to scaffold, recycle, and spiral outcomes and vocabulary, giving learners opportunities to develop their skills as they grow increasingly independent.

Chapter 11 Outline

Introduction: The General Definition of Assessment

Summative Assessment

Formative Assessment

Goal Setting and Self-Assessment

Checklists

Portfolios: Collect, Select, Reflect

Working Portfolios

Showcase Portfolios

Learner-Led Conferences

Strategies for Using Portfolios in the Classroom

Portfolios: Challenges

Portfolios: Tools

Conclusions

Chapter

11

Assessment

Objectives

To demonstrate the difference between summative and formative assessment

To recognize the advantages and disadvantages of each form of assessment in the classroom

To show the importance of goal setting and self-assessment for LIFE

To read about checklists and how they clarify expectations

To discuss the use, advantages, and challenges of working and showcase portfolios

Introduction: The General Definition of Assessment

The meaning of assessment has changed over the years and is now defined in fluid and dynamic ways. According to Tom Angelo (1995), assessment is "an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning." Assessment or outcomes assessment should allow instructors to evaluate curriculum, and make improvements when necessary, and evaluate effects of changes made. Burt and Keenan (1996) state that assessment in Adult Basic Education and ESL is used "to place learners in appropriate instructional levels, to measure their ongoing progress, to qualify them to enroll in academic or job training programs, to verify program effectiveness and to demonstrate learner gains in order to justify continued funding for a program." The North Vancouver School District (2004) defines assessment as "the systematic process of gathering information about learners' learning." What we can understand from these definitions is that, ideally, all assessment should help us to become better instructors and our learners to become better learners.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessments are used in classrooms for a number of different reasons. They are given to determine what a learner knows or doesn't know at a particular point in time. They are also given to report to funders, test effectiveness of programs, figure out gaps in programming, and place learners into programs or levels within programs. They are important in an outcome-based program; many outcome-based programs develop entry and exit tools (a form of summative assessment) for their programs, if not for specific levels or classes. Summative assessments are for the most part standardized, which gives a baseline to be measured against.

According to Wrigley (1992), standardized tests have certain advantages: they are cost-effective, their validity and scoring reliability have been tested, they are accepted by funders in the documentation of learning and program accountability, they provide program comparisons, and they give learners a sense of what they have learned compared with other learners in their program. Advocates of summative assessment argue that standardized tests in literacy and numeracy provide adult learners with a clear and reliable measure of their achievements and skills.

Examples of summative assessments include:

- provincial assessments
- end of unit tests
- end of semester exams
- report card grades

- benchmark assessments
- CLB literacy assessment tools
- program entry/exit tools

However, there are a number of shortcomings in the use of standardized tests in an ESL literacy classroom. As Wrigley (1992, 1998) points out:

- The social contexts of literacy are ignored in standardized tests.
- The focus is on paper and pen, and not on what learners are able to do in real life.
- Language, literacy, and culture are not treated distinctly, and therefore we are not able to understand what part of the question a learner may be having trouble with.
- The tests fail to show the literacy skills that learners have acquired in their mother tongue, treating English as the only language "that counts" (Macias 1990).
- They reduce the complexity of language and literacy learning to a set of skills.
- They don't discriminate well at the lower end of literacy achievement, failing to reflect experience with environmental print or provide information on the different levels of "initial literacy," such as being able to write names of one's children but not those of strangers.

Overall, summative assessment provides information about whether or not programming, curriculum, and classroom instructors teach what is supposed to be taught. It represents a summary of what the learner has learned. Summative assessment does not inform day-to-day teaching but provides a larger snapshot of what happens at a program level.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is part of the instructional process, and formative assessments are conducted throughout the year or period of instruction. Formative assessments are used to monitor learner progress and provide feedback so learners know what steps they need to take to meet the objectives of their studies. This type of assessment updates instructors and learners about what learners understand so that adjustments can be made in the instructional process. Learners are involved in formative assessment, which ensures that assessments are meaningful and effective. An important key in effective formative assessment is that feedback is immediate and descriptive. Learners need to know what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how they can make appropriate changes to meet expectations. It is important for learners and instructors to

know what the learners' next steps are, and what they can do to achieve them. Formative assessment ensures that learners are engaged in the learning process, because it requires self-reflection, collaboration with instructors and peers, and a learner voice in creating classroom community. Black and Williams (1998a) in Harlen (2003) indicate that there are compelling research results stating that using formative assessment may be the most significant single factor in raising the academic achievement of all learners – and especially that of lower-achieving learners (p.7).

There are many different types of formative assessment; two highly effective types of formative assessment in the ESL literacy classroom are portfolios and self-assessment, both of which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Examples of formative assessments include:

- surveys
- interviews
- checklists
- observation (of learners by instructors)
- instructor-developed tests
- learner self-assessment
- portfolios
- learner led conferences
- anecdotes
- Q and A sessions
- peer assessment
- goal setting

Immediate feedback is critical in making sure that formative assessment is effective. Feedback from instructors and peers allows learners to understand where the gaps in their learning are. Specific, targeted feedback gives learners a place to start to make adjustments in how or what they learn. It gives them a starting point for immediate and future conversations about their own learning.

Goal Setting and Self-Assessment

Goal setting and self-assessment are invaluable for Learners with Interrupted Formal Education. Being able to set realistic goals, monitor progress, and celebrate success is vital for learners to be engaged in and focused on their learning. Self-monitoring, reflection, and goal setting provide learners with skills that they can transfer beyond the classroom and into their everyday lives. Goal setting and self-assessment lead to the development of new ideas, new ways of looking at the world, and a better understanding of how an individual works in connection to other things, whether it be ideas, people, institutions, employment, or their own families.

Goal setting with learners can be challenging because sometimes the person's long-term goal is very far away. When a person enters a program with a long-term goal of being, for example, a Health Care Aide, it may take years to achieve the goal. It is not the instructor's role to decide which goals are achievable for which learners, but instructors can be invaluable in helping learners plan the process. In order to help learners understand short- and long-term goals, the Bridge Program at Bow Valley College has created an opportunity for learners to meet with an advisor and instructors to talk about short- and long-term goals. This gives the advisor and the learner a moment to consider ways to achieve the goal.

Goal setting and self-assessment lead to the development of new ideas, new ways of looking at the world, and a better understanding of how an individual works in connection to other things, whether it be ideas, people, institutions, employment, or their own families.

Visual representations are used so the learner is able to see where the starting and end-point are, and then together the learner and the advisor are able to collaborate to consider some short- and medium-term goals. It has been the experience of the Bridge Program that learners meet with more success when they focus on short-term goals as a means to achieving the later goal. The Bridge Program sees the value of goal setting, self-assessment, and reflection as a means to internalize the process of learning, and as such, the entire program incorporates goal setting and self-reflection. This explicit practice allows learners to become familiar with expectations and try out self-reflection in different environments. It is important to note that goal setting is a highly supported activity, because learners may need help to understand what short-term goals are and what steps are involved in achieving them. They may need help accessing community or other educational supports. It may take time to conceptualize how to achieve their goals and manage their time well.

While learners can set long-term educational or life goals, they can also set goals about specific areas of their language learning. At the beginning of a semester, it is worthwhile to have learners set language or learning goals. Have them come up with some goals that they can record. If they are unable to do this, you can record their goals for them. Instructors should check in with learners at a mid-point to see how successful the learner has been at moving towards success.

This is a perfect opportunity to have learners reflect on the process of setting and meeting their goals. Self-reflection in the goal setting process is key in moving towards independent learning. When learners are able to articulate what the process has been like for them, whether they have been successful or not in moving towards their goal, they have been successful in talking about their learning. When learners can talk about their learning in a reflective, constructive way, they are learning skills that can be transferred beyond the classroom and can help them be successful in life and learning.

Valdez Pierce (2002) points out that self-assessment is essential in teaching learners how to manage their learning, use learning strategies, and reflect on achieving language and learning goals. The focus of self-assessment is on producing learners who can move from supported learning to independent learning and become lifelong learners. Self-assessment is also key in motivating learners to continue learning and building self-confidence in their ability to learn.

Portfolios and self-assessment may seem particularly challenging at lower levels of ESL literacy; however, they are still possible to do and are still an excellent idea. Teaching learners to self-reflect (and even to understand the concept of assessment) cannot begin too early; learners who are aware of self-reflection at the earliest levels will find it easier to build on these skills as they move through the levels of ESL literacy. How to implement portfolios and self-assessment in the lowest levels therefore becomes the question. The most important thing for the instructor to keep in mind is that the language must be accessible and understandable to the learners. A good example of language that works well with low levels of ESL literacy is "I can" statements. An "I can" statement lists a very specific task or skill, such as "I can copy my name" or "I can say my address." A learner can (with significant support from the instructor) complete a series of "I can" statements at the beginning of a class, unit, or level, and then again at the end. This will demonstrate to the learners what they have achieved in real terms: it is now possible for them to demonstrate a new skill. A goal setting checklist is a good tool to help learners identify future goals and understand the steps involved in getting there.

Outcomes Checklist: Phase I Initial Reading and Writ

Tips for Use

- Lower-level learners can also participate in self-reflection
- Makes outcomes explicit
- Written in language accessible to learners

Reading

- ☐ I can find my name.
- ☐ I can find my address.
- ☐ I know the letters of the alphabet.
- ☐ I can read simple sentences.
- ☐ I can read question words.

Writing

- ☐ I can copy my name.
- ☐ I can copy from the board.
- ☐ I can write my name.
- ☐ I can write on the line.
- ☐ I can write my telephone number.

Sample Goal Setting Checklist

Goal: I want to complete the Health Care Aide program at

Tips for Use

Helps learner see the steps in reaching a long-term goal

Shifts focus from the long-term goal onto the next step

Steps to Goal:		**Times:**
Think about your career goals. What do you need to do to reach your goal?		All the time
1. Study ESL literacy at Bow Valley College		4 semesters
2. Do Basic Education Levels 4 and 5 at Bow Valley College		3 semesters
3. Complete grade 10 English and grade 10 math		2 semesters
4. Enter Health Care Aide program at Bow Valley College		1 semester

Short Term Goals

Name: _____

Tips for Use

- Can be filled in every week
- Helps learners set and achieve short-term goals
- Focuses on progress

Learning	My Goal
Reading	
Writing	
Strategies	
Life Skills	
Math	

Student: _____

Instructor: _____

Self-Evaluation

College Readiness

Tips for Use

Good for learners transitioning to further education

Allows self-reflection

Makes expectations explicit

Respect listen carefully to others • let one person talk at a time • do not disrupt class • keep the classroom tidy • treat everyone with respect	**Needs Improvement**		
	My suggestion for change:		
Responsibility • know my schedule • keep track of my stuff • do my homework • hand in assignments on time • take initiative to get missed work • take initiative to communicate with staff about problems	**Needs Improvement**	**Satisfactory**	**Successful!**
	My suggestion for change:		
Participation • attend class regularly • am on time for class • am ready to work in class • ask questions • share ideas • listen carefully	**Needs Improvement**	**Satisfactory**	**Successful!**
	My suggestion for change:		

Checklists and Rubrics

Checklists and rubrics can play an important role in assessment for a number of reasons. As Leong & Collins (2007) point out, informal assessments are often used by instructors to establish whether learners understand what they are learning or if they are challenged enough (p. 144). Burke (2005) refers to observation checklists "as a way to monitor specific skills, behaviours or dispositions of individual learners or all of the learners in the class" (p. 148). Using observation checklists gives instructors an opportunity to evaluate what is happening in the class on an ongoing basis and room to modify instruction when required.
Checklists and rubrics are very similar; checklists are exactly what they sound like, a list of requirements for a task (or class). Rubrics provide several possibilities for each requirement and generally explain the conditions required for achieving full marks on a requirement (for example, in order to get full marks the learner must…).

The use of checklists and rubrics in and for instruction should always be explicit. The instructor should know what a checklist or a rubric is and why it is being used. The language in the checklists and rubrics should be taught to the learners, for example, to "have a positive attitude in the classroom." All of the examples on the checklists and rubrics should be related to the expectations of the program or classroom that the instructor is in. There is no value in assessing something that the learner isn't aware of. Additionally, level-appropriate checklists and rubrics are critical in making sure that both instructors and learners get value from the experience. This explicit approach to the sharing of assessment criteria is especially important for LIFE because it gives learners the chance to understand what the expectation is with the aid of visuals (a checklist or previous examples of good work), simplified language, and up-front explanations.

Checklists and rubrics can be used to assess learners' needs and help them create goals for their own learning as well as to help learners to organize their work, keep track of their learning, and to see what areas they have yet to focus on. Using a checklist or a rubric gives instructors and learners an opportunity to talk about learning. Once an instructor has filled out a checklist or a rubric, he or she then discusses the findings with the learner. This provides an opportunity to talk about learning in the "big picture" while looking at specific areas of learning.

It is important to consider how and what you, as the instructor, will use when you are assessing a learner's work. Guskey (2001) in Burke (2005) believes that instructors need to organize grading criteria into three types: product, process, and progress.

- **Product criteria** describe what learners know and are able to do at a particular point in time. Instructors use product criteria to grade final products such as reports, projects, portfolios, and performances.
- **Process criteria** describe how learners achieved the final product. Instructors consider learner effort, class behaviour, work habits, daily work, regular quizzes, homework, class participation, punctuality of assignments, or attendance.
- **Progress criteria** describe how much the learners actually gain from their learning experiences. This might include learning gain, improvement grading, value-added grading, and educational growth. Progress criteria look at how far the learners have come rather than where learners are, allowing for a very individualized judgment of learners' "learning potential" (p.151).

For each of these criteria, the instructor can create checklists or rubrics to highlights aspects of learning that they want to assess. Using checklists and rubrics allows us to examine content knowledge while gaining a better understanding of how the process of acquiring knowledge is unfolding. As well, checklists and rubrics can be used for peer and self-assessment. For instance, if a group has been working together towards an outcome, they can work on a checklist to examine how well they worked together (process criteria), as well as assessing content outcomes (product criteria). When creating checklists, it is also important to start with what learners know and gradually expand from the starting point. Explicit explanation and instruction are key to learner success, so talking about what participation looks like in your classroom must come before assessing participation in a classroom setting.

Checklists can be designed to look like you want them to look. Depending on the level of the class or learner that the checklist is being created for, there can be varying degrees of white space, icons, words, or graphics. They can be simple checklists or there can be space for additional comments, if appropriate. There are many indicators that an instructor can use to show where a learner is in a particular area of their learning.

Often checklists will include columns with indicators such as:

Examples of Indicators		
No	Sometimes	Yes
Not yet	Some evidence	Yes
Not really	A little	A lot
Needs improvement	Satisfactory	Successful
Not yet observed	Sometimes observed	Frequently observed

Checklists and rubrics can also include dates, comments from instructors, comments from learners, a place to record examples of learner effort or achievement, a place for learners to write what they would like to improve, or any number of other things that capture motivation and learning. In classrooms where there is a high degree of instructor support, learners are guided through a checklist or a rubric, and discuss key elements with the instructor. The instructor then fills out the checklist or the rubric with input from the learner.

Instructor Assessment of Individual Group Work Skills

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Project Title _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Time Management	Routinely uses time well throughout the project to ensure things get done on time. Group does not have to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person.	Usually uses time well throughout the project, but may have procrastinated on one thing. Group does not have to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person.	Tends to procrastinate, but usually gets things done by the deadlines. Group does not have to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person.	Rarely gets things done by the deadlines AND group has to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person's inadequate time management.
Focus on the task	Consistently stays focused on the task and what needs to be done. Very self-directed.	Focuses on the task and what needs to be done most of the time. Other group members can count on this person.	Focuses on the task and what needs to be done some of the time. Other group members must sometimes remind this person to keep on-task.	Rarely focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Lets others do the work.
Contributions	Routinely provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A definite leader who contributes a lot of effort.	Usually provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A strong group member who tries hard	Sometimes provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A satisfactory group member who does what is required.	Rarely listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others. Often is not a good team player.

Preparedness	Brings needed materials to class and is always ready to work.	Almost always brings needed materials to class and is ready to work.	Almost always brings needed materials but sometimes needs to settle down and get to work.	Often forgets needed materials or is rarely ready to get to work.
Working with Others	Almost always listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others. Tries to keep people working well together.	Usually listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others. Does not cause "waves" in the group.	Often listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others, but sometimes is not a good team member.	Rarely listens to, shares with, or supports the efforts of others. Often is not a good team player.

Total _____ / 20

Portfolios: Collect, Select, Reflect

Learner portfolios are wonderful and challenging things. This overview will help to give a broad perspective about what portfolios are and why they are great tools to help learners own their learning. Portfolios are used to highlight a learner's experience, achievement, and growth. Learner portfolios include the idea of both product and process learning. According to Shackelford (1996), "a learner portfolio is a purposeful collection of materials capable of communicating learner interests, abilities, progress, and accomplishments in a given areas" (p. 31). One of the greatest benefits of using learner portfolios in the ESL literacy classroom is that the learners are taught to become independent thinkers while becoming familiar with the steps involved in taking charge of their own learning. The State of California Department of Education (2003) points out that it is important that both instructors and learners have a clear vision of the intended learning outcomes that will be captured in the portfolios. They indicate that there are three questions that will make the process of creating portfolios much easier. We can get a sense of direction when using portfolios by asking:

- What is the vision of success for my learners?
- What are the learners' visions of success?
- What are the criteria for documenting success?

Working Portfolios

Working portfolios collect and demonstrate evidence of the learning process, including rough drafts and works in progress. As Leong & Collins (2007) indicate, using working portfolios is a means of establishing systematic evidence of learning and progress. They state that working portfolios contain selected pieces from class work and set required pieces that reflect the program outcomes. Shackelford (1996) argues that the benefit of the working portfolio is that learners go through a process of collecting work that may be then used to put into a showcase portfolio. An important piece of the working portfolio is that learners are able to meet with their instructors to talk about the pieces they have included. These meetings help to build self-esteem and encourage learners to participate in self-assessment so they can understand their strengths and challenges in the process of their learning. Meetings about working portfolios are valuable because they provide opportunities to talk about learning in the *process* part of portfolio use. Pieces that learners might include in their working portfolio are: rough drafts of written work, spelling tests, math assessments, reading assessments, pieces of work from essential skills classes that they are working on or have completed, instructor feedback, technology pieces, and anything else that they are working on that is related to their learning.

Showcase Portfolios

A showcase portfolio is designed to document a learner's highest quality or best work. Showcase portfolios allow learners to indicate mastery of or readiness in a specific area.

Additionally, showcase portfolios include self-reflections about learning and provide learners with a point of reference when talking about their learning to instructors, peers, academic counselors, or others in the community with whom they want to share their work. When using showcase portfolios, learners should be able to explain why they chose particular pieces and how each piece highlights aspects of their growth. The showcase portfolio starts with an instructor-generated table of contents. The learner selects a piece that meets the requirements of the outcome listed in the table of contents. A key element in the showcase part of the portfolio process is that learners are able to articulate how the work they have chosen fills the criteria in the table of contents. Work that learners might include in this section are: volunteer work, final copies of written work, written reflections about an aspect of their learning, awards received, important moments in learning, a project, or anything else that highlights that they have met the outcomes.

The Portfolio Tea Party

In one ESL literacy program, learners have two opportunities each term learners to share their portfolios. In this program, the portfolios contain pieces of work of which the learners are especially proud and have chosen themselves. With the help of the instructor, learners plan a portfolio tea party, where they invite guests such as teachers and friends to their class for cake, tea, and a chance to discuss their work. In this process, students learn how to refer to their portfolios when they describe what they can do and how their language, literacy, numeracy, and life skills have developed since the start of term. This gives them a chance to realize, and to share with others, how much they have learned (and they get to practice being good hosts!).

Learner-Led Conferences

Learner-led conferences give learners an opportunity to talk about their learning with their instructor and others. A learner-led conference is a meeting between the learner, the instructor, and often other observers. Learners use their portfolios as a way to speak to what and how they have learned over a specific period. This is an ideal opportunity to talk about challenges and successes with specific pieces of work in mind, as well as an opportunity to talk about learning in a greater sense. Teaching explicit language-learning strategies, such as talking about "making a picture in your head" when reading, is a key focus in ESL literacy classrooms. Using portfolios and having learner-led conferences gives learners an opportunity to use the language they have heard in the context of their own learning, thereby helping learners to internalize both the language around strategies and strategy use.

Conferences are important in that they help to build self-esteem, form instructor/learner relationships, and encourage learners to participate in authentic self-assessment and the learning process (Reading/Langauge, 1990, in Shackelford, 1996). As Burke (2005) so wonderfully states, "Interviews and conferences, therefore, should play an important role in the assessment process in all classrooms – from kindergarten to graduate school" – and from Foundation Phase to wherever our learners go.

Strategies for Using Portfolios in the Classroom

Using portfolios in the classroom is both challenging and rewarding. The following section includes tips, ideas, and strategies that instructors can use in the classroom to make the process more meaningful and enjoyable for both instructors and learners.

- Appearance of the portfolio is important. The showcase portfolio should be a polished piece (plastic sleeves, nice binders, edited work, dividers, tabs, appropriate graphics).
- Include a table of contents. This will help guide the learner through the learner-led conference. This way, they have a visual reference point to talk about why their work meets the outcome in the table of contents.
- Start the portfolio process slowly and highlight quality, not quantity (even with working portfolios).
- Have explicit conversations about learner expectations. Check in with learners on a fairly regular basis. This will help to keep everyone on the same portfolio page.

- Build in opportunities for learners to share their portfolios with their peers and well as with other instructors or staff. The more they are able to talk about their learning, the more they can be reflective about their strengths and challenges.

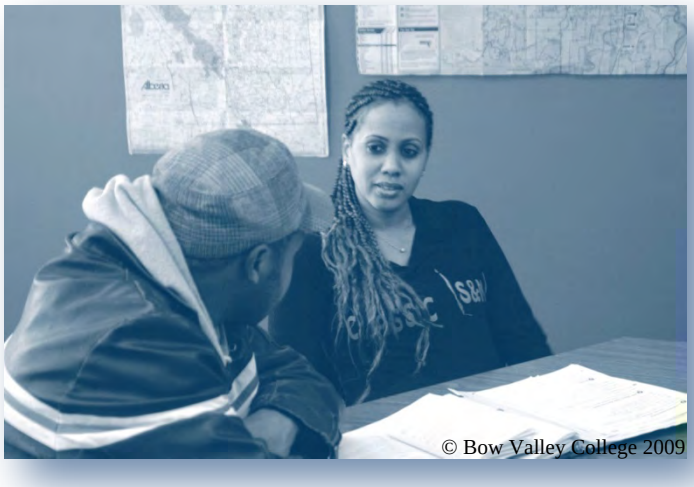
- Think of portfolios as a holistic snapshot of the learner. With portfolios, learners include different aspects of their academic and personal lives to present a "whole" picture of who they are.

- Portfolios are successful when learners understand why they are developing and maintaining portfolios. A key piece in the portfolio puzzle is to provide explicit and ongoing instruction and conversation about portfolios.

- When placing work in the working and showcase portfolios, ask what outcome the piece is meeting. In doing this, the learner can begin to think critically about how to meet academic objectives.

- Instructors may want to consider a plan and timeline for entries. This will help to ensure the portfolio process is a smooth one.

- Gottlieb (1995) in Trudell (2002) talks about the CRADLE approach to portfolios. CRADLE stands for developing **C**ollections, encouraging **R**eflective practices, **A**ssessing the portfolio, **D**ocumenting achievement, ensuring **L**inkages, and **E**valuating portfolios.



- Keep in mind that portfolios are a *collaborative* process involving instructors and learners. In ESL literacy programs, instructors should be responsible for guiding the process of portfolio development.

- Schedule weekly class time for updating the portfolio. This will help to keep everyone on task and goal-oriented.

Portfolios: Challenges

While using portfolios in the ESL literacy classroom is rewarding, challenges certainly arise:

- Portfolios are time-consuming for both instructor and learner. Knowing this can help you plan your preparation time and in-class time accordingly.
- At the beginning, learners may resist portfolios because they are not a traditional form of assessment. Talking about the benefit of portfolios will help to get learners more engaged in the process.
- Objectives need to be clear and explicit. If they are not, you will end up with a bunch of "stuff" that no one can speak to in any meaningful way.
- Because all learner entries for the same outcome will be different, it takes more time to evaluate portfolios. Having evaluation rubrics may help the instructor to evaluate different kinds of work that meet the same objective.
- Instructors need to be sure that learner work meets the outcomes. A table of contents and conversations with learners about the work they have selected help to ensure that outcomes are met.

As Burke (2005) comments, "a portfolio without reflections is really just a notebook of stuff. The power of the portfolio is derived from the descriptions, reactions, processing pieces, and meta-cognitive reflections that help learners achieve their goals" (p. 68).

The tools on the following pages are used in the portfolio process with learners. Learners use these forms to reflect on the work that they have done. They use these as a starting point to talking about their learning in learner-led conferences with their instructors.

Portfolio Reflection

Tips for Use

- Encourages self-reflection and considered choices
- Highlights strengths
- Allows learners to see improvement in their work

Why I Chose This Work

Title _____

Date _____

I chose this piece because …

_____

_____

_____

_____

I would like you see that …..

_____

_____

_____

One thing I would improve next time is …..

_____

_____

_____

Preparing for a Conference

Tips for Use

Used to get ready for sharing a portfolio or getting ready for an interview with the instructor

Name: _____ **Dat**

Your instructor will soon have a conference with you about your work this term. Prepare for the conference by discussing these questions.

1. How has your English improved since the last session?

_____

_____

2. What can you do now that you could not do before?

_____

_____

3. How has your reading improved?

_____

_____

4. What do you like to read? What makes it interesting?

_____

5. What are you doing to become a better reader?

_____

6. How has your writing improved?

_____

_____

My Strengths and Challenges

Name: _____

Date: _____

Goal for next week: _____

Tips for Use

- Helps learners identify strengths and challenges
- Encourages improvement
- Learners focus on short-term, achievable goals

My Strengths
Reading Strengths
Writing Strengths
Classroom Readiness Strengths
My Challenges
Reading Challenges
Writing Challenges
Classroom Readiness Challenges

Conversation Prompts for the Portfolio Sharing Event:

Tips for Use

Learners use this to prepare for portfolio sharing events. This gives learners language to ask others about work

Instructors who are new to portfolio sharing can use this prompt sheet to guide the process.

Greetings	
Nice to meet you, my name is…what's your name? Hello. Thank you for coming this morning. My name is…what's your name? Please have a seat. Please join me. I would like to share my portfolio with you. I would like to share my successes from this semester with you. I would like to learn about your successes.	Since January What can you January? How has your What work ar Why are you proud of this work?
During your Conversation	**Saying Goodbye**
That is really interesting. I like your writing. You are a good... I understand what you are saying. I understand why you are so proud of this work. I am really impressed by… You have obviously worked very hard on…	Thank you for sharing your portfolio with me. Thank you for visiting today and sharing your work. Thank you for your time and for sharing your success this morning. Good luck next semester. Goodbye. I hope to see you again soon.

Conclusions

Assessment is not simply a measurement of how much learners have learned in a lesson, unit, or class; it can also play a pivotal role in the learning process. Formative assessment, used as part of learning, helps instructors to pinpoint areas where learners are succeeding and areas where they need further development. It leads to the next stage of instruction. What makes formative assessment a valuable part of the classroom, however, is that it is equally meaningful and helpful to learners. Through formative assessment they find out about their strengths and challenges, take ownership of their learning, and learn strategies for learning itself: how to recognize what they have done, how to set goals, and how to measure progress.

There are a number of ways to approach formative assessment in the classroom. In this chapter we discussed goal setting and self-assessment, which provide learners with valuable tools for recognizing progress and determining their path into the future; checklists, which help both instructors and learners to clearly understand the expectations for the classroom and for any task; and two different kinds of portfolios, working portfolios, which demonstrate the learning process; and showcase portfolios, which exhibit the learners' best work.

Chapter 12 Outline

Introduction: Beyond the Whiteboard

Numeracy

Cognitive Development

Using Technology in the Classroom

Supporting First Language Literacy

Teaching in the Multi-Level Context

Conclusions

Chapter

12

Beyond the Whiteboard

Objectives

To highlight the importance of teaching numeracy, cognitive development, and technology

To learn strategies for teaching numeracy, cognitive development, and technology

To appreciate the role that developing first language literacy can play in an ESL literacy classroom

To recognize the multi-level context of most ESL literacy classes

To identify strategies for creating an effective multi-level learning environment

Introduction: Beyond the Whiteboard

Most educators recognize the core skills that should be taught in an ESL literacy classroom: reading, writing, and language development. We can add to this direct strategy instruction and, in some cases, foundational literacy instruction. However, there are a number of other things that need to be taught in order to help Learners with Interrupted Formal Education develop literacy and language skills and thrive in their new communities, and an effective ESL literacy program seeks to meet more than just the core literacy needs of the learners. These other needs include numeracy, cognitive development, and technology. There are also two considerations that affect many ESL literacy classes: how and whether to support literacy development in the learners' first languages, and how to create an effective multi-level ESL literacy class.

Numeracy

Enabling learners to become numerate is as crucial as enabling learners to become literate. Instructors of LIFE have a common goal – to empower their learners to make changes in their lives. Literacy instruction is essential in achieving this outcome, but it is only one part of language that learners need to develop. To successfully participate in society, individuals need to be fluent in numbers as well.

Numeracy permeates our lives in all of our communities – at home, at work, and in our free time. Without the skills to read, interpret, and manipulate numbers, learners will not fulfill their potential within their new communities, and will not achieve the goals that they have set for themselves.

Consider the numeracy present in a typical commute to work:

- read the alarm clock
- change channels on the TV to watch the news
- plan what to wear based on the forecast
- amend journey time to allow for a coffee stop
- establish the length of wait until the next bus
- identify the correct bus to catch
- pay the bus driver
- navigate streets and avenues
- press the correct button in the elevator

For most of us, all of this happens before 9:00 a.m. Without numeracy skills, even basic navigation through our cities and through our schedules for the day is very difficult. Consider

also the single greatest impact of a lack of numeracy: without numeracy, the ability to successfully manage finances, and positively affect change, is absent.

Identifying LIFE with Numeracy Challenges

Assessing a learner's stage of literacy does not enable instructors to pinpoint a learner's understanding of numeracy. There is rarely correspondence between the two. Each learner's understanding is shaped by his or her experience in academic settings, real-life interactions, and game play, as well negotiating and purchasing transactions. The commonality among all LIFE is that they need to develop a mathematical vocabulary in English. Note that an entire range of numeracy understanding is possible in every ESL literacy classroom, no matter what Phase the learners are at in terms of reading and writing.

The following table aims to indicate some essential knowledge traits and knowledge gaps among LIFE numeracy learners, but does not aim to be definitive:

Numeracy Learner Profiles		
	Mathematical Background and Experience	**Knowledge Gaps** Learners are unlikely able to…
Learner A **no background in numeracy**	• little or no academic or real life experience with mathematics • may work and contribute to a household but does not manage household finances • limited understanding of money	• count orally forwards and backwards to 100 • match numbers with their written equivalents • recognize patterns • add or subtract one- or two- digit numbers • understand fully the concepts of more and less

Learner B **some background in numeracy**	• some mathematical experience in real life or in an academic setting • refers to being taught mathematics "a long time ago" • can add and subtract quite confidently • knows some times tables	• unlikely able to articulate mathematical processes • understanding of calculating often muddled –may have learned a process, but doesn't understand the concepts • struggles with the requirements of word problems in English
Learner C **several years' numeracy education**	• several years of schooling in mathematics in their home country, Canada, or both • mental and written calculations are strong • adds, subtracts, multiplies with regrouping, and divides	• various gaps in understanding the four basic operations including: incorrectly memorized times tables; carrying or borrowing incorrectly; errors in long division • struggles with the requirements of word problems in English • difficulty in identifying the steps required to find the solution to a problem
Learner D **many years' numeracy education**	• many years of mathematical study either in his or her home country, Canada, or both • confident and competent in the four basic operations • some knowledge in one or more of the following: fractions, percents, ratios, proportions, decimals, geometry, and measurement	• lacks conceptual constructs necessary to solve word problems • lacks conceptual constructs necessary to solve word problems
Learner E **competent**	• competent and confident mathematician who has completed courses	• lacks conceptual constructs necessary to solve word problems

How to Identify Learner Understanding

As the range of learner experience and understanding can be so vast within a given group, it is advisable to undertake a *"Show me what you know"* approach in order to ascertain who your numeracy learners are. Ask learners to copy a single digit from the board onto the middle of a piece of paper, or on an individual whiteboard (a great investment of resources) and ask them to write down anything that they know about that number. Some learners will find copying the digit difficult while others will be able to calculate that $3^3 = 27$. Through whatever they are able to do, learners will reveal the extent of their knowledge and understanding.

Additionally, a series of increasingly challenging assessments may be undertaken with learners. Activities could range from counting a number of shapes, through to written geometry problems. Tiered, successive assessments can be used, where one is completed only after successful completion of the previous level. They can be separated along these lines:

Successive Mathematics Assessment	
Assessment 1	Identifying patterns Identifying numbers
Assessment 2	Reading and writing numbers in words and digits Single-digit addition and subtraction (without renaming)
Assessment 3	Two- and three- digit addition and subtraction (with renaming) Simple multiplication and division
Assessment 4	Word problems with the four operations Calculations with money
Assessment 5	Fractions, ratios, and percents

How to Incorporate Numeracy Instruction

Incorporating a numeracy stream in ESL literacy instruction can be challenging in an already pressured curriculum. Two different approaches have been detailed below.

Ideally, separate numeracy classes are scheduled into the curriculum, where learners are grouped according to need and knowledge gaps. These classes have a strong vocabulary focus and collaborative approach to learning. The content ranges from reading and writing numbers through the basic four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and beyond.

Where separate numeracy classes cannot be arranged, instructors should look for opportunities to introduce numeracy to compliment the thematic unit of study.

For example:

Sample theme:

- public transportation

Possible numeracy content:

- reading tables and schedules
- reading analog and digital time (including the 24 hour clock)
- money (making fares with change)
- map reading (including navigation of grid systems and compass directions)

In both cases, however, it is critical to incorporate small group work and partner work in addition to independent skills practice. As adult numeracy learners are so diverse in terms of their experience, small group work allows for collaboration, debate, and explanation – all critical if learners are to understand content and reinforce their own understanding.

It is also recommended that solving real-life problems forms part of instruction, including the explicit teaching of problem-solving strategies. Learners will benefit from being taught how to identify critical information, discount irrelevant information, and undertake one or more calculations to reach an answer, as well as how to decide if that answer is reasonable or not.

Promising Practices in Numeracy Instruction

The following checklist may be used to ensure that numeracy content is targeted, relevant, and helpful, which in turn ensures that learners "buy in."

- Keep a strong vocabulary focus and ensure that even learners who have mathematical understanding are learning useful information to explain their reasoning and decision-making.
- Keep content grounded in "real life."
- If possible, tie to the ESL literacy theme being studied.
- Use small group work, partner work, and individual skills practice.
- Include computer-based games and programs for skills practice and vocabulary reinforcement.
- Use manipulatives and realia wherever possible.
- Solve real-life problems.
- Include working with money and budgeting in your instruction.

Class Sales

In this activity, learners from several ESL literacy classes get together and create a store. Instructors can collect gently used goods for sale, or, alternatively, bake cookies or other goodies. The learners are responsible for pricing the goods, selling the stock, and making change. It is an excellent collaborative numeracy activity, with tasks available for every level of numeracy learner. Any proceeds can go toward a class party.

Conclusions: Numeracy

The development of numeracy is as important as the development of literacy for LIFE and should be taught alongside reading and writing skills. Ideally, learners are regrouped for numeracy instruction, as there is no direct correlation between their literacy Phase and their numeracy Phase. Even if this is not possible, numeracy should be part of the curriculum. This means that instructors may also require extra support. Not all ESL literacy instructors will have experience teaching numeracy and many may feel uncomfortable at first. A program can provide support for its instructors in the form of professional development opportunities and assistance in curriculum development and lesson planning.

Cognitive Development

Few would disagree that young ESL learners in elementary schools require help with cognitive development – as do all other learners their age. However, many ESL instructors assume that adult learners come into literacy classrooms with their cognitive abilities fully formed. After all, these learners are often parents, spouses, employees, business owners, and household managers. They have well-developed skill sets which have served them in all they have done in the past. However, lack of literacy, numeracy, and a formal education affect the cognitive development of adults. This is not a question of intelligence; rather it is a question of building the necessary skills to allow Learners with Interrupted Formal Education to thrive in a print-based society. Cognitive development, therefore, is one of the cornerstones in the foundation of literacy development.

What is Cognitive Development?

Jean Piaget, a Swiss developmental theorist of the past century, believed that cognitive development through education was an essential part of a strong society. He proposed that people develop cognitively in sequential stages. These stages roughly relate to infancy, preschool, elementary school, and adolescence (Boree, 2006). Piaget's contemporary and critic, Lev Vygotsky, suggested that different societies and cultures allow different learning opportunities (Gallagher, 1999). With this view in mind, it is not surprising that LIFE show many aspects of adult reasoning – after all, they have a fully developed adult brain – while not being able to do many of the following tasks:

- sorting objects by one characteristic (These are all made of wood…)
- classifying (These are clothes. These are toys. These are things to clean with.)
- using multiple aspects of a problem to solve it. (This tall thin cup and this short wide cup probably hold the same amount of water.)
- understanding that numbers or objects can change or be regrouped (four blocks and four blocks makes a group of eight. If I take away four blocks, I have four left.)
- following a pattern (circle, circle, square, circle, ?, ?)
- sequencing pictures to tell a story (The woman with a shovel and a seed. The woman putting the seed into the ground. The woman admiring the beautiful flower.)
- putting together a simple puzzle

In learners' personal lives, limited cognitive development may present itself as a lack of anticipation of the consequences of their actions. Money may be available for coffee today, but what about the last week of the month? After money is spent on new winter coats for the family, what will the landlord do when the rent is not paid? What happens when the electricity bill has

been ignored for two months? LIFE who are still working at the concrete operational stage – who are still developing the skills outlined above – may also have difficulty seeing situations from another's viewpoint. Clearly cognitive development has a strong influence on a person's ability to thrive in the classroom and in the community.

LIFE will exhibit some formal operational thought, as Piaget would term it, in their home and work lives. However, the above-mentioned concrete operational tasks must become accomplished skills before learners are able to move on to formal operational thinking in the academic sense. Before learners can think abstractly, reason logically, sequence actions within a story, predict, infer, and draw conclusions, they must have mastered concrete operational thinking skills. It is essential that early ESL literacy instructors build the foundational thinking skills that will enable their learners to experience success.

Activities for Cognitive Development

A good start is to use class warm-up time for fun cognitive development tasks. As learners arrive in the class they can be immediately offered "brain-building" activities. Hands-on activities such as puzzles and "Concentration" work well. Learners also enjoy learning how to do dot-to-dot activities and mazes of increasing complexity (try puzzlemaker.com). Another excellent activity is "Kidoku", a simpler version of Sudoku which uses symbols (such as the card symbols) instead of numbers. Hands-on kits can be easily created, allowing learners to begin with a simple four-square. Learners choose four different symbols to put in the square. If some of your learners had their first day of school in your classroom, this task may be quite a challenge. Other learners can quickly move to a card holding two four-squares. Each square must have a different symbol and each row must also have a different symbol. The next step is a card with four four-squares.

Cognitive Development Activities
Sudoku
Crosswords
Word Searches
Mazes
Memory
Pattern Games
Sequencing Activities
Find the Difference Puzzles
Hang-man
Code Puzzles
Mix and Match Activities

Once learners are adept at completing a symbol-based Sudoku, ask the learners to show you that each square and each row has four different symbols. This allows them to develop the skill of analysis and helps them take a deeper and more active role in their learning. Moving to pencil and paper "Kidoku" is a bigger leap than you may expect. Most difficult of all is the leap to pen and paper 6x6 "Kidoku," using numbers instead of symbols. Learners with more educational background will move through these stages faster, showing that they have greater mastery over concrete operational thought. Using warm-up time for these kinds of activities will also allow

the instructor to easily pinpoint which learners need more help. In this way, learner needs can be accurately targeted, and a strong foundation for literacy can be built.

In planning lessons, it is a good idea to keep the objective of building cognitive development in mind. Learners are taught to name the letters of the alphabet. Can your learners put alphabet cards in order with a model for reference? Can they order the letters without external reference? If you cover a letter on the alphabet, can they guess which letter you are covering? Can they fill in the blanks to show which letters are missing? Ask learners to put pictures in sequence and tell the story before the class writes a Language Experience story together.

Any activities which require learners to dig deeper and reach further will maximize their cognitive development. Frequently asking "Why?" and "What will happen next?" will help learners to develop their ability to think logically and predict future events according to past events. Thinking, remembering, and group problem solving will also contribute to learners' cognitive development. But what connection does this have to language learning?

Cognitive Development and Reading Skills

Learners with Interrupted Formal Education in their first language may be very talented oral language learners. At higher levels, they may also have developed strong reading skills, being able to quickly and easily find answers to questions where the information is clearly stated in the text in the same wording as the question. However, LIFE stand out clearly in a classroom of learners with stronger educational backgrounds. LIFE, not surprisingly, often lack "high order thinking" (formal operation thought). They lack strategies and study skills as well as the ability to understand what they read on an abstract level. When they are asked why a character did a certain thing, they may want to answer with a sentence plucked directly from the text. If the question is what will happen next, many literacy learners will draw a complete blank. "How can I know that?" they ask, "It doesn't say." Cognitive development is critical to progress through Phase III and beyond.

Conclusions: Cognitive Development

A systematic and explicit teaching approach which incorporates cognitive development will help learners to move from concrete to formal operational thinking. Without higher-level thinking skills, a learner's ability to pursue his or her education will stall well before high school upgrading courses. As ESL literacy instructors, our mandate is to empower our learners to live their best lives. Focusing on cognitive development in the classroom will help learners take charge of their own lives and their learning.

Using Technology in the Classroom

Best practices in the ESL literacy classroom include encouraging learner motivation, maximizing progress, preparing learners for the real world, and bridging learners into life-long learning. The incorporation of technology into the classroom allows a multi-pronged approach to achieve all of these goals.

The use of technology is considered an essential skill by most colleges today. Even entry-level jobs often require basic computer skills, the ability to handle electronic surveillance equipment, accuracy in using pass codes, and so on. Learners with Interrupted Formal Education have often had little exposure to technology and many have high affective barriers preventing them from even trying to understand the electronic machines that surround them. Their fears and lack of self-confidence sometimes lead them to believe that it is better not to try in case they fail. Safe and supportive technology training can serve as a vehicle to teach learners the importance of accuracy and details. Technology helps learners' hand-eye coordination and presents them with printed information in many different formats. As their skills increase, technology can connect learners to a broader world, providing them with access to information.

Technology: More than Computers

When we think "technology" we immediately think of computers. However, LIFE are surrounded by baffling technology everywhere they go. Buying a transit ticket can involve reading instructions, punching buttons, and inserting the correct amount of change. Learning to handle this kind of task brings LIFE a real sense of empowerment. Microwaves, DVD remotes, and CD players are more examples, as well as technology that many adult, educated native speakers of English find challenging, such as a universal remote control. When seen in this light, it is clear that learning about technology must have a place in the ESL literacy classroom.

While some learners will embrace technology with open arms, some may be more shy. Technology teaching must proceed at the comfort pace of the learners and provide plenty of support. This may require a lot of one-on-one attention and repetition. It may be possible to find some volunteers who are willing to help students learn how to use various machines. A "Technology Day" could be arranged where a number of volunteers instruct small groups in how to use different machines and allow them the hands-on practice they need to be comfortable using them.

Computer Instruction

Computers are a core component of any technology program. There are many ways to use computers in an ESL literacy class. With the lowest-level ESL literacy learners, a big accomplishment is learning how to use the mouse and becoming comfortable using a computer. Many purchased programs can help learners learn new words and alphabet sounds while allowing them to practice their mouse skills. Keyboarding skills can then be taught using programs such as BBC Computer Tutor. As they are able, learners can branch into word-processing, as well as using the internet and e-mail. Critical thinking skills can be taught as learners access the internet to find information. Concepts such as "key words" are developed as learners work to narrow their web searches. Blogging can be an exciting communication tool that lets learners read each other's blogs and respond. In addition, computers can provide instructors with a chance to target the needs of different learners. Learners can find helpful websites to practice their areas of weakness: vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension, etc. This empowers them to continue this learning at home, if they have access to a computer, or at the school or public library. Instead of simply giving them information, we teach our learners to find it themselves.

Teaching technology in a computer lab can seem overwhelming to some instructors, especially if the learners have high needs. Volunteers in the computer lab allow learners to have their questions answered quickly: learners feel more supported, and less of their class time is spent waiting for the instructor. In addition, volunteers in the computer lab can provide assisted computer use as learners dictate their own stories (Language Experience stories). In this way, topics can be tailored to the interests and experiences of the learners. A topic like "A Family Treasure" can allow learners to explore important aspects of their first culture. A story such as "How I Came to Canada" validates learners' experiences as living history. Learners can then be provided with a booklet of stories written by themselves and their classmates (but printed in a large, easily-read font). Learner motivation to read these stories will be high, maximizing their language learning.

Computers in the Classroom

A computer with a large screen in the classroom is an excellent tool for ESL literacy instructors if the resources are available. Youtube, Google Images, and other online reference sites also help instructors to quickly and easily find an illustration for a difficult vocabulary word (bull riding? square dancing? maple syrup?) while modeling one use of the internet. Lessons can be more varied through the use of Powerpoint, internet sites, DVDs, and CDs. In addition, learners can be frequently exposed to language in a wide variety of language modalities with the added benefit of having some control. They can ask the instructor questions, request to see something that was shown before, or practice different forms of language until they feel successful.

Conclusions: Using Technology in the Classroom

Learners' interest in using computers and learning about other technology is consistently high. Most LIFE identify computers and technology as an important part of their new country, and they are motivated to learn skills that will maximize their progress in English. The real world of jobs and daily living requires a certain facility with technology. As learners are empowered to reach these goals through their own effort, they will also be empowered to pursue their learning long after ESL literacy classes are over. For further information and a list of helpful websites, please see the Annotated Bibliography.

Supporting First Language Literacy

Learners with Interrupted Formal Education, by definition, face literacy challenges when learning English. This is because they do not have completely developed literacy skills in their first language. Some learners have no literacy in any language; others had limited literacy in a first or a second language before learning English, but all LIFE have literacy needs. ESL literacy programs, also by definition, work towards helping learners develop literacy in English, but rarely work with developing literacy in the learners' first languages. This poses an interesting question: should ESL literacy instructors have a role in supporting and enhancing learners' literacy skills in their first languages? Is there any advantage to the learners? Does it help the learners to develop literacy faster in English? Research has provided many compelling reasons to consider first language literacy as an essential component of any ESL literacy program. Literacy instruction in a first language is faster and more effective for a number of reasons. First of all, learners are fully fluent in their first language and this allows them to focus on the development of reading and writing rather than oral language acquisition. It is extremely difficult to learn to read and write a language that you do not speak – especially if you have no literacy skills in your first language. Secondly, many written codes have a more direct sound-symbol correspondence than English. This allows for easier development of word decoding as well as a swifter progression to fluent reading for comprehension. Finally, learners are already aware of the vocabulary and structure of their first language. This allows them to better anticipate and predict what word comes next in the sentence, and better check to see if what they have read sounds right to their fully fluent ears.

The good news is we only learn to read once. The skills required in reading any language, such as directionality (whatever direction that might be), attention to detail, recognizing letter or word shapes, understanding that print has meaning, and decoding, can be transferred to a second language. This is why learners who speak a first language with a non-Roman alphabet are not ESL literacy learners, even though they are at first unable to decode English words. They already have a considerable number of reading skills and strategies in place which they can use to learn to read English. For learners who have not acquired literacy in any language, it is easier to acquire them in their first languages and then to transfer the skills into English.

It is important to note, however, that the brain is wired differently for the acquisition of oral and written language. All groups of people in the world have a spoken language. Some of these languages have had a written code for thousands of years, such as Arabic and Chinese; however, many languages have acquired a written code only within the last 200 years (most of these systems supplied by foreign linguists). A good number of languages remain without a written code. So while our brains are hard-wired to speak and listen, reading and writing are more difficult skills that require years of instruction. This should point us to the path of maximum efficiency – literacy development in the learner's first language when possible.

There are few things more pleasant to an instructor's ear than the joy of a learner learning to read in his or her first language for the first time. Providing this opportunity shows the learners that you value their first languages and cultures. This can lead to a strong, respectful bond between instructor and learners which lowers affective barriers (the fears and concerns that impede learning) and allows for a swifter and richer learning experience.

How to Support First Language Literacy

There are clear advantages to helping learners become literate in their first languages, but also a number of challenges. How can an ESL literacy instructor incorporate first language literacy instruction in the classroom? In some areas, immigration patterns are quite predictable. For example, there is a large Spanish-speaking immigrant population in the southern United States, so it makes sense for ESL literacy instructors to also work on literacy in Spanish. Not every ESL literacy instructor speaks a second language, however, and for those who do, they often don't speak the "right" second language, which is to say the language of their learners. What about classes where learners speak a dozen or more first languages? The immigration and refugee patterns in many countries mean that our classrooms are highly diverse.

Even in programs with learners from a diverse range of cultures and language groups, it is still possible to foster first language literacy without requiring the ESL literacy instructor to speak a dozen languages. Many ESL literacy programs are filled with learners from a similar background, or groups of learners with a similar background. It may be fairly easy to find literate people in their community who are willing to work with small groups for a portion of your class time. It is also possible to harness the talents of other learners in your program, and create a learner-mentor program.

Canadian immigration patterns provide most instructors with a very diverse group of learners. This makes the solution a little trickier to work out. Once again, most language communities have some members who are more literate. Many of these community members want to have a chance to help their fellow countrymen, and this is a practical way to do it. If your school or college has a wide range of classes including CLB 4 and above, you may also want to consider looking in these classes for volunteers. In fact, developing a learner mentor program is an ideal way to provide a pool of eager first language helpers for your classroom, with clear benefits for both the learners and the mentors.

The benefits of a learner mentor program to LIFE is clear. Any literacy is good literacy. The benefits reach beyond the development of literacy, however. Mentorship programs also give LIFE a chance to talk over problems in their first language. A learner mentor may have better advice to give to the learner than the instructor would, and the learner and the mentor often form a strong and supportive friendship. Learner mentors also act as literacy role models, especially when drawn from higher-level ESL literacy classes. LIFE see that their mentors have walked the same road and have achieved a great deal. They begin to see that they, too, can make the same achievements. At Bow Valley College, there is a well-developed learner mentor program. LIFE in this program have been overheard asking when they might be able to become mentors as well. They saw the work their mentors were doing and wanted to be able to do the same thing, demonstrating the strong motivation inspired by role models.

The mentors also benefit from helping learners develop first language and English literacy. While they are not trained instructors, they have mastered the basic principles of what they are sharing with their partners. With the ESL literacy instructor on hand to answer questions, both mentors and their partners have a positive learning experience. Mentors also experience a boost in self-confidence. Many see clearly for the first time how much they have learned and how much they have to give to their partners. A letter of acknowledgement for their work as mentors can help them when they apply for jobs. This sort of mentor work can also lead to a lifetime habit of volunteerism, which is an advantage to the whole community.

The instructor also clearly benefits from having school or community mentors. Having helpers in the classroom provides a mood-lightening change in classroom routine. The learners look forward to seeing their mentors and are motivated to work harder. As well, the instructor can use this opportunity to provide more individualized instruction to single learners or small groups. In this way, instruction becomes more learner-centred and effective.

The ESL literacy program also benefits from a learner mentor program, because learners from different levels get to know each other, changing the atmosphere in the hallways. A learner mentor program allows a program to educate the "whole learner." As we know, personal problems and affective barriers hold many of our learners back from learning. Providing learners with a first language mentor will go a long way towards tearing down these barriers.

A learner mentor program is not very difficult to develop and run. First of all, program administration must be on board. Coordinators can support the development of a learner mentor program by encouraging instructors to participate, by arranging for a small budget for token mentor gifts at the end of each term, and by providing support staff to help those instructors willing to put time and energy into developing the program. Once the underlying support is in place, the mentors can be recruited, and the program can begin.

Challenges in Supporting in First Language Literacy

The benefits of supporting first language literacy are clear, but there are a number of questions and challenges to be considered. Many literacy learners speak several languages. They may have acquired some literacy in a second language, such as Arabic. Is it worth developing literacy in this language, which is neither the language they speak in their home nor particularly useful in their new country? The short answer is, yes, there is some benefit, as long as the learner speaks this other second language better than English. However, the learner must see this learning as an advantage and be willing to pursue it. If the learner is more fluent in Arabic, for example, than in English, Arabic literacy will proceed more rapidly, and any skills learned in Arabic are transferrable to the learning of English. If the learner is resistant to developing literacy in a second language other than English, a mentor can still provide the learner with individualized support in developing literacy in English, answering questions in this other second language or giving explanations. Understanding directions for an activity, for example, is often harder than the material in the exercise.

What about learners whose language has no written code? Many of these learners will have lived their lives without seeing written language as a useful skill. It may be difficult for them to understand why reading and writing in English is so important. Learners whose first language has no written code will also likely lack many pre-reading skills such as understanding the use of

signs, handling books, and interpreting pictures. These skills are usually passed down from literate parents. It is clearly not possible to support learners in developing first language literacy if their first language has no written code. However, oral first language support from a literate mentor (even if the mentor is literate only in English) will ease a learner's uncertainty and anxiety as he or she receives targeted instruction in English literacy. The mentor can help explain concepts or translate vocabulary for the learner, and, more importantly, can answer the learner's questions and act as a role-model.

Another challenge is if it is not possible to provide a mentor for all learners in the class; if there is no one available who speaks a certain language, some learners may feel left out of the program. If this situation arises, the instructor can decide what to do; one possibility is to provide English-speaking mentors for these learners, a solution which loses the benefit of first language support, but allows the learners access to one-on-one support.

Conclusions: Supporting First Language Literacy

There are many advantages to supporting first language literacy in LIFE wherever possible. First language literacy support is often more effective than English literacy support, in that it allows learners to develop literacy without worrying about learning a language orally. It also shows respect for learners and their culture. In any support of first language literacy, the goal is ultimately to transfer these skills into English, so that learners can thrive in their new homes and reach their goals for education, employment, and settlement. Although making a commitment to supporting our learners' first language literacy requires an initial investment of time as well as ongoing maintenance, the results in the classroom and in the learners are well worth it.

Teaching in a Multi-Level Context

Ideally, ESL literacy programs are able to run a number of ESL literacy classes and can thereby arrange learners into level groups. Despite the incredible range of diversity within the ESL literacy context, however, multi-level classes are a reality for many programs and instructors. Multi-level classes pose an extra challenge for the ESL literacy instructor. Each level of literacy (each Phase in the CLB Literacy Document) is diverse in itself, and calls upon the instructor to skillfully bring awareness to areas of strength and weakness for each learner in order to plan and provide support accordingly. For classes with more than one Phase of learner, the challenge is increased considerably.

In many ways, however, all ESL literacy classes are multi-level, even if a program is able to offer several different levels of ESL literacy. The level placement of Learners with Interrupted Formal Education is typically dependent on their reading and writing skills. The result is that the listening and speaking benchmarks represented within a class, even within one Phase, usually vary significantly. To illustrate, within a Phase II class, one learner listens and speaks at CLB 4 and can carry on a conversation with native-English speakers quite comfortably. This learner has lived in Canada for some time and is well-adjusted to Canadian living. His classmate, on the other hand, only started learning English one month ago, when she moved to Canada, speaks at a CLB 1, and uses a great deal of energy to communicate with the cashier at the grocery store.

It is also essential to note that reading and writing levels vary within a Phase. To a Phase II Initial learner, finding and copying an appropriate word to the line beneath a picture might be challenge enough, while a Phase II Adequate learner may be able to write several sentences with familiar text and related vocabulary fairly independently. This means that a Phase II class (or any of the Phases) will include learners with a wide range of reading and writing skills. Even if a program has the resources to provide classes for each part of a Phase, such as Phase II Initial, Phase II Developing, and Phase II Adequate, there will be a variety of skill levels.

In addition to the multi-level context inherent in any ESL literacy classroom and even within any

To some degree, all ESL literacy classes are multi-level: learners will never be at exactly the same level in terms of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and numeracy. Even learners who are closely grouped based on literacy skills will have a variety of oral and numeracy abilities, and in practice, will also have a variety of literacy abilities too. Diversity is the nature of education; everyone brings different abilities to the classroom, and everyone learns differently and at a different pace. Use this diversity as a strength rather than a challenge; allow for mentoring and group work, and always foster a classroom environment that is welcoming and safe, where all learners can feel successful.

one Phase, many classes house an even wider diversity. Smaller organizations and community programs may not have the resources to hold multiple ESL literacy classes. Some organizations are only beginning to recognize that the needs of LIFE differ from those with academic backgrounds. In many communities and programs, an individual instructor may have Foundation Phase, Phase I, II, and III learners all in one class. To complicate matters further, sometimes learners with higher levels of education, unsuitable as the ESL literacy environment may be them, for whatever reason don't fit in mainstream ESL programs and find their way into the ESL literacy classroom as well.

The challenges of working in a multi-level setting are many. Instructors find themselves looking for and, more often than not, creating materials that both support and challenge the learners. Because learners come with such varied strengths, one learner might find a vocabulary-matching exercise very simple, while another learner in the same class struggles with the same activity. Given the fact that the very nature of ESL literacy classes is wide-ranging with regards to learners' skills and needs, what approaches can make this challenging situation for instructors also one that is manageable, and even beneficial, for everyone involved?

There are a number of tips for working in a multi-level setting:

Set the Tone: From the very beginning of the course, let learners know that the class is multi-level, and that being in a multi-level class means each learner will be good at different things. One person might be able to speak more English, while another might be better at writing sentences or even paragraphs. No matter who they are or what their skills are, every learner is important, and where each individual learner is at, is okay. The instructors and learners in the class all need to respect each other where they are, and every learner has strengths he or she brings to the class, which can be shared with others. This conversation can be repeated throughout the course of the term, in order to validate where each person is in terms of his or her learning.

Recognize that Success Means Different Things for Different Learners: In a multi-level class, success for one learner might be copying a sentence on the line, while for another, it might be writing a full paragraph on the same topic.

Follow a Structured Routine: Following a structured routine from week to week not only gives learners a sense of predictability, it also simplifies planning. ESL literacy instructors often create a great deal of materials. Having a structure in place cuts back on time and prevents instructors from having to reinvent the wheel for every lesson or theme. As well, it is a good idea to have a list of things learners can do when they are finished tasks ahead of other learners.

Recycle: Provide learners with opportunities to use the same language over and over again until they become comfortable with it. For those learners who catch on earlier than others, offer a more difficult task based on the same language points or theme.

Teach Strategies: Learning how to learn is as important, if not more important, than learning the content, and enables learners to become more autonomous.

Scaffold: Plan lessons that are going to work for the learners with the most basic skills in your class, yet also offer more advanced learners an opportunity to challenge themselves. While this can be a tricky task for instructors, it is possible. Here are a few ways this can work:

- Make oral language development a starting point for your thematic work.
- Use cooperative games and tasks that don't highlight who gets it and who doesn't.
- While everyone practices the same vocabulary orally, provide learners with a spelling list, and support them to choose the right number of words for them. They should select a number of words they believe they can successfully learn. More advanced spellers are requested to select extra words from the challenge section of their spelling list.
- Include a variety of reading materials in your class library, so that everyone has something to read during the extended reading portion of your class.
- Provide learners with writing frames appropriate to their current ability.

Offer Support: In addition to scaffolding, see what kind of staff or volunteer support is available to you. The help of an educational assistant or a volunteer assistant provides opportunity for supported small group activities. This can be particularly advantageous in reading and writing, as each group can then work with a reading passage that is at an appropriate level for them, and each group can work on a similar writing activity, but with very different levels of support. For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter Ten.

Encourage Learners to Use Whatever Strengths and Strategies They Can: Learners can use numerous strategies to help them accomplish the same task. There are many good strategies, including: use of first language, picture dictionaries, first language dictionaries, asking others for assistance when they get stuck, and going back in their binders to something they remember from a previous lesson. The important thing is that the learners are experiencing growth and success.

Encourage Learners to Help Each Other: Learners can help each other. Provide opportunities for beginning readers to read with the support of someone who is a stronger reader,

for stronger learners to write a simple story that a beginning learner dictates, or for one learner to explain a numeracy concept to another learner in their first language. A highly organized learner can help someone who is unfamiliar with binder organization, and someone who understands class routines can offer support to someone who doesn't understand yet.

Celebrate Successes: Help learners see their own language development. Ask them to look at a current writing sample and another from two months ago, and tell you whether their writing is the same or different now. When this kind of self-evaluation is done regularly, competition and comparison with others in the class become less significant.

Conclusions: Teaching in a Multi-Level Context

While working in a multi-level context is certainly challenging, it also creates possibilities for a highly supportive, collaborative learning environment. Furthermore, as learners are provided with strategies for learning and growth, they begin to take greater ownership over their own language and strategy development. The tips and techniques for working in a multi-level environment can also be universally applied to all ESL literacy; not only are all ESL literacy classes multi-level to a certain extent, but these are also good practices for creating supportive, safe classrooms.

Conclusions

The development of literacy means more than just the ability to read and write. In order to thrive in their new communities and to reach their goals, LIFE will also need to be taught numeracy, which provides them with the skills and strategies for coping with numbers and math; cognitive development, which helps them learn patterns of thinking and reasoning expected in western culture, such as logic, linear reasoning, process of elimination, and recognizing difference; and technology, which includes computers but also all other kinds of machines and electronic devices. These three topics should not be seen as extras or even optional; all three are critically important in the development of literacy and language and will help learners with life in their new countries. Education, as much as we can discuss different subjects, is also highly fluid, and the skills and strategies learned in one area, such as recognizing a pattern of shapes in geometry, can be transferred to another area, such as recognizing patterns of grammatical endings.

There are two other considerations in an ESL literacy classroom that were discussed in this chapter: supporting first language literacy and teaching in a multi-level class. Both of these topics involve drawing on the strengths of the learners in the program to make the most of the learning environment, and working with the resources we have, to not just make do, but to make learning happen.