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Call for Papers

TNTESOL Journal
Volume 4, Fall 2011

The Editorial Board of the TNTESOL Journal seeks articles of general interest on any aspect of the teaching of English as a second or foreign language in elementary, middle high school, college/university, or adult/immigrant education. The topics can be varied and wide-ranging.

Articles should be no longer than twelve pages, double-spaced, or no more than 4000 words. A section entitled "Classroom Practices" will allow a maximum of 1500 words. Articles should follow APA style format, use nonsexist language, and have bibliographic references for all citations or works referred to in the body of the article.

Important note: All articles must be submitted electronically.

To submit your article electronically, please do the following:

1. Write and save the article as a Microsoft Word document.
2. Submit your paper as an attachment to an email in which you provide the following in the body of the email: your name, address, home phone number, school affiliation, email address, and title of the paper. Include a statement that your work has not been printed elsewhere and is not currently submitted elsewhere.
3. Email to dvrcraig@mtsu.edu and include the words "TNTESOL-J Submission" in the subject heading. You will be notified immediately by return email once the article is received.

Note: We accept articles year-round. Deadline for submission for fall publication: June 1, 2011.

CONTENTS

TNTESOL Journal Volume 3 2010

Examining Practice, Considering Possibilities, Providing Opportunities

Editor's Comments <i>Dorothy Valcarcel Craig</i>	4
 <i>Articles</i>	
Fluency Training to Improve the Reading Skills of Middle School Students <i>Sharon B. Hargrove</i>	8
Online Learning in the Middle School ESL Classroom <i>Johnna Paraiso</i>	22
Sight Word Knowledge: Increasing Reading Fluency <i>Heather Williamson</i>	32
EFL Learners' Choice of Learning Strategies Between Ethnic Groups <i>Hsiu-chen Chen and Huating Tai</i>	44
Response to Intervention and ELLs: One Teacher's Examination <i>Sunita Watson</i>	55
Teaching ELLs in the K-12 Arena: Perceptions from Non-Native English-Speaking Classroom Teachers <i>Patricia Davis-Wiley</i>	64
 <i>Classroom Practices</i>	
Holistic or Analytic Scoring? Issues in Grading ESL Writing <i>Martha Michieka</i>	75
Content Creators and Language Learners: Exploring Web 2.0 and Wikis <i>Dorothy Valcarcel Craig</i>	84

Editor's Comments: In This Issue

Dorothy Valcarcel Craig
Editor

As I reflect on the articles presented in the third edition of TNTESOL Journal, I am reminded of the professional educators in the field as well as those in higher education who strive to work collaboratively in order to seamlessly improve practice for all learners—K-16. The articles clearly present challenges and successes and tell the story of those who work with second language learners on a daily basis. Through research, practitioner-based action research, and reflection—each contributor's voice is heard through personal experiences as educators. The articles included in this edition delve into specific issues and concerns regarding language learning. Fluency, fluency training, and literacy development in the form of reading and writing are discussed in several articles. Student choice, self-reflection, and selection of strategies for teaching and evaluation are examined. Two articles focus primarily on technology and possibilities for using new tools and deliveries to promote language learning. As professional educators, we recognize the value in learning and continue to learn from our students as part of the journey. Along the way we consider possibilities, materials, and resources in order to provide enriching opportunities for learning and applying new skills, techniques, and strategies for language learning. Building on last year's theme, "Reflecting on What is Usable Knowledge," this edition's theme encourages readers to *examine practice, consider possibilities, and provide opportunities*.

Sharon Hargrove presents an interesting action research study conducted to examine fluency training and the possible impact on reading skills among middle school students. The author considers the issues surrounding U.S. born ELLs and those who have been enrolled in U.S. schools throughout their education. She points out that for many ELLs—they have received instruction in English from the time they entered school, however, they continue to struggle with fluency and reading. Working with a group of 6th grade male second language learners, Ms. Hargrove engages in action research in order to examine student choice of fluency tasks, preferences, strategies, and student achievement.

Johnna Paraiso closely examines current resources, materials, and curriculum in order to design online learning modules, lessons, and related activities for middle school second language learners. The author points out that many states across the country now offer "virtual schools" and instruction for secondary education

students. The online delivery encourages student choice, however, many immigrant students—who are second language learners—do not have the experience with technology that their English-speaking counterparts have acquired. This in itself presents additional challenges in terms of access in the home, technological literacy skills, and general computer knowledge. Ms. Paraiso uses a qualitative approach to research to explore whether the elements commonly used in online learning could effectively be utilized to address the varied needs of ELLs in the classroom. Using a teacher-designed web site, the author designed and delivered standards-based online instruction to twelve students representing multiple languages and cultural backgrounds. Although this study focused on middle school curriculum, instruction, and students, the findings are interesting, useful and could easily be applied to ELLs at any level.

In her article on the value of sight word instruction and use, Heather Williamson examines the effect of sight word fluency on reading fluency. The author presents two approaches to teaching sight words—drill and practice and instruction, which focuses on sight words in context. Working with a group of third grade ELLs, Ms. Williamson explores the dilemma facing many second language learners—high scores on standardized achievement tests in the areas of listening and speaking and struggling with oral reading and reading in general in the classroom. Findings from this particular study indicate that guided practice with sight words each day promoted sight word automaticity and reading fluency.

Hsiu-chen Chen and Huating Tai explore language learning strategies and choice in their article, which included students representing two ethnic groups—Taiwanese and Mexican students. The authors posit that specific ethnic groups of EFL learners prefer to utilize different language learning strategies. Based on this premise, the authors implement a version of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)—translated in Taiwanese and Spanish—in order to gather data regarding student choice and selection of strategies. Chen and Tai discuss the different types of communication strategies employed by EFL students and state that Taiwanese students used much less indirect communication strategies than the Spanish-speaking students who participated. In addition, the authors conclude that the Spanish-speaking students chose a greater degree of language learning strategies overall than the Taiwanese students did during English instructional tasks.

A current concern of many educators is the effectiveness and implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) when working with second language learners. Sunita Watson employs an action research approach in examining personal practice and collaborates with a small school team to identify strategies, materials, and services appropriate for ELLs. By closely exploring student

placement in the RtI Tiers, the author delves into perceptions of pullout services, teacher attitudes, and student views. Ms. Watson shares that based on TVAAS data, there was a need for the RtI services. In addition, both teacher and student attitudes towards RtI were positive. The author concludes that the key to success is through combining instructional strategies, engaging in collaborative teamwork, and continuing the ongoing examination of “what works.”

Patricia Davis-Wiley presents one part of a two-part study, which examined perceptions of non-native English-speaking classroom teachers. The author discusses the historical implications for hiring native English-speaking teachers in ESL and EFL positions and presents a strong argument against the exclusive preference. Working with five non-native English-speaking teachers, Dr. Wiley administered an open-ended survey instrument in order to gather data regarding perceptions of efficacy. Analysis of survey responses indicate that although personal challenges were presented, the non-native English-speaking teachers were able to provide explanations regarding how they overcame the challenges. In addition the participants reported an empathy for their own students who face similar challenges when learning English.

In her article, Martha Michieka presents valuable and practical information regarding holistic and analytic scoring for evaluating ESL writing. The author provides a detailed account of the two types of scoring scales and reminds us that writing assessment renders itself subjective unless clear scoring criteria are in place. Next, the advantages and disadvantages of each type of scoring are discussed. The author does not advocate one type over the other, but rather, encourages choice based on specific goals and needs.

I offer my own slight contribution and prompt the readers to consider Web 2.0 and related tools for language learning. Although many professional educators are already using some of the web tools readily available, I encourage those who have not yet embarked on the Web 2.0 journey to experiment with the tools for the purpose of language learning, curriculum design, and classroom instruction. By carefully examining the possibilities of using Web 2.0 tools, educators are better able to design meaningful tasks for students in the K-16 classroom. Encouraging our students to become “content creators” encourages them to take an active role in their learning, thus, assuming the responsibility that comes with being in charge of their learning.

The contributors in this edition of TNTESOL Journal present a variety of ideas, experiences, and strategies. The articles focus on many issues and concerns that continue to be part of the professional conversation surrounding teaching English

as a Second Language, teaching English as a Foreign Language, second language learner challenges and struggles, and new possibilities through technology.

...Examining Practice, Considering Possibilities, Providing Opportunities, Enjoying Learning!

Fluency Training to Improve the Reading Skills of Middle School English Language Learners

Sharon B. Hargrove

This action research study focused on fluency training to improve the reading skills of fluent speaking middle school English language learners who struggle academically due to low proficiency in reading. The participants in this project were ten male 6th grade English language learners enrolled in a rural middle school. The four week project focused on the inclusion of specific fluency training strategies in the ESL classroom to improve reading ability and content area achievement. The research took a mixed method approach and included data garnered from qualitative sources including surveys and reflective journal entries. Quantitative data was taken from test scores. The data was coded and analyzed to insure triangulation. The results of the study indicated a strong correlation between fluency training, student motivation, and reading fluency scores. The findings supported the inclusion of fluency training in a well-rounded reading curriculum; however, the reported speech effect on content area achievement was mixed and showed indication of need for further research.

The number of English language learners entering schools in the United States continues to grow in large metropolitan areas and small rural communities. This continued growth is presenting great challenges to educators as they strive to meet the needs of these students. The term “English language learner” is very broad and includes students from around the world who enter schools in the United States with various levels of educational backgrounds. Many experts in the field of second language acquisition have presented research that has helped teachers to bridge the language gap, build on native language literacy skills, and move these students toward academic success. However, many English language learners (ELLs) were born in the United States or emigrated at a very young age. Therefore, the entirety of their educational experience has been in schools where the only language of instruction has been English. While some of these students have progressed at a rate comparable to their native English-speaking peers in gaining academic success in all areas—others struggle to gain proficiency in the basic skills of reading and writing. When these students reach the middle school level, their academic language deficiencies frustrate the teachers who often see them as lazy and unmotivated.

Mount-Cors (2009) reported that teachers in the United States often assume that students who can speak basic conversational English should also be able to read

and write well enough to perform academic tasks at the middle school level. These teachers do not provide the scaffolding necessary for language learners to continue to grow academically. The fallacy of this theory is supported by extensive research including that of Cummins (2003) who stated that English language learners can acquire basic communication skills within about two years of initial exposure to the English language. However, he also reported that it can take anywhere from five to seven years for their cognitive academic abilities to catch up to those of their native English speaking peers. Many English language learners do progress at this predictable rate, others progress more quickly, however, some struggle much longer to gain a level of proficiency in the areas of reading and writing which can lead to academic success. This research project focused on such a group of English language learners and studied the effect fluency training could have on reading scores and content area achievement.

The link between fluency in reading and academic success is undeniable. Reading with comprehension is required in all academic areas, and much research has been done on the topic of reading fluency and its impact on reading comprehension. In research presented by Bashir and Hook (2009), fluency is included as a building block of good comprehension. They share that, reading is a complex developmental process that is based on the integration of diverse components. These components must flow into a smooth and automatic foundation on which reading fluency and, consequently, comprehension are grounded. Through his research, Hasbrouck (2007) also concluded that fluency is a fundamental component of reading, which is closely linked to comprehension and motivation. Hasbrouck went on to point out that students who struggle with fluency do not enjoy reading as much as fluent readers do. Hook and Jones (2002) found that without fluency—which includes the ability to see the prosodic correspondence between the spoken word and written text—students have a hard time chunking information into meaningful units in order to facilitate comprehension. The research presented suggested that fluency training is a necessary component of a well-rounded reading program.

In order to reflect upon the importance of fluency training on overall reading ability and content area academic success, the following questions were proposed for this study

1. Does intensive fluency training provide motivation and improve the overall reading ability of middle school English language learners?
2. Which fluency training strategies do students enjoy and use most effectively in building reading and language skills?
3. Does reading fluency training provide for skill transference, which can

result in an improvement in content area performance?

4. How can the results of this study be shared with other ESL teachers?

The questions were chosen in order to gain insight into the impact of the fluency training on students' reading ability. The questions also provided opportunity for student feedback on the learning process. The importance of content area language acquisition should not be overlooked in a study of reading and English language learners, and question number three provided a way to gain information about improvement in content area skills. Sharing the results of the study with content area teachers provided information to guide them in scaffolding content for student success.

Background Information

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation (2001) has placed immense pressure on teachers to cover large amounts of content through a focus on grade level standards. Middle school teachers expect students to be able to complete class work, homework, and projects independently while working toward mastery of content which must be validated through proficient scores on high stakes testing. In order to live up to these expectations and show evidence of average yearly progress, students must be able to read fluently with adequate comprehension at or near grade level.

Reading instruction at the middle school level is focused more on analyzing literature than improving fluency and word recognition in order to build comprehension. Many students at this level who read for pleasure build stronger vocabularies and writing skills while struggling readers tend to avoid reading and miss out on these important side effects of the reading process. The risk of failure for these struggling readers is very real.

English language learners, ELL, make up a large percentage of the struggling readers in schools today. Many of these students may have had interrupted schooling, inadequate basic reading instruction, or may live in homes where no English is spoken and no reading materials are available. Although academic failure is the most obvious risk for these ELL students, Krashen (1993) reported that they have much more to lose if they do not engage in regular reading practice. He reported that developing reading competence can take a second language learner from, "...a beginning conversational level to a level where they can use the second language for more demanding purposes" (p.84). Krashen goes on to state that, "When they read for pleasure, they can continue to improve in their second language without classes, without teachers, without study and even without people to converse with" (p.84). With so much at stake, it is imper-

ative that ELL students gain the skills necessary to become competent and avid readers.

The National Reading Panel (2000) includes fluency as one of its five critical components of skilled reading and reports a strong correlation between fluency and comprehension. Therefore, improving reading fluency must play a major role in the design of any program aimed at improving the reading skills of middle school ELL students. Hasbrouk (2007) defined fluency as, "...the ability to read text with appropriate speed and accuracy. Fluent readers also read with good expression" (¶ 3). He also stated that students who struggle with fluency will have a difficult time understanding what they read no matter how strong their vocabularies or how high the level of their phonemic awareness may be. O'Donnell and Wood (2004) agreed with Hasbrouk in saying that a lack of fluency detracts from comprehension, since readers are typically using their cognitive energy to identify words rather than to construct meanings from larger units of texts. There is some difference of opinion about the connection between fluency and comprehension. Weaver (2002) offers that miscue analysis and teachers' classroom experience show the misconception of thinking that fluency is necessary for comprehension or that fluency is a surefire indicator of comprehension.

Many fluency-training strategies have been researched in order to gain insight into their effectiveness in improving students' reading abilities. During a twelve-week research project involving two elementary schools, Eber and Miller (2005) incorporated fluency training that focused on repeated reading. This research showed positive results for all students in the areas of fluency, word recognition, and comprehension. The researchers were surprised that students scoring in the lowest levels on reading pretests showed the greatest gain. They felt this could be attributed in part to the fact that these students had more room for improvement. In another study of repeated reading and its effect on fluency, Roundy and Roundy (2009) also reported positive outcomes for all students. Their five-week study involved 110 middle school students. After gathering and analyzing data, they found many students had doubled their reading fluency pretest scores and had also increased comprehension scores. One of the most interesting results of both studies was an improvement in the students' attitude toward reading.

When compared, both data from research done on a small scale and data from much larger projects have shown that fluency training can have a positive effect on students' reading abilities. In research involving three fourth grade students and using several fluency training strategies including repeated reading, guided reading, choral reading and sight word practice, Atkinson-Smith (n.d.) reported that all students showed improvement and reached the goal of reading fourth grade material with grade level fluency. On a much grander scale, Stahl and

Heuback (1997) conducted a two-year study involving 14 classes of students that made fluency practice the focus of reading instruction. The purpose of their research was, to examine ways to help children move from the accuracy-driven decoding, typical of the decoding stage, to the fluency and automaticity needed to take advantage of reading to learn. The reading program was designed around several fluency training methods such as partner reading, oral recitation, repeated readings, and an expanded home-reading program. The results of this study were mixed. Even though some readers made little progress, many struggling readers were able to read and comprehend material at a much higher level than expected due to the additional practice at home and the additional work in the classroom.

Much of the research reported on reading fluency has concentrated on native English speakers. Good teaching is good teaching, and what works with native speakers should also have a positive effect on English language learners; therefore, the results of the research could be used to implement a program of effective fluency training for ELL students. The amount of research dealing specifically with reading fluency and ELL students is growing due to an ever-increasing number of immigrant students entering schools today. Most research on this topic has found that fluency training for ESL students must also include vocabulary instruction. Comprehension is difficult for any reader unless students have the vocabulary to read contextually. Since English instruction is limited to only one or two periods a day, it is necessary for teachers to be innovative and look for ways that can address the issues that struggling ELL readers bring into the classroom.

Introducing technology into the ESL reading curriculum is an innovative approach that has produced some positive effects. Research done by Blum, Koskiman, Tennant, and Parker (1995) focused on audio books and ELL reading fluency. This nineteen-week project gave the students the opportunity to take the audio books home each day. The program design supplemented the school's literacy program, which focused on fluency and vocabulary instruction to build comprehension. Data gleaned from student surveys at the conclusion of the project showed a marked improvement in students' motivation to read. Since student motivation is one of the most important elements in second language acquisition, these results are very valuable to teachers of ELL students. Teachers also noted that students were better at monitoring their own reading, which could be an indication of comprehension. The students became very selective in their reading materials and would return books that they could not understand. Growth in fluency was evaluated using qualitative methods. The criteria for fluency stated by Blum et al. (1995) as smooth, natural, expressive reading as determined by teacher judgment and word accuracy of 90% or higher. Results presented indicated that all students met or surpassed this level of fluency. Research on the use of audio books took this methodology into the digital age by downloading audio

books to Apple iPods (Patten, Craig, Nunnery, Paraiso, Hagrove, & Williamson, 2006). This study revealed that this new technology to be a huge motivational factor in getting students to read more. Even though no positive effects on reading fluency were noted in the study, the researchers stated that, findings indicate that although comprehension skills did not improve significantly—overall writing skills and vocabulary development did improve. Since vocabulary development and writing skills are key issues in English language acquisition, this technology deserves a place in any study of improving reading fluency and overall reading skills.

The focus on fluency in reading instruction continues to be applauded by many experts. Rasinski (2006) pointed to research conducted in fluency training and identified the following as three key instructional strategies that are essential to developing fluency:

1. Model fluent reading,
2. Provide assistance while reading, and
3. Provide opportunities for students to practice reading.

The fluency training strategies that are to be included in this action research project will provide for the inclusion of these three key elements.

THE STUDY: EXAMINING FLUENCY TRAINING

Participants

The study was conducted in an ESL classroom at a large middle school located in a southern, rural school district. The ten participants were all male 6th grade students who were identified as English language learners based on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA) required by the state of Tennessee and administered during spring of 2009. Participants' composite language acquisition scores ranged from 1-4 on a scale of five with reading being the lowest score ranging from 1-3 and speaking the highest with a range of 3-5. These scores placed the students within the English acquisition categories of high beginner to intermediate with most scoring at the intermediate level.

One student's native language was Bosnian, and the remaining nine were from Mexico and spoke Spanish as their first language, L1. Two of the students were receiving special education services as well as English as a second language instruction. Participants were not newcomers in terms of their education as all but one of the students had been in school in the United States since kindergarten.

Table 1 provides a detailed description of the participants.

Methodology

Action research was chosen approach for this inquiry because of its effectiveness as a process teachers can use to identify a problem, incorporate the gathering of data into everyday classroom routines, and use the findings to improve practice. O'Brian (1998) endorses the use of action research in the classroom because, instead of being used in experimental studies of possible situations, it is used to solve real problems that are in need of being addressed in order to meet the needs of students. Myers and Rust (2003) suggest that good teaching is research because teachers must constantly monitor their teaching and student learning to find the most effective ways to move students toward academic success. They presented action research as a vehicle, which teachers can use not only to reflect upon practice in their own classroom but also to engage in activities that can lead to change in educational policy at the local, state, and even national level. A mixed-method research methodology was used to assess the impact fluency training activities had upon the students' reading abilities. Qualitative data was collected through the use of the researcher's field journal notes, classroom observations, student journal entries, and surveys. Quantitative methods were used to gather students' scores on fluency tests and classroom evaluations. Sources of data included:

1. Pre- and post survey responses
2. Pre- and post fluency test scores
3. Pre- and post content area scores
4. Reflective journal entries

Research Procedures

The study began with a student survey that allowed students to reflect upon their competence in and attitude toward reading. Content area teachers completed a survey concerning how reading ability was affecting student performance in the classroom. Test scores—which would be utilized for comparison purposes—were gathered from the Power School grading system. Participants were given initial fluency tests. The researcher and the student participants recorded observations and reflections in journals as they engaged in a four-week fluency training session. The fluency test was re-administered and students completed an exit survey. Qualitative data was collected and coded to make sure that triangulation occurred and that research questions were answered. Research findings were shared with students, parents, and content area teachers.

Data Sources

Rich qualitative data was gathered during this study from many sources. The researcher's reflective journal painted very graphic images of a classroom filled with eager and excited students who had previously been less than enthusiastic about reading class. Comments made by content area teachers reflected a very positive shift in their attitude toward the need for scaffolding English language learners as they moved toward proficiency in reading. Reflective journaling allowed the students to confide to the researcher the difficulties they experienced in trying to read big words and how embarrassed they felt when they were called on to read. Surveys allowed the students to make choices and provide their insights into the effectiveness of the fluency training process.

Fluency test scores and classroom evaluations provided concrete data that could support the need for more emphasis on including some of the strategies that build fluency into the content area. The data provided by these sources presented a challenge during coding. After color-coding the information to align it with the overarching questions, the attribute codes fell into place very easily as the themes and categories aligned.

Discussion of Findings

In order to accurately represent the findings and conclusions of the study, the data was analyzed to identify emerging themes. As the themes developed more fully, attributes of categories began to align with each overarching question. This was helpful in identifying the emerging themes and also ensured triangulation. Findings are presented according to each emerging theme.

Theme #1: Fluency Training and Motivation

Measuring motivation is very difficult in any arena. Before beginning the study on fluency training, a Likert scale survey was given to garner insight into how the students felt about reading. All participants saw reading as very important and had a strong desire to become better readers. Even though eight of the students reported having a hard time reading big words, seven saw themselves as good readers. One student said that he never liked going to reading class, while all other participants reported enjoying the class very much. Information gathered from student journaling throughout the research, showed strong evidence that the students were enjoying the reading activities and even wrote entries asking for specific ones to be repeated. Field notes from the researcher's journal noted a change in the atmosphere of the classroom based upon the eagerness with which the students approached reading tasks.

Improvement in overall reading ability was measured using data gathered from individual fluency testing. This test measured the automaticity component of fluency including reading rate. A pre-test and a post-test were administered to measure gains. In order to calculate WCPM, word count per minute, students were given one minute to read a passage while the teacher recorded errors. The number of errors was subtracted from the total words read. Gains were recorded for all participants, with the mean gain in word count per minute being 24.4 points. Grade level gains were also recorded. Three students showed no gains in this area, while others progressed from one to two grade levels. The mean grade level gain was 1.3. Fluency as measured in word count per minute indicated a wide range of reading ability as measured by oral reading within the classroom.

This fluency testing revealed a wide range of reading ability in the measured skill. Since these students are still struggling with comprehension in reading and content area classes, differentiated instruction should be planned that will move these students toward grade level in comprehension. Practice can be improved by including students in fluency activities that address individual needs. The results of the fluency testing are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Fluency Testing

Participating Student	Pre-test WCPM	WCPM Grade Equivalency	Post-test WCPM	WCPM Grade Equivalency	WCPM Gains
#1	71	2	86	3	15
#2	94	3	94	3	0
#3	71	2	82	3	11
#4	60	1	98	3	38
#5	34	1	49	1	15
#6	149	7	177	8	28
#7	77	2	109	4	32
#8	83	3	119	5	36
#9	113	5	135	7	22
#10	65	2	112	4	47

Prosody refers to the readers' ability to use expression and word phrasing so oral reading closely resembles conversational language. The participants' level of prosody was measured by using a Likert scale model to rank the student's fluency in this area from 1-5 with five representing grade level fluency. The test included ratings on expression, phrasing, usage of punctuation clues, and smoothness of reading. All students showed gain in these areas. The highest again was 1.0 and the lowest 0.1 with the mean being 1.2. Since the participants who ranked

highest in automaticity also ranked highest on the prosody scale, an improvement in practice could be made through the use of more practice using the prosodic features of reading through such methods as reader's theater. The results of the fluency testing for prosody are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Fluency Testing for Prosody

Student	Gains	Pre-test	Post test
1	0.6	1.0	1.6
2	0.4	3.0	3.4
3	0.4	1.4	1.8
4	0.4	1.0	1.4
5	0.2	1.0	1.2
6	1.0	2.8	3.8
7	0.2	3.6	3.8
8	1.4	1.6	3.0
9	0.4	2.6	3.0
10	1.0	1.0	2.0

Theme: Fluency Strategies

Fluency training was approached through the use of several researched based fluency training strategies. Nonparametric data was gathered using a Likert scale which students used to rank the effectiveness of the strategies from 1, least effective, to a 5, most effective in improving reading skills. The students felt that YouTube videos that allowed them to read along or sing along as the lyrics were presented on the screen as well as reader's theater had helped them the most in building reading fluency. Students practiced their scripts for reader's theater performances in groups. The researcher's field notes revealed that the group work was very collaborative and provided students with time to work on the reading fluency necessary to give good performances.

The importance of group practice was also noted in student journal entries. Students' journals revealed that not only had the YouTube videos helped them with fluency in reading, they felt that their speaking had improved through singing the songs repeatedly. One student commented on singing the songs at home to his family with whom he usually never spoke English. The strategies ranking highest on this scale were ones that allowed the students to interact and actually perform. The performance element in these strategies added fun to the fluency practice and allowed the students to relax and enjoy the reading experience.

Reader's theater and YouTube videos also ranked high on a similar survey concerning the students' enjoyment of reading during the implementation of the various strategies. However, computer based reading activities and iPod assisted reading ranked as the two most enjoyable reading activities. Most of the participants in this study did not have technology in their homes and were anxious to use it in the classroom. Field notes from the researcher's reflective journal noted an elevated sense of excitement and motivation when students were presented with the opportunity to use any type of technology, especially the computer. Since motivation is one of the most important keys of academic success, these results provided insight into what strategies could be used to motivate students to be actively engaged in the reading process. The results of the surveys are presented below (Table 3).

The goal of all reading is comprehension, and many experts report strong evidence of a link between reading fluency and reading comprehension. In order to find a relationship between the fluency training exercises and improvement in reading comprehension, mean comprehension scores were taken from the Power School grading system at the school before the research began and after the process ended. All students improved or stayed the same. The gains were very minimal in most cases. With the exception of student participant #7—who scored high in fluency but extremely low in comprehension—the highest comprehension scores were attained by students who also had high marks in all areas of fluency testing. More individual evaluation should be done to find strategies that could close the gap in reading skills for students whose reading appears to be fluent, but whose comprehension levels are below proficient. The comprehension scores seem to be stagnant. In order to improve comprehension a stronger emphasis should be placed on comprehension skills in future fluency training (Table 4).

Table 3

Student Participant Views on Effectiveness and Enjoyment of Strategies / Scale 1-5

Strategy	Student Rating: Effectiveness	Student Rating: Enjoyment
Choral Reading	3.0	3.2
Repeated Reading	3.5	3.4
Computer-Based Reading	4.2	4.7
iPod	4.2	4.6
Partner Reading	4.8	4.4
Readers' Theater	4.5	4.5
Songs	4.0	4.4
Poetry Recitation	4.3	3.7
YouTube Videos	4.8	4.5
Reading Centers	3.7	4.3

Table 4

Pre- and Post Test Results

Student Participant	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
1	60	62	+2
2	77	81	+4
3	62	64	+2
4	71	84	+13
5	25	28	+3
6	81	88	+7
7	87	88	+1
8	70	70	--
9	50	50	--
10	61	64	+4

Theme: Fluency Training and Transference

Data gathered on skill transference from the reading classroom to higher achievement in the content area classroom presented mixed results. Observations made by the researcher and content area teachers noted that students were more engaged in the classroom and volunteered information more freely than before the study began, but no measurable gains could be found in content area test scores. All content area teachers reported feeling that low reading ability was a strong contributing factor in low student achievement. Most participants were working below grade level, and some evidence of modification to address language deficiencies was found. One content area teacher commented that the results of the research had caused her to be more conscious of providing scaffolding for all students who were struggling with reading.

CONCLUSION

Improving practice is the ultimate goal of action research. Gains made in reading fluency during the study provided evidence that students should continue engaging in these exercises in the ESL reading classroom. Data should be gathered throughout the remainder of the school year so the teacher can address students' individual needs. Since comprehension scores showed very little gains during

the study, stronger strategies that focus on comprehension development should be incorporated into the reading curriculum. Appropriate scaffolding should be provided in content area classrooms to help insure the growth of English language learners' academic content knowledge as they work to bring their reading skills up to grade level proficiency.

The Author

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Online Learning in the Middle School ESL Classroom

Johnna Paraiso

This study evaluated available technology resources in order to design and implement online learning for second language learners. Based on this evaluation, the inquiry examined the views, perceptions, and successes of ESL middle school students working with a variety of technology including online learning and instruction. Employing a qualitative approach, the researcher observed second language learners working with online resources and collected multiple forms of data including field notes, participant field journals, blog entries, student test scores, survey data, and artifacts. Findings indicate that student participants expressed an interest and a high degree of satisfaction with the online learning elements. Students were engaged and were able to interact creatively and constructively. A change in student participation took place where the focus was placed on sharing and a willingness to participate in projects such as writing, high levels of vocabulary use, and increased self-confidence.

A popular practice in higher education—online learning is becoming increasingly popular in American secondary schools. Forty-eight states now have virtual schools where secondary students, either by choice or requirement, have the option of taking advantage of online learning opportunities. Students can take part in credit recovery programs, complete vocational training, and participate in academic enrichment activities all in the online environment. However, an increasing number of immigrants into U.S. schools—many of whom are enrolled in English as a Second Language programs—are faced with a number of disadvantages when taking part in online learning. The lack of academic English is a significant obstacle for ESL students when participating in online learning. Additionally many ESL students are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and may not have access to computer technology at home. Thus, these children may lack the familiarity with current technology that their counterparts enjoy. A simple Internet search, done easily and on a nearly daily basis by many American students, may be overwhelming for English Language Learners (ELLs). This in turn makes the growing availability of online learning hold diminished promise for ELLs.

A growing trend among regular education students is the virtual school. Virtual schools are useful for credit recovery as well as enrichment (Starkman, 2007; Washburn, 2004). Although a growing trend in education, the place of virtual schools for ESL students remains untapped, however, several studies support the need for further investigation. For example, Thirunarayanan and Perez-Prado (2001) completed a quantitative study comparing the achievement of students enrolled in two sections of an English as a second language course. One section was taught in a face-to-face classroom environment and the second section was delivered and taught online. The findings from this particular study suggest that there is a need for ongoing research and inquiry in order to continuously test the effectiveness of utilizing web-based course delivery technology for second language learning.

Additional insight is offered by studies, which focus on the possibilities presented when utilizing technology to promote literacy. For example, the relationship between the use of technology in the writing classroom and student achievement was explored by Daniels (2004) who examined the difference between writing scores among students who worked in a technology-rich environment and those who were taught writing in a traditional classroom. Daniels is of the opinion that the practice afforded by the computer program as well as the student enthusiasm that was displayed at using the computer played a major role in the improved test scores (Daniels, 2004).

However, the continued use of technology as well as the meaningful interaction needed to internalize the second language must be considered. An interesting study involving two sisters whose first language was Polish supports this. The researchers examined computer use in the home environment. Throughout the study, the sisters used a wide range of English language computer programs. With the help of their mother, the sisters used the programs for a twelve-week period. At the end of the period, the girls were encouraged to continue to use the programs independently. Data collected indicated that—without the reinforcement and interaction with the mother—the retention began to diminish (Dylak & Kaczmarska, 2001).

Reinforcement of new learning and support of prior knowledge is an important aspect of effective technology use in the second language classroom. Chatel (2001) suggests that when teachers choose web sites and software in the student's native language as well as in English that the student's affective filter is lowered enabling the student to retain more of the information presented. In addition, Meskill (2005) offers that the "language of school" can be particularly difficult for English language learners as they struggle to assimilate into the American school environment. Face to face contact with peers can be minimized through

the use of computers, giving the learner a chance to practice academic skills without less social pressure. Therefore, technology may assist in: a) promoting language learning, b) encouraging use, and c) lowering the stress associated with learning a second language within a school environment.

Other studies indicate that technology can benefit student learning by generating interest and enthusiasm, but students benefit most when the activities are purposeful in nature. Wang (2005) outlines five ways that technology can advance literacy learning. These are as follows:

1. Word processing,
2. Technology texts,
3. Publishing student work,
4. Communication through the Internet, and
5. Searching for online information.

Last, Tobin (2005) found that computers could provide a valuable resource for differentiating instruction for diverse learners. Tobin's studies of learning disabled, gifted and language minority students show that instructors had tremendous opportunity through the Internet to provide content area instruction in an ability-appropriate manner.

The problem addressed in this research project was whether the elements commonly used in online learning could be used effectively in addressing the multiple needs of the English Language Learner. The study addressed whether or not the technological resources available for ELLs enrolled in three middle schools in a mid-state public school system could significantly impact or increase language acquisition. Based on this evaluation, the researcher then examined the impact of online delivery on English language learners in terms of: a) student success, b) preferences, and c) interactions.

Using a qualitative research approach, the researcher documented the experiences and achievements of middle school English Language Learners as their language instruction was delivered in an online format. Data were collected in the form of completed class assignments, test scores, blogs, emails, student participant journals, researcher field journal notes, and artifacts.

The overarching questions that guided the study included:

1. What technological resources, specifically computers and software, are currently available for ELLs and what patterns of use were in place to assist language acquisition?

2. How effective are the computers, software, and patterns of use in facilitating English language acquisition?
3. How effective are computers and computer programs in facilitating English language acquisition?

METHODOLOGY

The design approach to this research project addressed the question as to whether common elements of online courses could be effectively interwoven into a middle school ESL class. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the researcher not only wanted to gather statistical data on the student achievement, but also wanted to chronicle student experiences and perceptions of online learning as contrasted to traditional classroom structure.

A class web site, www.myeslclass.org, was constructed and maintained by the researcher for the purpose of delivering ESL instruction online to the twelve students involved in the research project. The assignments were designed according to Tennessee State Curriculum Standards for both ESL as well as for regular Language Arts and Reading education. Elements that have been found through research to be common to many online courses, such as discussion boards, blogs, web quests, and wikis, were built into the design of the online class research project.

A qualitative study of the students' experiences with these online elements best suited this research projects, as the researcher was seeking to document not only numerical data but whether the affective filter was effectively lowered in order for the students to acquire greater ability with English literacy and technological literacy.

Qualitative research requires multiple forms of data. The data are collected over a prolonged period of time and typically involve the researcher as instrument and as a participant observer. In order to begin the process, the researcher utilized the following procedures and data sets:

1. Field journals were kept by the researcher and participating students in order to chronicle the online learning experience from both the viewpoint of student and teacher.
2. Student surveys were conducted in order to determine the students' personal satisfaction with online learning.

Since this was a qualitative study, most of the data collected were a documentation of the process and experiences of the students and teacher as they progressed

through the online modules. Therefore, the field journals were of particular importance to the study because they represented thoughts, views, and perceptions. A student survey was designed as one of the instruments, because it provided a means for the students to express their opinions of the online learning experience and to provide personal feedback. The survey questions were designed specifically to determine whether or not the students found the online experience to be preferable to a traditional classroom setting.

The following procedures were employed in order to collect multiple data sets:

- An inventory was conducted to determine the availability of network programs and software resources currently available in three selected schools participating in the study.
- An inventory was conducted to determine the availability of suitable online educational resources for middle school ESL students.
- The class web site itself served as a source of ongoing data collection via recorded observations and notes taken by students and researcher.
- Student work samples and artifacts were collected at intervals during the course of the study.
- Student test scores from sources such as BrainPop were gathered as part of the data.
- Researcher field journal notes were recorded to chronicle the online learning experience.
- Participating students kept electronic journals in the form of blogs in order to chronicle the online learning experience from both viewpoints.
- Student surveys were conducted in order to determine the students' personal satisfaction with online learning.

The participants of this study consisted of twelve English language learners representing three selected schools in the mid-state area (Table 1). The group consisted of six female students and six male students, ranging in age from eleven years through fourteen years. Although most of the student participants were considered to be operating at the intermediate level (English Language Development Assessment), the group represented a varied range of English proficiency. The students participating in the study were from several ethnic backgrounds. Two of the students had computers with Internet access at home, whereas ten did not. All of the students in the group had access to an individual computer in class for the duration of the research project. These students were selected to be a part of the research project because they expressed an interest in being involved in the online learning research project and returned parental/guardian permission forms.

Table 1

Participants

Student	Grade	Gender	Ethnic Background	School
Participant 1	7	Male	Hispanic	SCM
Participant 2	6	Female	Hispanic	SCM
Participant 3	7	Female	Hispanic	BMS
Participant 4	7	Male	Hispanic	BMS
Participant 5	8	Female	Iraqi	BMS
Participant 6	7	Male	Russian	CMS
Participant 7	7	Male	Lao	CMS
Participant 8	7	Male	Lao	CMS
Participant 9	8	Female	Hispanic	CMS
Participant 10	8	Female	Hispanic	CMS
Participant 11	8	Male	Guajarati	CMS
Participant 12	8	Female	Hispanic	CMS

DATA ANALYSIS

Once all data were collected, the researcher stored and made copies of all data in order to thoroughly analyze the data. For the purposes of this study, the researcher adopted an action research approach as outlined by Sagor (2004). Since this study was qualitative in nature, much of the data involved was analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis as explained by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The procedures that the researcher used to analyze the data included:

1. Coding each unit of data. A code was assigned to the collected data in order to determine the type of data, the purpose of the data, and the overarching question addressed by the data.
2. Organizing the data into a system that reflected the initial coding. This process involved placing the data into folders based on the coding system or organizing the data online according to the coding system.
3. Refining the categories as patterns in the data emerged. This process included the creation of new categories as needed and writing rules of inclusion as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994).
4. Exploring relationships and patterns across categories. As the data were

analyzed, the researcher determined if there were previously undiscovered relationships and patterns in the data. The implications for further research and practice were analyzed as well.

The types of data analyzed in the final research study included student narratives, student surveys, researcher narratives, student test scores and student work. The coding used in analyzing the data included the following categories (Table 2).

Table 2

Coding Categories

Coding Category	Attributes
Computer Software Analysis	An analysis of the software programs available in each of the three schools involved in the research study was performed in order to determine if there were programs common to all three schools that could aid in the design of the online course.
Test Data	Student online quiz scores were analyzed in order to determine if passing scores were received for the online module.
Teacher Satisfaction	Using a Likert scale, the teacher-researcher analyzed the types of activities in the study to determine effectiveness and ease of use of each activity.
Student Satisfaction	Using a Likert scale, the students involved in the study indicated the enjoyment and ease of use of each learning activity.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As the online class experience in the study developed, necessary adjustments were made in order to maintain the integrity of the study. Initially the course was set up to have more of the instruction delivered online with relatively little interaction between students. However as the class continued working within the online experience, the participants' excitement over their projects was expressed in their natural desire to share and discuss. Collaboration came naturally to this group of learners. The participants developed a more sophisticated vocabulary as they shared their learning experiences, both with other online participants as well as those that were physically in the classroom with them. There seemed to be a need among this group of middle schoolers to have immediate live feedback from their peers as well as their instructor. Thus the researcher frequently noted students collaborating perhaps even more frequently than they might have in a

more conventional environment where the mode of expression was geared more toward paper and pencil.

Generally speaking all participants as well as the teacher-researcher concluded that the online course elements that were integrated into the ESL class were a valuable learning tool. The participants expressed enjoyment in the collaborating activities of the three middle schools involved in the study. The researcher found that the participants ranked the online experience as very satisfying and preferred such a technology infused course to a more traditional classroom environment. The researcher came to a number of conclusions based on the data gathered during the course of the study. First of all the students expressed interest in and satisfaction with the online learning elements that were incorporated into the study. Upon observation, the researcher found that the students were engaged in the learning and were able to interact both creatively and constructively with these learning elements. The online elements that were present in the study invoked the same kinds of thought processes present in effective classrooms: discussion, sharing of ideas, synthesis of information, creative interaction with information and adherence to curriculum standards.

Secondly the researcher found that the introduction of online elements into these ESL classes provided a technology infused environment that had not previously been present. As a result of this change, participants were engaged in learning, focused on sharing, and demonstrated an increased willingness to participate in otherwise less preferred projects, such as writing five paragraph essays. Writing such essays and posting them for other classmates to view within a degree of personal anonymity lowered the affective filter among the participants.

A third conclusion the researcher noted was that the participants increased their use of English vocabulary, particularly vocabulary related to educational technology and the online learning elements they were using. Words such as “blogging”, “message boards”, and “checking email” became a part of the everyday classroom vernacular. Participants expressed eagerness to share their knowledge with others, including their families. The participants’ level of self-confidence increased as they perceived their technological competence to increase. In a population of students such as these English language learners, where technological and educational opportunities may have been previously limited, increased confidence with language translated into increased competence with language and technology for the participant.

Based on the findings in this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. A methodic comprehensive program to introduce English language learners with little or no technological experience to classroom computers, programs, and online learning.
2. An organized and increased effort on the part of ESL and classroom teachers to find and implement online elements into the classroom.
3. A commitment on the part of administrators at the building and the district levels to increase digital access for English language learners who do not have access to technology at home.
4. A commitment on the part of administrators and school board members to maintain and increase funding for educational technology for English language learners, particularly as the ELL population continues to increase and demand for proficiency with technology in both education and the work force increases.
5. A concerted effort on the part of parents, teachers, and administrators to provide materials for online learning and appropriate venues for students to display their learning, such as district web sites and student technology competitions.

The opportunities for online learning are increasing in the American school system (Thompson, 2007). English language learners, who may not have had a significant background with educational technology, frequently find themselves faced with new learning experiences in American public schools. The use of a simple classroom computer in itself may be a daunting task for a student who has never used a mouse or a keyboard before. The English language learner may then find himself less competent to take advantage of educational opportunities such as distance learning or online learning. The integration of online course elements into the ESL class provides these students with practice using educational technology in a supportive environment. With such experience, the English language learner may then be more capable to take full advantage of future online learning opportunities.

The integration of online course elements such as message boards, email and blogs were not only beneficial for the language learner's language acquisition, but increased the students' computer knowledge and engaged them in higher order thinking. The researcher found that the participants that were involved in the use of these online elements grew increasingly comfortable not only with the online learning experience itself but with the increased level of academic vocabulary that was intrinsic in the online learning experience. English language learners in this study not only achieved academic goal—they also achieved personal goals and became technology leaders with their own friends and families.

The Author

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Sight Word Knowledge: Increasing Reading Fluency

Heather Williamson

This study examined the effects of sight word fluency and use on reading fluency as well as specific strategies to assist students in building sight word fluency. Aspects of sight word fluency and reading fluency were examined and analyzed in order to generate questions, which ultimately became the focus of the study. After gathering and analyzing a variety of qualitative and quantitative data, findings indicate a significance between sight word knowledge and reading fluency. Findings were shared with school administration, English as a second language teachers, and regular education teachers in order to provide information and insight regarding the practice of sight word drilling and reading fluency.

As a classroom teacher as well as researcher, it is a teacher's job to do everything in their power to teach students as many skills as possible for them to be successful as they become adults, teachers must also show these gains with the students rise in test scores each year. As stated in the Tennessee ESL Program Guide (n.d.) and noted in No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), "Schools are responsible for improving the academic performance of all students, and there are specific consequences for districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress." By learning if a strategy truly works, teachers can better assist their students. According to Hudson (2005), perhaps the most compelling reason to focus instructional efforts on students becoming fluent readers is the strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension. In addition, the National Institute for Literacy (2010) suggests that monitoring student progress in reading fluency assists teachers in determining the effectiveness of instruction as well as informs the process of setting instructional goals (www.edcheckup.com).

Struggling readers are often overlooked or ignored because of the immense pressure placed on educators to teach all grade level standards. These students, especially the Limited English Proficient (LEP) students who continue to struggle, fall even farther behind. According to the Tennessee Department of Education 2008 Report Card, the gap between LEP students and non-LEP students was significant. In 2008, the target percent desired was 89% proficient and advanced

in the Reading/Language Plus Writing section of the TCAP. LEP students averaged at 74% while African American students scored at 87%, and white students scored at 94% (TDOE Report Card, 2008). Students must be taught effectively in order to close the gap. Schools and their teachers must do the work.

One way to close this gap is to find a solution to the problem of struggling readers. If the students are unable to read and comprehend what they are reading, they cannot show significant improvements on their test scores. The teaching of sight words is one means of focusing instruction on fluency issues in reading. Johnson (n.d.) suggests that approximately 75% of all words that a beginning reader encounters are sight words. Sight words are an extremely important and vital part of all students' education, particularly LEP students who need to master sight words in order to focus on vocabulary involved in reading and content area material. Consequently, reading of sight words is necessary for young children's independence, safety, and more mature reading experiences as they grow older and progress in school (Meadan, Stoner, & Parette, 2008). Independence, safety, and success are what these struggling readers need in order to make the reading gains necessary to improve their overall achievement in reading as well as making the gains needed on their reading achievement test scores.

According to the National Institute for Literacy (2010), automaticity of a skill is achieved when the skill can be performed with little or no conscious attention to execution. The importance of reading with automaticity can be found in a variety of research which provides evidence that automaticity in word recognition allows the mind to be free to concentrate on comprehending the material that is being read (Yoshimura, 2000; AutoSkill, 2009; Wolfe & Nevills, 2004).

Hook and Jones (2002) offer that even mild difficulties in word identification can pull attention away from the underlying meaning, reduce the speed of reading, and create the need to reread selections to grasp the meaning. This type of fluency is very important as it provides a bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension (NIFL, 2010).

The significance of sight words in education is present in findings gleaned from extensive research, which focuses on connecting knowledge of sight words to reading fluency and comprehension. Research spans from studies focusing on brief daily drills of sight words, repeated reading of sight words in context, and examinations of the innumerable teaching strategies and their individual outcomes. Cavanaugh (2005) made this statement concerning English language learners and sight word fluency,

“The importance of learning the Dolch words is also very important for the beginner ESOL/EFL/ESL student. While most native speakers have been learning written forms of words that make up a large part of their oral/aural vocabulary, this is often not true for students with English as their second language.”

Although there are many benefits to sight word recognition, six major benefits are regularly cited (ww.k12reader.com):

1. Sight words are confidence builders.
2. Sight words free up a child’s energy to tackle more challenging words.
3. Sight words provide clues to the meaning of a sentence.
4. Sight words sometimes defy decoding strategies.
5. Sight word instruction builds a foundation for reading new, more complex words.
6. Sight words enhance ESL instruction.

There is no doubt that it is important for students to learn sight words with automaticity. It is important for their reading fluency and comprehension. It is also important for them because comprehension and fluency assists students in making gains in proficiency levels.

Two of the most researched types of teaching sight words involve: a) sight word drilling with flashcards and b) teaching them through context.

Sight Words Through Drill and Practice

Research conducted by Mayfield and Holmes (1999) indicate that brief direct instruction daily of the sight words resulted in higher achievement in vocabulary and comprehension unit test scores of at-risk third graders than those of a control group of students who did not take part in daily sight word drills.

Kubina (2005) suggests that by designing and providing opportunities for practice, teachers utilize a powerful variable in reading achievement known as “engaged time.” Engaged time refers to the amount of time students actually engage in a particular meaningful and relevant activity. Because reading researchers have noted that engaged time has demonstrated the highest correlation with reading achievement, allocating and using time for practice activities helps all students with their targeted reading skills. This is one reason for sight word activities that are engaged in on a regular basis.

Sight Words in Context

The second approach of teaching sight words through context (still repetitively) has a great deal more support than actual drilling of sight words with flashcards. Most experts agree that teaching sight words in isolation does not prove that students will learn and use the words when they encounter them in context. Therefore, it is believed to be better when sight words are taught within meaningful context (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1999; Sousa, 2005; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). In conclusion, it has been noted in several articles and research studies that it does not make that much of a difference how sight words are taught, what matters chiefly is that they are taught. Whether drilling, within context, or a combination of both, sight words must be taught and learned with automaticity in order for struggling readers to become more fluent readers.

The Sight Word Study

The problem that was chosen for this action research project is something that the researcher was experiencing with a third grade ESL class. The students in this third grade ESL class were reading below grade level, thus scoring very low on reading comprehension tests. These students scored well on the listening and speaking part of the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA), so it was not a question of those fluencies. The second language learners were simply struggling readers. When passages were read out loud together, the group as a whole would often forget some of the ideas because of the time that was taken to read the passage. Stories were picked from their estimated reading levels based on the STAR Reading scores. The stories included a great deal of sight words that were from Dolch sight word lists. Children typically do not learn new sight words by being exposed to them only once. Repetition is key to sight word acquisition (www.k12reader.com).

As the researcher began to think and learn about the reading problem in the classroom, the following overarching questions emerged and were used to frame the study:

1. Does sight word fluency increase reading levels significantly, and if so, would daily repetition promote even greater fluency?
2. If sight word training increases students' fluency, how will the researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?
3. Should the sight word repetition strategy be word isolation drills or sight words read in context practice?

METHODOLOGY

The research employed an action research design. Craig, (2009) suggests that through action research, teachers and others working in a practitioner-based environment use their expertise and knowledge to conduct systematic inquiry that helps improve conditions and solve problems. Qualitative data for this study in the form of teacher observational field notes, researcher reflective field journals, as well as surveys were collected analyzed. In addition, pre- and post-test numeric data were also collected in order to determine if students were making progress as a result of specific instructional strategies involving sight words. An action research approach was chosen because the researcher was seeking a “plan of action” to resolve the particular reading problems in the English as a second language classroom. As part of the action research process, the researcher uses data, data analysis, and findings—matched with knowledge of the environment, expertise, and experience to develop a plan for improvement (Craig, 2009). Therefore one of the main goals of the study was to utilize findings to improve the situation regarding reading, sight word use, and language learning in the ESL classroom.

Location and Subjects of the Research

This research study was conducted in a rural county in middle Tennessee. The school was a kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school. The table below represents the subjects involved in this study. All students were third grader’s all enrolled in English as a second language classes. A total of 14-second language learners participated in the study. Participants included five boys and three girls who were eight years old and four girls and two boys who were nine years of age. All were native Spanish speakers representing the Mexican culture and who had family-related connections to Mexico. All participants were from low socio-economic status home environments (Table 1).

Table 1

Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	L1/First Language	Socio-Economic Status
Student 1	Male	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 2	Male	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 3	Male	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 4	Female	9 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 5	Female	9 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 6	Male	9 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 7	Female	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 8	Male	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 9	Male	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 10	Female	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 11	Female	9 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 12	Female	8 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 13	Female	9 years old	Spanish	Low
Student 14	Male	9 years old	Spanish	Low

Note: All student participants and parents/guardians were asked to sign Informed Consent Forms as well as Assent Forms due to the fact that they were minors. Students participated on a voluntary basis. Students participating in the study were 8-9 years of age. The first language was Spanish. All students represented a low socio-economic status home environment and lived in a rural area.

Data Sources, Collection, and Analysis

This research relied heavily on the collection of qualitative data. It involved data sets such as teacher’s field notes, sight word worksheets, sight word tests, surveys, and tests. The researcher’s field notes were recorded throughout the entire study. The notes were transcribed. The notes were coded using activity codes as well as situation codes because the information related directly to the participants’ situation and behaviors during the instruction as well as during the research period.

The sight word worksheets and tests were coded as activity code data. The following table (Table 2) represents the data codes, attributes, and categories that emerged as a result of the study. This information is aligned with overarching questions #1 and #2. A discussion related to all research questions follow.

Table 2

Triangulation Matrix: Questions, Data, Codes, Categories, and Attributes

Overarching Question	Data Set	Code	Category	Attribute
Does sight word fluency increase reading levels significantly and if so, would daily repetition promote even greater fluency?	Teacher's Field Notes	Activity Code	"Go Sight Word Go!"	Knowledge of sight words does increase reading levels.
	Sight Word Worksheets			Daily repetition does promote greater fluency.
If the sight word training increases students' fluency, how will the researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?	Teacher's Field Notes	Situation Code	"And the Nursery Rhymes Ran Away with the Show!"	Activities were fun and engaging.
	Tests			Activities worth effort with gains in scores and participation.

In order to determine the effect of sight word instruction and the use of sight words on reading comprehension, numeric data were also collected from pre- and post-tests. The following table (Table 2) represents the data found as related to the pre- and post- tests on sight word use and recognition. When averaged, the data shows that each student learned an average of 20 new sight words by the end of the sight word training. The largest amount of sight words gained by one student was 93. Only one student scored one less on the post-test.

Table 2

Pre- and Post Tests: Sight Words

Subjects	Sight Word Test 1	Sight Word Test 2	Difference
Student #1	215/220	214/220	-1
Student #2	203/220	203/220	0
Student #3	113/220	170/220	+57
Student #4	211/220	218/220	+7
Student #5	215/220	219/220	+4
Student #6	112/220	205/220	+93
Student #7	218/220	220/220	+2
Student #8	217/220	220/220	+3
Student #9	215/220	217/220	+2
Student #10	160/220	202/220	+42
Student #11	211/220	213/220	+2
Student #12	204/220	219/220	+15
Student #13	181/220	213/220	+32
Student #14	195/220	212/220	+17

The overall evidence gathered during this study from the actual sight word tests that the subjects participated in suggests that guided sight word practice of 20 to 30 minutes daily promoted sight word automaticity and reading fluency. The subjects also completed a variety of reading comprehension worksheets throughout the study. These worksheets were constructed to promote sight word fluency. It was noted in the teacher’s field journal that the students struggled to complete these worksheets when working unaided in the beginning of the study, and they took too much time to complete them. However, as the study was nearing the end, students asked for help less often and they completed the sheets more quickly. Also, observational notes suggest that the students seemed more confident when answering their individual worksheets. Their number grade improvements on the sight word worksheets also suggest that their gains in sight word acquisition promoted a gain in the grades made on the worksheets.

Discussion of Findings: Overarching Questions

The following discussion presents information and findings based on each overarching question. Procedures and reflections are organized by question and offered in a narrative in order to present the voice of the teacher as researcher. Following the discussion, suggestions for improving practice are offered with the hope that the findings will assist others in improving their own practice, thus, assisting second language learners in the classroom.

Question 1: Does sight word fluency increase reading levels significantly, and if so, would daily repetition promote even greater fluency?

All data collected and analyzed regarding the relationship between sight word fluency and reading fluency shows that the greater the sight word fluency, the higher the reading fluency will be. This was determined by analyzing the students sight word test scores and sight word sheet previous to the training and once again at the end of the study. Once the students had begun to show growth in their sight word automaticity, the ease in which they completed the sight word worksheets was noted in the teacher observations and field journal. Also, the grades that the students made on the worksheets showed an increase in the reading fluency. The 20 to 30 minute daily repetition activities and the gains made from the drills made huge differences in the student's scores.

Question 2: If sight word training increases students' fluency, how will the researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?

The researcher was very impressed by the findings as there was such a significant increase in sight word knowledge and reading fluencies. Observational notes and researcher journal show that the research will be using specific strategies for teaching that were found to promote greater fluency.

Question 3: Should the sight word repetition strategy by word isolation drills or sight words read in context practice?

The researcher found that drilling the sight words in context was superior to drilling them in isolation, such as on flashcards. As noted in the teacher journal, the researcher had tried sight word drilling in isolation the previous year with the same students, however, the gains were small and the drills held little interest to the students. Now, drilling in context, the students were observed as being happier and more eager to complete the drills. The teacher researcher used nursery rhymes and interesting, fun sentences to drill the sight words. A major factor, as noted in the observational journal, was that the researcher stressed to the subjects

that during the drills, eyes must be on the student notebooks, with fingers following along as the sentences were being read aloud.

Question 4: What suggestions and strategies may be offered to other ESL teachers as a result of this study?

All teachers, including ESL teachers, can look at this study and the gains made by the subjects during the daily sight word drills, and hone their teaching practice. Key factors are drilling in context everyday, finding an interesting context area (such as nursery rhymes), and keeping the students focused during the drills by following along with the readings using their eyes and fingers.

Suggestions for Improving Practice

Seeing the data represented in the various tables constructed as a result of this study, suggestions for improvement include the following:

- Struggling readers gain fluency when their sight word knowledge is increased, therefore teachers must work specifically on sight word vocabulary.
- Daily sight word drills improve students' sight word vocabulary and should be at least 20 minutes a day.
- Teaching sight words in context is better practice than teaching sight words in isolation, so teachers need to put the individual flashcards away or use them in a different manner.
- Teachers must ensure that sight word context activities must be fun and engaging.
- Teachers need to be sure to watch students carefully during the drills because it is a key factor to have the students follow the reading in context drills with eyes and fingers focused upon the readings.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that there is a connection between sight word knowledge and reading fluency. Findings also led the researcher as a teacher to feel and see the difference in the impact of learning sight words through context rather than isolation drills.

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EFL Learners' Choices of Learning Strategies between Ethnic Groups

Hsiu-chen Chen and Huating Tai

This study attempts to compare the differences between Taiwanese and Mexican students' English learning strategies. Both the Taiwanese and Mexican students in the study were EFL learners. The research focus was to determine if there were any differences or similarities between English learning strategies and cultural differences for these two groups of students. The researchers utilized the Oxford Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) translated into Chinese for Taiwanese participants and Spanish for Mexican participants. Findings indicate that there were some significant differences between the two groups of participants regarding choices of language learning strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

Oxford's learning strategies are divided into direct learning strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) and indirect learning strategies (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies). There are 50 items containing all these strategies mentioned in the questionnaires. The questionnaires are analyzed by SPSS Kruskal-Wallis Test. The results reveal that cultural varieties do make significant differences on Taiwanese and Mexican students' English learning strategies. Mexican students use more cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies than Taiwanese students. As for memory strategies, a very interesting finding indicates that ethnicity can predict very different choices of language learning strategies on both ethnic groups. That is, Mexican students tend to use more creating mental linkages, while Taiwanese students use more mechanical techniques.

Rubin (1975, 1981), Oxford (1989, 1990), and Cohen (1995, 2003) all proposed theoretical articles about learning strategies. There were many studies based on these theories of learning strategies afterwards. The majority of earlier studies on learning strategies were based on questionnaires as their analytical data. Some previous studies were about the use of the strategies. Cohen (2003) stated that

learner's learning style preferences affected his/her uses of learning strategies. Masgoret & Gardner (2003) stated that attitudes and motivation play an important role in any learning tasks. Oxford (2003) introduced some key concepts related to learning styles, learning strategies, and motivation.

Studies on ethnocentric differences show that Asian learners prefer strategies involving rote memorization and focused on the linguistic code such as language, dialect, or style (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; Chamot, 1987; Reid, 1987; and Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). O'Malley et al. (1985) supports this in saying that Asians are typically more reluctant than Hispanics to try new learning techniques. Dirksen (1990) shares that Chinese EFL students' favorite learning styles for foreign language learning are considerably different from the Chinese-tradition learning styles, which incorporate a lecture and textbook-centered approach. Other studies (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989 and Hall & Hall, 1990) report that learners' language learning strategies positively correlate with their cultural backgrounds.

In the era of globalization, foreign language acquisition has been thought as an important subject in the world. Though every student tries his/her best to learn English, there are still some kinds of difficulties in their acquisition of English. Dickinson (1987) offers that learners will take more responsibility for their own learning if they use appropriate learning strategies. Wharton (2000, p. 206) also states that, "more proficient language learners use more learning strategies than less proficient language learners." Both researchers show the importance of using learning strategies in language learning. Mexican students, the same as Taiwanese students, are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there is a positive correlation between the ethnicity and the choice of language learning strategies. This study was based on the survey of the correlation between the cultural differences and the choice of language learning strategies of Taiwanese and Mexican students. The inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. Are there any differences on the choice of language strategies between Taiwanese students and Mexican students?
2. Are there any differences of choosing the strategies between these two groups of different cultural backgrounds among the six categories, respectively?
3. Is it true that Taiwanese students are more reluctant than Mexican students to try new learning techniques?

Instrumentation, Participants, and Results

The questionnaire adopted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) (Oxford, 1989), was first translated into Chinese. Then, it was administered to 147 Taiwanese college students. As for Mexican students, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish, converted to an online format, and made available to 31 participants to complete via the Internet. Completed questionnaires collected from 147 (Taiwanese) and 31 (Mexican) were analyzed using a series of chi-square difference tests with SPSS version 10. A random sample of 50 was selected from the original 147 Taiwanese students in order to ensure reliability. The data were used in the statistical analysis; however, results from the sample were almost the same as the original group of 147.

The reliability coefficients of the SILL used were measured at .96 (Taiwanese students) and .91 (Mexican students) confidence level using Cronbach's alpha. The Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to examine each SILL item for significant variation between Taiwanese students and Mexican students. The results show that there are significant differences on the choices of the learning strategies among these six categories between Taiwanese students and Mexican students (Table 1).

Table 1

Significant variation between Taiwanese students and Mexican students

Item	χ^2	p	Item	χ^2	p	Item	χ^2	p
1	12.560	0.000 *	16	20.065	0.000	35	9.525	0.002
2	6.771	0.009	17	17.629	0.000	36	11.553	0.001
5	13.008	0.000	18	6.173	0.013	37	7.134	0.008
6	14.069	0.000	22	4.144	0.042	38	3.858	0.048
8	5.182	0.023	23	4.783	0.029	40	14.908	0.000
11	5.274	0.022	27	9.298	0.002	43	5.210	0.022
12	4.903	0.027	29	8.337	0.004	45	4.468	0.035
13	13.762	0.000	30	4.994	0.025	48	3.827	0.049
14	22.449	0.000	31	5.473	0.019	49	13.028	0.000
15	24.659	0.000	32	6.659	0.010	50	8.808	0.003

* critical value of $\chi^2=3.841$ (df=1), $p<0.05$

According to SILL, Oxford (1989) divided the items into six categories:

- Items 1 to 9 are memory strategies,
- Items 10 to 23 cognitive strategies,
- Items 24 to 29 compensation strategies,
- Items 30 to 38 metacognitive strategies,
- Items 39 to 44 affective strategies, and
- Items 45 to 50 social strategies.

The information presented in Table 1 indicates that cultural differences do make significant differences on Taiwanese and Mexican students' English learning strategies. A discussion regarding the differences of the choice of the strategies between these two groups from the six different categories follows.

Discussion

Cohen (1995) stated that language learners use strategies including performance strategies and communication strategies. Performance strategies are the strategies which relate to cognitive processing and attempt to compensate for gaps in target language knowledge. Nevertheless, the strategies which focus on getting a message across are communication strategies which may or may not have any impact on learning. Compared to Oxford's learning strategies, direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) are performance strategies and indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies) are communication strategies. In our study, Taiwanese students used much less indirect /communication strategies than Mexican students did (Table 2).

Table 2

Significant Differences: Memory Strategies and Mean Score

Participants	Item 1	Item 2	Item 5	Item 6	Item 8
Taiwanese	3.5	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.0
Mexican	4.3	4.0	2.2	2.1	3.5

Table 2 presents a very interesting finding which indicates that ethnicity can predict very different choices of language learning strategies in both ethnic groups. On items one, two, and eight, Mexican students used these strategies more often than Taiwanese; whereas, Taiwanese students used items five & six more often than Mexican students. Mexican students tended to use more creating mental linkages, while Taiwanese students used more mechanical techniques.

Table 3

Significant Differences: Cognitive Strategies and Mean Score

Participants	Item 11	Item 12	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16	Item 17	Item 18	Item 22	Item 23	Item 27	Item 29
Taiwanese	3.1	3.2	3.3	2.7	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.0	3.0
Mexican	3.7	3.7	4.0	3.9	4.5	4.3	4.0	3.8	3.7	2.7	3.8	4.2

Items 10 to 23 consisted of cognitive strategies. Among these strategies, Table 3 shows that Mexican students tended to use cognitive strategies more often than Taiwanese students. There were four sets of cognitive strategies on Oxford's SILL items: a) practicing, b) receiving and sending messages, c) analyzing and reasoning, and d) creating structure for input and output. According to Oxford (1989), cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language. With the exception of item 23, findings indicate that Taiwanese students should place more effort on practicing English using authentic tasks such as—reading English articles, viewing broadcasts, discussing TV programs and movies, etc. As for item 22, although Taiwanese students preferred translating English word for word—this should also be avoided (Oxford, 1990).

As for the compensation strategies, items 27 and 29, Table 3 indicates that Taiwanese students' vocabulary bank is still insufficient. Most of Taiwanese students preferred translating English word for word or looking up every new word. Oxford (1990, p.90) states that guessing is essential for listening and reading. Using linguistic clues such as suffixes, prefixes, and word order are useful for guessing meanings.

Table 4

Significant Differences: Metacognitive Strategies and Mean Score

Participants	Item 30	Item 31	Item 32	Item 35	Item 36	Item 37	Item 38	Item 40	Item 43
Taiwanese	3.1	3.2	3.3	2.7	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.1	2.8
Mexican	3.7	3.7	4.0	3.9	4.5	4.3	4.0	4.0	2.2

There are three sets in metacognitive strategies: a) centering learning, b) arranging and planning learning, and c) evaluating learning. Table 4 indicates that Mexican students tended to use more metacognitive strategies than Taiwanese students. Learners in Taiwan should seek more opportunities or conditions to

practice English. In many cases, Taiwanese students are too shy to talk to a foreigner in English.

Affective strategies include: a) lowering anxiety, b) encouraging yourself, and c) taking emotional temperature. Table 5 also indicates that Mexican students encouraged themselves to speak English even when they are afraid of making a mistake or error (item 40). Though item 43 shows the significant difference between Taiwanese and Mexican students, most of the students in both cultural groups seldom used this strategy.

During the process of learning, it is important for learners to lower their anxiety and to encourage themselves. Then they will become better learners and that will also make their learning more effective and enjoyable.

Table 5

Significant Differences: Social Strategies and Mean Score

Participant	Item 45	Item 48	Item 49	Item 50
Taiwanese	3.8	3.5	3.2	3.2
Mexican	4.1	3.9	4.1	3.9

The final section of the categories was social strategies. Oxford (1990, p.144) states that language is a form of social behavior; it is communication, and communication occurs between and among people. Social strategies include asking question, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others (cultural understanding of others' thoughts and feelings).

Items 45, 48, and 49 consisted of strategies for asking questions or asking help from others. Item 50 focused on understanding the culture of English. Items 46 and 47 were concerned with cooperating with others. Table 5 indicates that there is no significant difference between these two groups with regard to cooperating with others. However, findings show that Taiwanese students did not like to ask questions and seldom develop an understanding of English culture.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study show that there are similarities on learning strategies among different cultural groups supporting earlier similar studies. First, the

significant differences of memory strategies show that Taiwanese students prefer rote memorization strategy similar to “ethnocentric assumption” regarding the memory strategies (O’Malley et, al., 1985).

This study also proved that learners’ language learning strategies positively correlate with their cultural backgrounds—similar findings from studies conducted by previous research (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Hall & Hall, 1990).

Secondly, among these six categories, the researchers found that Mexican students used more strategies for learning English than Taiwanese students. Besides the cultural differences, there must be some other factors that affect these differences such as the distance of geographic positions with the target language, learning motivations, the opportunities of practicing English, etc. Based on these findings, one suggestion is that Taiwanese students should seek multiple opportunities to practice English.

The last point is that Taiwanese students were more reluctant than Mexican students to try new learning techniques. While Dirksen (1990) stated that Chinese EFL students’ favorite learning styles for foreign language learning are considerably different from the Chinese-tradition learning styles with its lecture-and textbook-centered approach, it seems that Taiwanese students still prefer traditional ways of learning.

Findings from this study lead the researchers to conclude that Mexican students choose more learning strategies in learning English than Taiwanese students do. Though learning strategies cannot be defined as good or bad, they must be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness for individual learners in the completion of given language tasks. To assist students in becoming more proficient language learners who are capable of using more learning strategies as Wharton (2000, p. 206) indicated—second language or foreign language instructors should create a non-threatening learning environment for students and promote the use of learning strategies that facilitate both learning and teaching processes. The use of appropriate strategies can encourage learners to have more responsibility and autonomy for their own learning.

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Appendix

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

| 1 | Never true | 2 | Usually not true | 3 | Always true | 4 | Usually true | 5 | Always true |

Circle the answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements.

Question		Scale				
1.	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1.	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of situation in which the word might be used.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I physically act out new English words.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I review English lessons often.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I say or write new English words several times.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I try to talk like native English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I practice the sounds of English.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I use the English words I know in different ways.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I start conversations in English.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I read for pleasure in English.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I try to find patterns in English.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I try not to translate word-for-word.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	1	2	3	4	5

27.	I read English without looking up every new word.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	I look for people I can talk to in English.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	1	2	3	4	5
38.	I think about my progress in learning English.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5
41.	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	1	2	3	4	5
42.	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	1	2	3	4	5
43.	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	1	2	3	4	5
44.	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	I practice English with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
48.	I ask for help from English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
49.	I ask questions in English.	1	2	3	4	5
50.	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5

Notes:

- Revised from Oxford's SILL, version 7.0 for ESL/EFL (1989)
- Translated in Chinese for Taiwanese students and Spanish for Mexican students

Response to Intervention and ELLs: A Teacher's Examination

Sunita Watson

This action research study presents one teacher's journey to improving practice. Taking a collaborative team approach, the researcher examined the Response to Intervention support services and the impact on English Language Learners. Data collected in the form of standardized test scores, student surveys, teacher discussions, and brainstorming assisted in identifying preferences, needs, and issues related to students who receive and who are not involved in the RtI program.

As the issue of reading intervention reaches the English language learner (ELL) population, questions arise as to whether ESL (English as a Second Language) students may benefit from the additional support in reading offered by the RtI (Response to Intervention) program. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that it is beneficial for ELLs to receive scientifically based reading intervention early in their educational career (Vaughn & Ortiz, 2009; Healy, K, Vanderwood, & Edelston, 2005; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006). However, there are many aspects to consider regarding the ELL before intervention can be administered. Vaughn and Ortiz (2009) state:

It is important to understand the program in which ELLs are enrolled, how their native language and English proficiency is assessed and monitored, and the core literacy program they receive for development of native language and/or English literacy skills (p. 1).

This raises further questions as to whether ELLs should receive reading intervention in their native language, especially if it is Spanish, or whether they should receive it in English in an ESL pull-out program. In this respect, the language of instruction becomes a central issue when considering culturally and linguistically diverse students, language dominance, and proficiency. Others have raised the issue that prevention, rather than intervention, determines success for ELLs in reading, and that participation in the RtI program does not necessarily indicate that an ELL requires special education services (Feldman, 2007). Garjarka

(2008) notes that teachers need to be equipped with the a variety of appropriate evidence-based instructional approaches that have been validated with diverse populations in order to increase the success for ELLs. Furthermore, when situations require ELLs to move into an intervention program, a team approach is desired (Feldman, 2007; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Vaughn & Ortiz, 2009).

When discussing the issue of ELLs receiving RTI, it is important to define terms that are consistent throughout the body of research as well as ascertain the purpose of RtI. RtI, or Response to Intervention, “is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners” (RtI Action Network, 2009). Response to Intervention is a process by which appropriate, high quality, scientifically validated instructional practices are used to ensure instruction for all learners of diverse backgrounds (Mangi, Lauer, Kucak, Black, Housaman, Huck, Thompson, Holcomb, & Werner, 2009). In an RtI model, all students receive direct and guided reading instruction (Tier 1). Regular progress monitoring reveals students who are in need of additional support, perhaps 30 extra minutes of small group reading or skill instruction, two to three days per week (Tier 2). Students who do not respond to this intervention may be referred to a reading specialist or reading coach for specialized, intensive, research-based intervention for 30 minutes per day in addition to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 support.

ESL instruction is normally delivered in one of two methods: a) direct instruction in English with a highly qualified ESL teacher in a pullout program, or b) instruction in both English and the native language, with emphasis being placed on English as the core language of instruction. The effectiveness of an intervention program with ELLs must take into consideration the program design. It is generally believed that ELLs will fare better in a bilingual program. However, in the United States, it is not always feasible to provide ELLs with bilingual instruction if their native language is one other than Spanish (Vaughn & Ortiz, 2009). In contrast, Linan-Thompson, et al. (2006) states that results are mixed when comparing intervention in an ESL program with intervention in a bilingual program. While the delivery method of instruction for intervention for ELLs is important to consider, the student’s background and other language issues must also be factored into successful intervention. According to Collier (2007), teachers should collect information that will be enlightening in understanding the whole student. Such information includes: a) prior education and learning experiences, b) home language, c) L1 language proficiency, d) English proficiency, e) academic achievement, and f) general behavior within the learning environment.

Bilingual instruction—a topic of current discussion—is also a consideration. When an ELL receives instruction in both the native language and English, one must consider whether the student’s language of instruction impacts the need for

intervention. Healy, Vanderwood, and Edelston (2005) state that bilingual students have greater success in the language of instruction than in the other language, with English being the language of instruction, especially with regard to literacy.

Yet another issue to address is whether prevention may have even greater success than intervention with regard to deciding how to proceed with ELLs before they struggle. Feldman (2007) insists that the educator must ask pertinent questions for self-reflection, such as:

1. What can I do as the ESL professional to better assist my students and to promote language success?
2. What strategy should I try if another is not working?
3. Which materials will work best with specific students?
4. What information should I seek out that may provide insight?

When considering prevention as a method of success for potential struggling readers, there is much evidence to support the team approach to evaluating a student's needs. Vaughn and Ortiz (2009) express concern that educators do not feel they are capable of meeting the needs of diverse learners, so it is important to have a support team who may assist in filling in the gaps about the student's language and literacy background, educational history, and cultural background. Professionals in the field share that a team may decide more intensive or different interventions may be needed for a student who is not responding to initial intervention before investigating whether special education may be an option (Healy, et al., 2005).

When considering the implementation of the RtI program with ELLs—Vaughn and Ortiz (2009) also note that there are some significant challenges in determining the student's knowledge and skills in the native language and how that impacts learning in the second language (English). This topic is significant in that as more ELLs are being pulled out for both the ESL program and the Tier program, the process poses challenges with regard to:

1. Student time on task,
2. Impact on student attitudes due to being pulled out of the regular classroom, and
3. Strategies and techniques being utilized to improve reading proficiency.

An Examination of My Classroom Practice

As an ESL professional working at an elementary school, I decided to examine my own practice regarding RtI and English language learners. Utilizing the steps in the action research process (Craig, 2009), I was determined to improve my practice through inquiry. By working collaboratively, analyzing current situations, and collecting available data, I began my action research study. Following a team approach, I asked my administrator and the literacy coach to assist. Approximately 21% of our students receive free or reduced lunch. Many of our students are second language learners operating with limited English proficiency. The team of three (administrator, literacy coach and myself) decided to discuss the RtI program with regular classroom teachers representing grades two through five.

Discussions lead to the conclusion that more and more ELLs were receiving RtI services. However, there was little evidence to indicate that the second language learners who were receiving RtI support were showing the same rate of success as that of their ELL peers who were not involved in the RtI program. This led to brainstorming sessions where the following critical questions were generated:

- 1. Question #1:** How do measures of proficiency compare for ELLs receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 support to those ELLs not receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 support? In this age of high teacher accountability, data must inform educational decisions. Educators naturally want to know if the implementation of the RtI program with ELLs is a worthwhile endeavor.
- 2. Question #2:** What are students' and teachers' attitudes about being pulled out for both programs, and how does that impact success and progress? One of the facets of this question addressed the issue of time on task for the ELLs who possibly had to travel for both ESL and RtI.
- 3. Question #3:** What possible factors may be the causes of the differences in proficiency, if any? This question led to additional discussions and informal dialogs with regular education colleagues, administrators, parents, and support staff.
- 4. Question #4:** How can this information improve practice? Knowing how well a program is working is essential for teachers and administrators. Aspects of the program that are successful should be implemented and used, while aspects that do not yield results should be reconsidered and researched for more favorable ones.

After generating the critical questions, I agreed to gather information, continue the dialog with colleagues, and conduct observations of ELLs in the RtI program

as well as those receiving ESL pullout services. With the abundant amount of data available, it was easy to identify data that would yield information and possibly provide insight.

Tennessee Value Added Achievement Scores (TVAAS) were available for fourth and fifth grade ELL students. Thinklink Learning scores were available for ELLs in grades two through five. These two types of assessment data were collected in order to determine how ELLs were making progress as measured on standardized achievement tests. It was also agreed that I would conduct informal teacher and student surveys. Surveys were mostly open-ended but provided some choices to assist language learners who may not be able to think of a reading interest category on their own. I continued to engage colleagues in discussions in order to gather information that would help determine attitudes towards ELLs receiving Tier support through RtI. Notes on the informal discussions revealed the administration's opinion about the effectiveness of RTI with ELLs. Last, the most current Reading Placement Test results were collected.

My Findings, Conclusions, and Practice

The process of action research enables teachers to examine practice in order to improve conditions, instruction, and the learning environment in general. Action research also involves examining programs, services, and related factors that may or may not contribute to student success. This informal examination of my own practice as well as the current programs and services in place for ELLs, lead me on an insightful journey. In order to share my findings, I offer the following discussion, findings, and conclusions (Table 1).

Table 1 serves as a triangulation matrix as well as provides an explanation of the emerging themes. Attributes are defined for each theme—thereby providing a descriptive account of findings. Last, the table aligns the critical questions generated from discussions and surveys along with the data I collected.

Table 1

Findings Based on Data

Critical Questions	Data Set	Attribute
How do measures of proficiency compare between ELLs receiving Tier 2 and 3 support to those not receiving the Tier support?	Think Link scores for 2 nd and 3 rd grade ELLs	Scores indicate a variety of proficiency levels.
	TVAAS scores for 4 th and 5 th grade ELLs	Scores show some areas of proficiency and some as low- or non-proficient.
	Informal interviews with teachers about what other measures of proficiency they use; reading placement test	Placement testing, unit testing, and Thinklink results show that students have areas where they are steadily making progress and areas that still need support.
What are students' and teachers' attitudes about being pulled out for both programs and do these attitudes impact success and progress?	Open-ended surveys with teachers	Surveys of teachers showing missed class time are not a factor in success; the benefits of Tier and ESL support outweigh the alternative (not receiving the extra support).
	Open-ended surveys with students	Student surveys show a variety of attitudes about RTI, most being that RTI was viewed at least somewhat helpful by most students.
	Open-ended interviews with reading coach and principal	Small groups support language growth and peer language models; instruction is fully scaffolded.
What possible factors may be the cause of the differences in proficiency—if any?	Informal interviews with students about the RTI program	Students do not realize there is a difference because working in groups is just part of their day.
	Informal conversations with the principal.	ESL teacher is the expert in language arts and acquisition; the reading coach is the expert in solving reading problems. It is critical to watch ELLs so they are not coded too early for special education when they might just need a little more time to acquire the language.
	Informal interviews with reading coach	Reveals daily struggles of ELLs in RTI.

An examination of the achievement data indicated that the fourth and fifth grade ELLs were operating at the lowest levels of proficiency in reading skills. The TVAAS data revealed that in reading/language arts, 50% of the students were proficient, 25% were not proficient, and 25% were excluded from testing that year. Based on the data, there was indeed a need for RtI support. While assessment data were helpful in understanding the performance levels of the ELLs in English, the data did not reveal how proficient the students were in the native language.

If bilingual instructional services were available, proficiency in L1 might assist in determining a beginning point for instruction in English. Therefore, reading placement scores for the beginning of the year were used to help determine a baseline of proficiency for ELLs—which is common practice in schools without bilingual services.

The results of the Reading Placement Test showed that several ELLs were below proficiency level and were categorized as “approaching.” A few students were found to be on grade level, while only one student was beyond grade level. These results indicated a strong need for RtI support, especially in the upper elementary grades where there may be holes in the reading development.

Throughout my informal discussions with regular education colleagues as well as collecting responses from the informal surveys, I gathered information regarding student and teacher attitudes and preferences. The information was useful in offering insight as well as when planning for instruction. For example, when students were asked what they liked to read, answers in the K-2 grade span described specific fiction books about animals, while students in the 3-5 grade span preferred nonfiction and comic books. When asked how long they liked to read, students at both grade spans liked to read for fun anywhere from 10-20 minutes to more than 30 minutes, depending on the child. All students reported that they liked working with teachers in a small group. Most liked going to centers, but were unfamiliar with the term “literacy centers.” Of the students surveyed, only 2 were in the RtI Tier 2 or Tier 3 program. All students believed working in small groups helped them with their reading. This final component is most interesting in that it revealed that ELLs realized the potential benefit of the extra support of working in a small group.

In my discussions with colleagues, I found that several teachers had students who were receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 support. Third grade was the most prevalent in having ELLs in the Tier program, which is not surprising considering the focus on testing in third grade. All teachers responded that the time being pulled out for ESL and/or RtI was minimal, and that the benefits of those students working in a small group outweighed any time traveling. Communications with the administrator and literacy coach revealed that they believe the RTI program is successful with ELLs and should be continued in conjunction with the ESL teacher to provide the expertise in second language acquisition.

My personal examination of practice began with my desire to improve practice in order to meet the needs of my students. As the examination progressed, I found that perceptions and attitudes towards RtI and ELL students were positive. I also found that there was indeed an established need for students to receive a variety of services including pullout as well as RtI. Students themselves shared that they enjoyed reading and working in small groups. Negative attitudes were absent, thus, leading me to conclude that by combining a variety of instructional strategies, services, and teamwork, all involved benefit. Although additional and ongoing examination of the success of our students as well as the impact of RtI and ESL services has on second language learners, my personal inquiry was a

beginning point. As professional educators it is our duty to question and to seek out new and innovative ways to assist our students. The ongoing practice of self-examination also leads to improving practice. As we do so, we ensure success for our students.

The Author

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Teaching ELLs in the K-12 Arena: Perceptions from Non-Native English-Speaking Classroom Teachers

Patricia Davis-Wiley

This study examined the perceptions of efficacy of five non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST). After administering a survey, the researcher collected and analyzed data in order to identify themes regarding teacher efficacy, challenges, and successes when working with English language learners. Findings indicate that the NNESTs who participated in this study felt effective as teachers and experienced many of the challenges that their own second language learners experience. In addition, the participants offered suggestions for meeting the needs of ELLs in the classroom.

Although, in the new millennium, the number of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) of English outnumbers that of native English-speaking ELL teachers (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2001), there is a dearth of published research studying the dynamics of this particular population, and in particular, this group's own self-perceptions of their teaching efficacy. Whereby, the native speaker fallacy, or the tenet that native English speakers are the best teachers of English, is still widely accepted by many in the ELT arena (especially outside of the United States), others such as Phillipson (1996) contend that NNESTs and not native English speakers, are in reality, the ideal teachers of English to ELLs. By virtue of the fact that they have gone through the second language acquisition process themselves, they truly understand from personal experience, what it is like to acquire a new language and its culture. Therefore, they can truly empathize with their ELL students and in so doing, give them the learning strategies that they will need to meet the linguistic challenges of becoming proficient in a second language.

Teachers of ELLs

Historically, the preferred hiring of NESTs (native English-speaking teachers) over NNESTs (Harmer, 1991; Stern, 1983) has been widely accepted, yet, the belief that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of English (Pacek, 2005;

Phillipson, 1992; Thornbury, 2006), is starting to be challenged (Nemtchinova, 2005).

Indeed, arguments against the exclusive preference for the native speaker model include:

1. The availability of highly English-proficient, trained NNES teachers in today's global arena,
2. The ability of NNESTs to be more attuned to the needs of ELLs (Canagarajah, 1999),
3. The realization that NNESTs and NESTs both have strengths and weaknesses as teachers of English and therefore, one group is not necessarily superior over the other, but rather different from the other (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1994; Medgyes, 1994; Prodromou, 1992), and,
4. In addition to other issues associated with being a native or non-native English speaker, professionalism, dedication and the desire to grow as an effective teacher of English, may actually be more important than simply being a native English speaker (Liang, 2002; Braine, 2005; Watson Todd, 2006).

Reves and Medgyes (1994) suggest that whether or not one is a NNEST or a NEST, a high level of linguistic proficiency in English is expected of all teachers of ELLs yet reaching this goal is not an easy task.

Attaining Linguistic Proficiency

Linguistic proficiency is a multi-dimensional process and is typically described in terms of arriving at a particular level of communicative competence at which one can perform in a language (e.g., English), in context function and accuracy, when listening, speaking, reading and writing in the target language (Canale & Swain, 1980; Cummins, 1989, 1984).

Acquiring a second language takes time, and according to research conducted by the ILR or the Interagency Language Roundtable (formerly known at the Foreign Service Institute), and ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1986), in order to progress from Novice Low/Level 0 (no functional proficiency) to Superior/Level 3 (ability to function effectively in most formal and informal settings), it will take hundreds of hours to reach a high level of proficiency, depending on the linguistic aptitude of the student, his/her native language and the target language studied. Reves and Medgyes (1994) suggest that the more English proficient the ELL teacher is, and the higher the degree of flexibility of teaching strategies that this teacher possesses, the more effective

this teacher will be. Is it this personal linguistic journey that all NNESTs follow that may be a factor in making them successful teachers of English? Filho (2002) states that it is this very non-nativeness that actually makes NNESTs more linguistically and empathetically aware of their own ELLs' challenges and difficulties than NESTs would be. From their own personal experiences as second (or even third) language learners, they can innately predict the needs of their non-native English-speaking students better than NESTs. Researchers in the field report that teachers who speak the same language and share the identical cultural background as their NNES students actually have a greater advantage over NESTs who have not acquired English as their second language. In addition they are able to create an effective curriculum and appropriate pedagogy for these ELLs in their classrooms (Auerbach, Barahona, Midy, Vaquerano, Zambrano, & Arnaud, 1996).

Although some in the ELT world criticize a non-standard English accent of a NNES, and consequently consider NNESTs as being less-qualified than NESTs, Lippi-Green (1997) purports that considering teachers inferior, based on their accents, is a form of linguistic discrimination, and should not be a major criterion for evaluating these teachers' teaching abilities and professional credibility.

The Present Study

This study was developed in an effort to explore the efficacy of NNESTs from a different perspective that what is found in the majority of published research on this issue. The study is the first of a two-part research investigation and examines the self-reported perceptions of five NNESTs who work with ELLs in grades K-12. Part one describes the results of the data that were collected from the subjects through a survey instrument. This article presents findings exclusively from the first part of the study. Both parts of this study, however, were conducted with the same population, and were driven by the following essential research questions:

1. How did the subjects' personal second language journeys later impact them as teachers of ELLs?
2. What are the major challenges and personal successes of NNES who are teachers of ELLs?
3. What level of empathy do NNES ELL teachers report having when working with ELLs?
4. Do NNES ELL teachers perceive themselves being as effective as NES teachers when working with ELLs?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The five NNESTs who participated in this study were females who were currently teaching in a large school district in the United States during the academic spring semester of 2010. One of the five participants first studied English at the post-secondary level in the U.S.. The remaining four participants were first introduced to English in their home countries. Specifically, three of the five NNESTs who participated studied English from 4th or 5th grade, continuing through college.

One participant, however, began her study of English in a special language school, in her home country later in life, beginning at 13 years of age. All of the women reported acquiring English via a variety of methods, including: a) texts, b) tapes, c) videos, d) grammar-translation, and e) laboratory drills. Some shared that they were exposed to authentic literature and music in the target language as part of their English language curriculum. The total length of time the participants had been speaking English varied from 12 to 42 years, whereby the total number of years the participants taught English in the U.S. public school system (grades K-12) ranged from 1.5 to 11 years.

Data Collection Instrument

In order to address the essential research questions guiding the study, the participants responded to a researcher-created survey consisting of 21 single item-focused questions followed by an open-ended question asking for additional comments (Figure 1).

Procedure

At the beginning of the academic spring 2010 semester, the researcher sent the survey instrument to the five participants in electronic format (Figure 1). Participants were asked to complete the survey and return it within two weeks. Following the customary protocol to ensure participant anonymity, no names or specific identifying information were requested.

Figure 1. Survey Instrument

Personal Background Information

1. Where did you learn English?
2. Who taught you English?
3. How many years have you been speaking English?
4. When you were learning English, how were you taught?
5. What were your personal challenges for learning English?
6. How did you overcome these challenges?
7. Please describe any situations you had where you *had to speak English in your home country*.
8. How many years have you been teaching?
9. Where did you complete your ESL teacher training?
10. If you taught *prior to your present teaching position*, where did you teach? (*If you had previously taught, please answer questions 11 and 12.*)
11. What subjects did you teach?
12. On what grade levels did you teach?

Teaching Experience in the U. S.

1. When did you first start teaching ESL in the United States?
2. How long have you been teaching ESL in your present teaching position?
3. You are now a teacher of English to non-native English learners of English. What level of empathy do you share with these students?
4. What challenges do your students have in learning English?
5. Which of these same challenges did you have when learning English?
6. How do you help your students meet these challenges?
7. Compared with native English-speaking ESL teachers, how effective do you feel you are teaching English to an ELL learner?
8. What successes have you had as an ESL teacher?
9. Describe how being a NNES has impacted you as an ESL teacher.
10. Other comments?

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The survey responses were carefully read, categorized, and subsequently synthesized into themes. The themes specifically addressed each of the essential research questions constituting the theoretical framework of the study and which follow in detail below. The following themes, which emerged from the analysis of the survey included:

1. Personal challenges for NNESTs learning English,
2. Information and explanations regarding how these challenges were overcome,
3. Challenges that ELL students in the participants' classrooms face,
4. Similar challenges that NNESTs reported,
5. Level of empathy that NNESTs share with their ELLs,

6. Help and assistance in meeting students' challenges,
7. NNESTs' perceived level of effectiveness compared with NESTs,
8. Perceived success as an ESL teacher, and
9. How being a NNEST has impacted the NNESTs as teachers of ELLs.

The following provides additional details regarding selected responses based on each survey item.

Item #1: How did the subjects' personal second language journeys later impact them as teachers of ELLs?

Responses from the NNESTs appear to corroborate the research findings of Auerbach et al. (1996), Canagarajah (1999) and Filho (2002), who essentially report that NNESTs have a definite first-hand experiential advantage over NESTs in the ELL classroom. The comments below, from the study's participants, emphasize this point.

Because I have experienced the difficulties when learning English..., I understand how my students feel and what they have to go through.

It [being a NNEST] made me become more understanding and sensitive to my students' language-learning experiences and needs.

I ...serve as an example to some of my students, showing them that even non-native English speakers may succeed...

Item #2a: What are the major challenges and personal successes of NNESTs who are teachers of ELLs? (Challenges)

The challenges of NNESTs are many and include global market-place perceptions of the purported inferiority of non-native English speakers as teachers of English compared with native English speakers (Lippi-Green, 1997; Phillipson, 1996), as previously presented in the review of published literature on this issue.

The participants in the present study, however, were hired by a large public school district based on: a) their superior academic backgrounds, b) excellent quality of their teacher preparation programs, c) their high degree of English proficiency, and d) perhaps, because they were NNESTs and were therefore valued for the experience and innate empathy that they can share with the NNESTs in this particular school district by virtue of their non-nativeness. Thus, even though the participants were NNESTs, they experienced no problem in being recognized as being professionally-prepared ELL teachers.

The participants did report, however, some personal challenges that they experienced when working with ELLS in their classrooms. Many of the challenges cited were identified by the participants were presented by the ELLs:

1. ELLs' level of grammar, writing and reading comprehension,
2. Lack of literacy in their students' native languages,
3. Little to no parental support for learning English in the home,
4. Regular education teachers' lack of knowledge concerning second language acquisition challenges and working with ELLs in general,
5. ELLs' fear of speaking English and making mistakes, and
6. Data indicating that ELLs acquire BICS / Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills quickly but experience difficulty with CALP / Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (Cummins, 1989).

Item #2b: What are the major challenges and personal successes of NNES who are teachers of ELLs? (Successes)

When asked to report types of success the participants experienced as a result of working with ELL students, one participant offered, "I cannot boast any huge successes, like my students won a spelling bee competition, but, I do have daily successes—I stay after school with certain students who want and love to learn." Still another NNEST participant regaled in the fact that, "I have students who came in January with no English and moved to the next grade in May." And, it is in this vein that all study participants shared personal success anecdotes some of which could serve as excellent instructional tips for all teachers of ELLs.

Meeting the needs of shy students, for example, and those students not willing to openly participate in class, could be effectively addressed by providing them opportunities to write down their thoughts or work in small groups before they answer teachers' questions. One NNEST states, "Many of my students will not express themselves unless they are absolutely confident about the answers." She later suggests a way to deal with this challenge stating that, "I sometimes have students whisper to me and I interpret their answers to the other students."

Other pedagogical tips, given by the survey participants, for dealing with linguistic skill challenges, included:

- Vocabulary/spelling: provide context clues and break down big words into smaller pieces;
- Writing: introduce all kinds of graphic organizers;

- Reading: brainstorming before reading; circle vocabulary words and look up meanings; discuss section prior to reading it, then, read together.

In addition to using a great amount of verbal praise and encouragement with her ELLs, and a variety of resources and activities to build background knowledge, an essential component in content-based instruction (Brinton & Snow, 1989), another participant shared that, “I try to make students feel at ease in my classroom (wherever that may be), and create a warm and friendly learning environment.”

Krashen’s (1981, 1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of doing this in the second language classroom. Another participant addressed the issue of first language illiteracy in her ELLs and reported, “I try to help my students by encouraging their first language development, working with families and community in order to empower parents to participate in their children’s education.” Making students feel confident in the ELL classroom is another important key to success for all second language students. However, in addition to reading and writing with students in order to improve their academic skills—all participants stressed the necessity of being able to relate to their students on several levels and in being truly empathetic to their needs.

Item #3: What level of empathy do NNES ELL teachers report having when working with ELLs?

From her own personal linguistic journey of acquiring a second language—as seen in her comment below—one participant admitted that she fully understood the frustration of both ELLs and their parents.

Language learning is time consuming.

It has been a year. My child’s English has no improvement.

Why? I often have parents ask me this....

I fully understand the reasons behind it and am able to provide clear explanations to parents, and sometimes, regular education teachers.

Another participant reported that she could fully empathize with the linguistic challenges that her ELLs face. She shared that grammar drills do not always work because she still make personal errors from time to time, even though she know how grammar works.

Yet another of the NNESTs shared,

A high level of empathy can definitely help teachers understand and relate to some of the cultural issues our students and their families have. I understand what problems they might experience while learning.

Whereby, the NNESTs participating in the study reported having similar challenges as their ELL students, they still expressed a positive attitude toward their own level of teacher efficacy as seen in the results of the analysis of the following research question.

Item #4 Do NNESTs perceive themselves being as effective as NES teachers?

The participants unanimously expressed the opinion that they felt they were as effective as any ESL teacher. In fact, one participant in particular emphasized this by saying that, “It certainly helps me to understand my students’ learning needs by being a NNEST.”

All NNESTs expressed the notion that being NNESTs made them more sensitive and consequently, perhaps, more effective ESL teachers than their NES colleagues. One participant expressed her frustration with some NES as teachers of ELLs in the following statement.

I had a problem realizing that NES ESL teachers did not know a second language. How can these people teach a language without realizing the processes, frustration, and difficulties of being a second language speaker?

Thus, do the NNESTs perceive themselves as being as effective as NES teachers? The answer is inequitably, yes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the self-reported perceptions of five NNESTs who were asked to reflect upon their individual journeys as teachers in the ELT K-12 arena—specifically reflecting upon their own efficacy as teachers of ELLs. A survey was administered to the participants and the results were analyzed and reported. Findings from the study are offered as insight to other NNESTs. In addition, survey responses led to the following conclusions.

It is imperative that the efficacy of non-native English-speaking teachers of ELLs be further investigated using a variety of research methodologies. It would be helpful and insightful to replicate the study with a larger, more diverse number of participants in order to gather additional data.

The individual and collective voices of NNESTs need to be heard and their message incorporated into the existing corpus of published works on this issue. These data could inform not only the curricula of ELL teacher preparation, but also the public school systems that seek to hire the most-qualified and efficacious teachers for their ELL students. This study has just begun this process.

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Holistic or Analytic Scoring? Issues in Grading ESL Writing

Martha Michieka

Evaluation is an essential and sensitive part of the teaching and learning process. There is extensive literature that addresses commenting and responding to ESL students' writing (Ferris, 1995; Ferris, 1997; Hegdecock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Hyland, 1998). There is also a body of literature that has addressed issues on peer editing and students' reaction to peer reviews. It is obvious from this massive literature that students care very much about the comments and grades they get on their papers. Although it is never stated explicitly, the ultimate goal of most of the work done in the writing classes on the part of the students is not just to improve writing but to get good grades too. This unfortunately may not be a shared goal with the teachers. Sometimes it is frustrating for the teachers when their students show more concern for their grades instead of being concerned about improving their writing skills.

The process of revision is influenced profoundly by the final grade. Students care a about their grades and will pay attention to what they think will affect this grade. Most students will revise only those aspects that they know the instructor pays attention to when grading, and many might not to revise their drafts if they know that this revision will not improve their grades. That few students, if any at all, are likely to spend time revising their essays after a final grade has been assigned may be proof that grades motivate revision. Literature has shown that students get frustrated when they cannot understand some of their teachers' marginal comments because they know that failure to follow suggested comments will affect their final grade (Ferris, 2007) Students are justified to care so much about their grades since in most educational systems regardless of the level, grades have an impact that goes beyond the classroom. A good score in a given writing class means a better GPA, which may result in getting a scholarship, or a good job, or if it was a placement test, a student gets placed in an advanced course. A poor score on the hand may have serious chain consequences on the student such as being dropped out of school, a lower GPA, being placed in a basic course that does not count toward graduation requirement thus delayed graduation, missed scholarship, failure to get into a desired major and the list goes on and on. Both

students and teachers know these consequences and thus most dread grading. Although the teacher's life may not be affected by the grade as much as the student's, the knowledge that a grade given in one class could impact a student's life makes grading an abhorred, yet unavoidable task most teachers have to perform.

Not much literature addresses the subject of writing evaluation. For example, not much has been published on decisions teachers make when grading students' papers. The process may be complicated, but just like the process of writing maybe think aloud protocols would be used to report what goes on in the teachers' minds while they evaluate writing. How does a teacher decide what good writing is as contrasted with bad writing? Is an A paper in one class the same as an A paper in another class? If a student gets an A in one writing class is it guaranteed that the same essay graded by a different instructor or even by the same teacher in a different mindset would earn an A? Do ESL students whose writings were rated as A papers in their countries remain A students when their work is graded elsewhere? There are several questions that need to be addressed concerning ESL writing assessment. Grabe (2001) argues for a theory of second language writing that would define "the construct of writing". He postulates that, although there are several issues associated with developing one, a theory of second language writing would among other things "help us understand how to assess writing abilities more effectively and more responsibly" p. 41. Before this theory is developed, graders of writing continue to grapple in the dark not exactly sure of what good writing is and what they should look for in a piece of writing. Several questions continue to plague second language writing instructors. What is the relationship between first (L1) and second language (L2) writing? Is L2 writing the same as L1, and can the scales used to grade L1 be used in L2 writing? In his extensive empirical research Silva (1993) demonstrates that L2 writers' texts differ in several aspects from L1 writers' texts. The conclusions of his study show that, in general, the writing needs of second language writers are uniquely different from those of L1 writers and thus the need for "different evaluation criteria for L2 writing." p 670. L1 writing cannot be the yardstick for L2 assessment because L2 writers bring very varied experiences into their writings.

Writing assessment, unlike other forms of assessment, renders itself very subjective, and unless clear scoring criteria are set, reliability will always remain hard to attain. Even when standards of grading are set, as Rubin & Williams-James, (1997) argue " ... writing assessment still remains notoriously unsystematic." (p.140). In most writing assignments, reliability is mainly affected by grader variability in scoring. Several factors, including some extremely subjective ones like the grader's mind set influence grading (Shores, M.& A. Wesley, 2007). If a grader is in a happy mood chances are that students being graded at that time will score better. The order of grading may also affect the grade. For example, if

a poor student's paper follows immediately after the best one in class, it is likely that these two papers will be compared and the poor student might get a lower score than he / she would have got if this comparison was not done. Other factors such as rater fatigue and time constraint can affect grading.

Scoring scales: Holistic versus analytic

The two main scoring scales that have been discussed in literature are holistic and analytic.

Holistic scoring

Reid (1993) defines holistic scoring as "evaluation of a piece of writing in which the rater reads the paper without marking on it then rates the paper as a whole (holistically) and assigns the paper a single score within a given range on scales for example 1-4, 1-6, or 1-9." (p. 291). In such scoring, the essay is evaluated as a whole piece instead of looking at independent skills. Holistic scoring is impressionistic involving a quick assignment of a score based on the overall feeling the rater gets at first or second reading.

Advantages of holistic scoring

The most obvious advantage of using this scoring method is its time saving factor. Raters make only one holistic score without having to spend much time deciding the score of various writing skills such as language use, organization and content development. Apart from its ability to offer economical and reliable ranking of papers, holistic scoring as White (1994) claims ... has the unique capacity to combine norm referenced and criterion referenced test theories" (p. 233). Holistic scoring can generally be viewed as norm referenced since the papers are compared with other papers, but at the same time, it is criterion referenced because it uses a set criteria that can be used elsewhere with some form of modification.

A second advantage is that this scoring method focuses on what writers have done well. Raters are encouraged to focus on the positive aspects of each piece of writing. The essay is then compared to the benchmark samples to see the level it is closest to.

A third advantage is the clear and specific criteria used by teachers or rater. Since this scoring is guided, if it is used in a classroom situation, students can evaluate and score their papers and those of their peers thus helping students raise their

own consciousness on what is expected by the raters. With time, students can conceptualize what goes into making a highly scored essay (Reid, 1993).

Instructional uses of holistic scoring

Although holistic scoring has been mainly used in large scale writing assessment such as the writing section of TOEFL and Test of Written English (TWE), it can be used for instructional purposes, especially in process writing where writers engage in several drafts before turning in a final draft. In earlier drafts, a quick impressionistic look at the paper might help the teacher guide students in their revision and in the preparation of later drafts. Holistic scoring is also useful in making placement decisions especially at college level. If a college offers different levels of ESL courses, a holistic score will give some prediction of where students can fit best by comparing writing samples with benchmarks from each level.

Limitations of holistic scoring

Holistic scoring, however, has some limitations that should make its users think of ways of modifying it. The one time score does not give details to help with revision and also does not show how the students perform in the various components of the writing skill nor does it offer students feedback on what needs to be improved (Bacha, 2001; Reid, 1993). This limitation poses a challenge to students and other people who may be interested in the student's writing or want to obtain information on specific aspects of a student's writing that need improvement. If the score is given in large-scale assessment, students will never know what they did well or did not do well. The people affected by the grade such as students and parents cannot get feedback on which aspects of writing need improvement or writing strengths that should be upheld (Hamp Lyon, 1995). The score given is hard to interpret because there is no specific explanation given. As Connor-Linton (1995a) argues, "If we do not know what the raters are doing and why they are doing it then we do not know what their ratings mean." (p.763). Although holistic scoring is meant to be impressionistic, it is can be difficult to understand exactly on what raters base their impressions.

While holistic scoring is a time saving method, it is clear that grading is a complex and difficult task which needs time. Most writings are appreciated only after careful reading, but due to hurried scoring, some strengths such as the writer's well-argued ideas may not be rewarded (Hamp- Lyon, 1996). A first impression may be deceiving and a rater may be carried away by very well structured sentences or be put off by the same without considering other aspects of the paper. Efficient grading is supposed to bring out individual differences and uniqueness,

but holistic scoring tends to seek for similarities. The unique characteristics of each new piece of writing are ignored as the raters try to match the writing with benchmark samples. Hout (1990) in his discussion of some of the objections raised in literature concerning holistic scoring shows that holistic scoring correlates with appearance and length of text. Raters often fall into the trap of giving longer papers a higher score.

Holistic scores are often used for placement with the assumption that students who get a similar score are in the same level, but this may not always be true. Kroll (1990) observes that with the use of holistic scoring, there is a possibility of placing students with very different needs in the same course because the scores do not make a clear distinction between writers. If for examples several essays are rated as 3s, they may not necessarily have much in common. One would be a three because of misinterpretations of the prompt while another is a three because of limited syntactic control thus hindering raters from understanding the flow of otherwise very interesting ideas.

Since what individual raters look for in a given writing varies, there may be several underlying differences in the quality of the essays. In a study comparing American ESL and Japanese EFL standards, Connor-Linton (1995b) observed that even though American ESL and Japanese EFL instructors agreed on their essay scores on what would be considered weak or strong writing, they paid attention to different aspects of writing. Different kinds of errors carried more weight depending on the rater. What the American raters considered to be irritating errors were not necessarily irritating to the Japanese raters and vice versa. A holistic score given by an American instructor did not mean the same thing as that given by a Japanese instructor. This researcher concludes that, “Judgments of error importance are intimately related to and depended upon the raters educational and socio-cultural context” and that “quantitative similarities in ratings may mask significant qualitative differences in the reasons for those rating” p. 112. Brown (1991) made a similar observation noting that in one study, English faculty paid more attention to cohesion and syntax, unlike the ESL faculty who paid more attention to organization. Holistic scoring leaves one wondering whether all mistakes carry the same weight (Isenhour, M., et. al 2008). Despite all the limitations discussed here holistic scoring continues to be a useful form of scoring especially if it combined with some aspects of analytic scoring.

Analytic scoring

In analytical scoring, unlike holistic scoring, various skills are separated for scoring purposes. What is selected for scoring depends on what is being assessed.

Aspects such as organization, content, vocabulary, language use and mechanics may be separated and each given a score. All components carry a given weight based on what the rater is looking for. Since a score is given for each component, the feedback is more detailed and the score is better justified.

Strengths of analytic scoring

Unlike holistic scoring, analytic scoring offers information that both students and teachers can use for diagnostic purposes. Usually, students would expect to get feedback from raters, especially on what aspects of their writing need improvement. The information given in analytic scoring allows teachers to plan their instruction to fit the needs of their learners.

A second advantage of analytic scoring is that it addresses several aspects of a student's writing. Scoring each sub-skill of writing, might work to the advantage of second language writers. Some ESL students may have good organizational skills but be weak in language usage. Their strengths in some skills may easily compensate for their weak areas thus giving them an advantage.

Although scoring each sub-skill may be time consuming, it allows the rater to give useful feedback that would, in the long run, improve students' writing. This scoring can also be modified to allow a few skills to be scored at a given time. For example, one could score skills such as organization and content in earlier drafts and then address language use and mechanics in later drafts. Analytic scoring forces the raters to pay attention to all skills of writing including those that they would easily ignore. Since they must comment on each sub-skill, raters cannot just do a quick reading and fail to pay attention to details. If one aspect was not graded well by the time all the skills have been addressed, the rater is likely to have gained a more objective view.

Limitations of analytic scoring

The greatest limitation of analytic scoring is its time consumption. Raters have to spend a great amount of time reading through and scoring individual sub-skills. This has limited analytic scoring to small-scale assessment because it would be a costly process in mass assessment (White, 1994).

A second concern in analytic scoring is the lack of agreement about what separable sub-skills exist in writing. Many critics of this scoring do not believe that writing can be separated into sub-skills and still be considered writing (White, 1994). Is a piece of writing just a combination of skills weaved together? Can a writer fail to organize his/her work and still produce a good text?

Closely related to this issue is the concern about the reliability of analytic scoring. Reliable analytic scores are difficult to obtain because of the lack of professional consensus about the definition and importance of sub-skills. For example, it is not exactly clear what vocabulary is. What one rater may consider as good use of vocabulary may pass as everyday language for another rater. Also paying a lot of attention to separate skills of writing may divert attention from the overall effect of a text. Instead of looking at a coherent whole, writing is seen as parts.

Although detailed comments have been viewed as positive, there is still some disagreement on the nature of corrections that writers should receive. For example, there have been very differing opinions on whether writers' grammatical errors should be corrected. Truscott (1999) argues that grammar correction is not effective and does not benefit writers, but Ferris (1999) rejects Truscott's argument arguing that grammar correction can be effective and that many ESL writers will be disappointed if their grammar is not corrected. Even with careful rater training, various raters may still put more weight on different aspects of writing and end up affecting reliability.

CONCLUSION

This paper has not advocated for any specific scoring criteria but emphasized need specific grading criteria. The purpose of evaluating should govern the choice of the grading instrument. Brown (1995) discusses four major testing decisions that need to be matched with testing categories: diagnostic, proficiency, placement and achievement. A writing teacher needs to keep these decisions in mind when giving and grading writing assignments. If students are being evaluated for placement purposes such as in contexts where there are various levels of ESL writing classes, a holistic scoring scale might be appropriate, especially if there are time constraints and as long as the raters agree on what aspects they want to consider for placement. However, if a writing program seeks to make a diagnostic decision about students, then an analytic score will provide the most useful information needed in making decisions on students' strengths and weaknesses. It should be up to the individual teacher to decide when detailed comments accompanying a grade are useful and when they are not. The success of each scoring criteria depends on the appropriateness of use.

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Content Creators and Language Learners: Exploring Web 2.0 and Wikis

Dorothy Valcarcel Craig

As professional educators, university professors seek new and innovative ways to integrate technology into coursework and class assignments. Especially critical when working with licensure candidates, it is important to encourage the application and utilization of current technologies and Web 2.0 tools. The relevant use and "practice" within the graduate classroom assists in gaining skills and knowledge needed to effectively infuse technology into teaching and learning in the K-12 environment.

Coursework—which prepares teachers to work with second language learners, is no exception. In fact, it is critical in that instruction for English language learners (ELLs) must include specific strategies for language learners while assisting students with cultural tools present within the new learning environment as well as within society. The work of Vygotsky tells us that the sociocultural factors involved in learning stem from interaction and use of cultural tools or cultural artifacts. Tools or artifacts involved include those items, practices, or products that are ever-present in society (Cole & Engestrom, 1997, Vygotsky, 1978). In today's world, the cultural tools and artifacts we use on a daily basis include technology, computers, and related Web 2.0 applications.

Based on this premise, coursework that includes a well-designed blend of information regarding second language acquisition, examinations of culture and cultural aspects, specific strategies, methods, and assessments appropriate for ELLs, and applications of technological tools better assist practicing teachers who are preparing to transition from the regular education classroom to the ESL classroom.

Cultural Tools for the ESL Environment

More than likely, there are not many teachers who have not heard or come in contact with many of the technologies and technology applications known as Web 2.0. There are web sites devoted entirely to the integration of Web 2.0

tools in classrooms. In today's world, Web 2.0 technologies such as Facebook and Twitter help us to connect and reconnect with old friends, colleagues, and relatives. Many practicing teachers are already using these web applications as tools for professional development, homework assignments, class schedules, and parent information. However, when working with second language learners there are additional factors that must be considered. These include: a) access to technology, b) connectivity, c) language diversity and proficiency, and e) prior experience

The technologies involved in the Web 2.0 classroom must be adapted to the language-learning classroom. In some cases, it is difficult to make that adaptation especially when a regular education teacher is transitioning to the second language classroom. Teachers tend to fall back on what works effectively and what feels most comfortable. But, second language learners have distinctly different needs than their English-speaking counterparts and may not be able to utilize the technology in the same manner. This is where teacher preparation coursework comes into play. By integrating the use of technology tools into assignments, teachers who are preparing to work with second language learners are encouraged to explore their own practice as they build skills and acquire knowledge regarding how to incorporate Web 2.0 tools into the ESL environment. However, a brief examination of what the term, Web 2.0 means and what these tools entail is important before they can be effectively integrated into classroom practice.

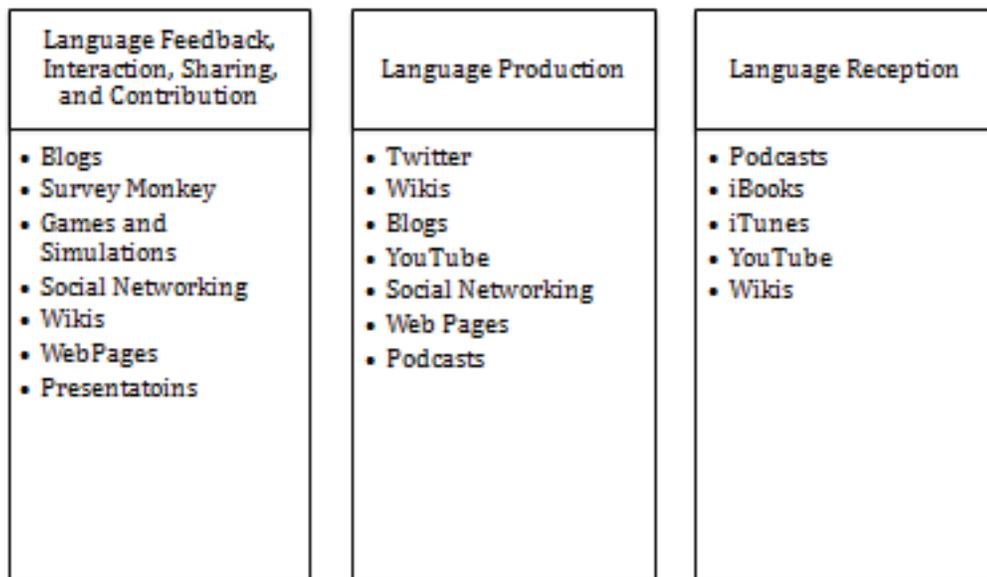
As mentioned previously, Web 2.0 tools are common and are being used by many in classrooms as well as in the home environment. Although familiar to most English language learners, there are many second language learners with minimal experience using Web 1.0 tools and minimal knowledge and experience working with Web 2.0 applications. Web 1.0 is considered to be the first version of the web because it enabled a small number of users to create content for a larger number. For example, teachers as well as students view Internet sites created by web designers; however, they may have little experience designing a web site of their own.

Web 2.0 and related tools are viewed as "social web applications" because they engage users and encourage active communication and collaboration. Web 2.0 includes blogs, podcasts, eBooks, Wikis, YouTube, Teacher Tube, and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. Web 2.0 tools are the second-generation Internet applications and include the following characteristics:

1. They are used for productivity as well as pleasure,
2. They all involve shareable content created by users,
3. They involve social networking and web-based communities, and
4. They help to facilitate interactive information sharing and collaboration.

These tools in particular promote the creation of content and easily allow for communication and interaction. It is the Web 2.0 tools that work especially well with second language learners because of the skills involved in use. For example, blogging encourages writing, reviewing, and responding. Wikis enable students to use language learning strategies and skills in conducting research and creating entries. In further exploring the processes involved in second language learning, there are three areas which are closely aligned with Web 2.0 tools: a) language feedback, sharing, interaction, and contribution, b) language production, and c) language reception (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Web 2.0 Tools and Language Learning



Exploring Wikis

Although there are many possibilities for integrating Web 2.0 tools in second language instruction, the remaining discussion will focus on the Wiki and the creation of content for the purpose of language learning, professional development, and parental involvement in the ESL classroom. In addition, considering the ease of use and design, the Wiki is a key tool that may be integrated into ESL teacher preparation coursework. The wiki affords a variety of applications appropriate

for second language learners, which may be aligned with teacher preparation course content and tasks. Classroom wikis—when created as part of ESL graduate coursework over the span of a semester—are ready for classroom integration once the course is completed.

Leof and Cunningham (2001) share that Wiki is a type of software that allows users to freely create content and share the content with others via the web. The word, wiki, is Hawaiian for quick. In the world of Wiki, this implies that content may be easily shared as well as changed. This is due to the fact that the software enables “open editing” which allows many users to revise and edit the original content, therefore, creating a community of interaction and communication.

Set up in a manner similar to an encyclopedia entry, a Wiki entry may include interlinked pages created by users to further expand information. A teacher or student-created wiki may include public pages as well as private pages. Pages may be set so that only the creators are able to edit and revise or set up as “public pages” where any user may alter existing information. In terms of ESL classroom instruction and activities, a Wiki encourages users to become writers, editors, users, and evaluators of information. In addition, classroom Wikis for second language learners:

- Promote authentic interaction and communication when creating, discussing, and sharing content.
- Emphasizes student-centered learning and places the second language learner “in charge” of his or her created content.
- Facilitates teamwork as ELLs collaborate on group Wikis and engage in conferences in order to evaluate and edit content.
- Encourages reading, writing, language production, and reception.
- Promotes creativity through the design and development of the Wiki.
- Provides opportunities for ELLs to interact and gain experience using cultural tools and artifacts.

Creating a Wiki as part of ESL teacher preparation coursework allows practicing teachers to carefully analyze information critical to completing licensure requirements as well as examine and create content relevant to their own individual classroom situations. Components may include: a) professional development information, b) resources for ESL as well as regular education classroom teachers, c) student pages, d) newcomer information, e) methods and materials for ESL instruction, and f) interactive resources such as discussion topics and blogs. Other uses that may be considered in terms of the actual ESL learning environment include:

1. Creating a grade-level Wiki for collaboration between ESL and regular education teachers.
2. Glossary of terms and vocabulary words created by second language learners.
3. Content Wiki to support CALLA or SIOP instruction.
4. Individual student Wikis based on projects and language learning.
5. Journaling and book discussions—class, group, or individual.
6. Portfolio Wikis based on content instruction or writing.
7. Student presentations reflecting content and language.

Once complete, the content selected and created may be shared with colleagues, community members, and students for instructional and information purposes. The practice of creating a Wiki as part of coursework also allows practicing teachers to experiment and generate additional ideas for classroom use with second language learners. The time spent designing the Wiki provides opportunities to reflect on the differences and needs of second language learners as compared to English speaking-students. Therefore, the time spent designing the Wiki as part of graduate coursework assists in making the transition from regular education to ESL classroom.

Issues to Consider

As with all web applications, there are specific issues that must be considered when integrating Web 2.0 tools such as Wikis in the second language classroom. First and foremost is privacy. If students will be creating and using the Wiki, be sure that student identify is protected and that all policies for Internet use in place within the school or district are considered. One way to allow students to post pictures as authors of the Wiki is to have them create a cartoon version of themselves. There are many free web services where students can experiment with “cartooning.” In addition to privacy issues, policies and guidelines for Internet use apply to second language learners as well as regular education students. Second language learners in the middle and high school grades are especially vulnerable due to the nature of teen interaction. Issues such as protecting personal information and avoiding cyber bullying should be addressed whenever any student is working with Web 2.0 applications (Magid, 2010).

Creating and designing a Wiki also provides opportunities for second language learners to critique and evaluate accuracy and appropriateness of information. Incorporating rubrics adapted for ESL learners is one way to encourage content evaluation and also assists students in developing writing and editing skills while using language for authentic purposes. With content creation comes social responsibility and accountability. Collaborative discussions regarding what is

socially acceptable in terms of language use is yet another way to engage second language learners while encouraging them to experience Web 2.0.

As new technologies become available it is critical that they be considered as tools for both ESL teacher preparation and ESL classrooms. By carefully examining and exploring the possibilities we as educators—in higher education as well as in the K-12 environment—are better able to design meaningful tasks for our students. By doing so we encourage authentic use of language and literacy development—traditional literacy as well as technological literacy—while gaining skills need to effectively utilize Web 2.0 tools. On the horizon, it is predicted that soon we will have Web 3.0 tools available. Web 3.0 tools are expected to evolve as part of a semantic and intelligent web—a place where software agents will integrate information to give intelligent responses to human users (McManus, 2009). Possibly, it will be the current second language learners who will become the creators of software agents. Time will tell! It is our job to assist our second language learners in becoming “expert” users of language as well as all of the cultural tools afforded in order to become the new citizens of tomorrow.

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