

formerly Bright Ideas

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Skilled Reading: Top-Down, Bottom-Up

by Paul Abraham

Earlier this year, the reading world bid goodbye to one of its stalwarts, Jeanne S. Chall, Professor Emerita of Reading from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Professor Chall had been active in reading education for almost 50 years. While Chall's contributions to reading theory and practice were many, from readability to stage theory, she was most often identified with the reading wars, the battle fought between those advocating phonics instruction and those advocating whole language, which relies in part on instruction using sight words.

Chall's belief that decoding skills played a key role in the reading process forced her into a position of representing phonics. Her view of reading theory, however, always included rich language input along with skills in phonics. The reading field seemed to push her into the role advocating phonics and lost sight of her strong beliefs about the importance of world knowledge, well-written literature, and developmental stages.

Reading Theories

As guardian of phonics, Professor Chall was often viewed as a bottom-up theorist, that is, one who emphasized the ability to decode or put into sound what is seen in a text. Other bottom-up theorists included Gough (1972), LaBerge and Samuels (1974). The bottom-up model was firmly in place when I learned to read. Teachers emphasized decoding skills and spent almost no time helping emerging readers recognize what they, as readers, brought to the information on the page.

The top-down model of reading does just that, focusing on what the readers bring to the process (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971, 1982). The readers sample the text for information and con-

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Foreword

Many of us in adult basic education have found our way past the useless dichotomy between phonics and whole language epitomized by the reading wars waged over the last decade. We have come to accept a more balanced approach to teaching reading— embracing whole language principles using literature-rich content while incorporating decoding and other reading subskills into the instructional practice.

The more we understand about the reading process by examining how theory and research applies to our practice, the better reading teachers we will become. Understanding how readers make meaning from the printed page can ground us in our daily teaching and inform the choices we make in the classroom. We need to clarify what we believe about language and literacy acquisition so the choices we make about reading assignments and activities are purposeful.

This issue of Field Notes offers articles by practitioners whose students range from the newly literate to the college bound. Some writers, like Lee Haller and Marcia Chafee, offer step-by-step lesson plans for teaching basic reading, while others, like Paul Abraham and Jessica Spohn, offer theoretical frameworks for understanding the reading process. Janet Fischer and Richard Goldberg do a striking job of illustrating how they apply reading theory principles to their classroom.

I have also selected Web sites and resource listings with an eye toward balancing theory and practice. As always, readers of Field Notes are welcome to express their reactions in subsequent issues of the newsletter by sending a letter to the editor or contributing an article.

Though articles on reading assessment are conspicuously absent, the forthcoming issue of Field Notes will focus entirely on assessment, including the assessment of reading abilities.

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Submissions are welcome. If you have an idea for an article or wish to submit a letter to the editor, call Lenore Balliro at (617) 482-9485.

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Learning to Read, Reading to Learn

by Jessica Spohn

As students complete the arduous task of passing the GED or completing an alternative high school diploma, they have acquired a wide range of reading comprehension skills and they have achieved an important milestone. Some students will want to continue in postsecondary education. But often, teachers have not introduced the reading skills and strategies these students will need to succeed in a college setting. College students have to cope with a large amount of reading, with lengthy texts in scientific, historical, and technical areas.

In this article, I will discuss strategies and skills in reading instruction for students moving from a small and often supportive adult basic education classroom into a large and often impersonal college setting.

How Do You Feel at the End of This Paragraph?

Read the italicized text below from a computer manual:

*The Print dialog box is where you also set the size attribute ratios. These settings are percentage multipliers used to scale the current font whenever relative size at tributes are applied. For example, if the current font has a size of 10 points, and the Large size attributes ratio in the Print Preferences dialogue box is set to 120%, then any where the Large attribute is applied in the document, the character size changes to 12 points, which is 120% of 10 points ($10 * 120\% = 12$).*

Ready to read on with confidence and comprehension or are you ready to cry, give up or ask someone for help? Is this how your student feels when an instructor assigns a reading from a college text? Using my computer, I checked the readability score of this document. It has about an 11th grade level equivalency, suggesting that most 11th graders could read and understand the passage. So with a masters degree in education, I should be able to read and comprehend this passage with ease.

But I can't. I can't read and understand this passage without accessing an array of comprehension skills and strategies that I don't use every day. I have to be an active and strategic reader. I have to ask and answer certain questions and draw on certain reading skills that will help me read independently. Below is a list of these strategies and skills, drawn from Bloom's Taxonomy, that I must use to understand the paragraph. The same skills can be taught to students as they encounter unfamiliar, challenging texts.

1. Why Am I Reading This?

Why do I need or want to read this text: what's in it for me both as an immediate goal and as a part of who I am and what I want? Answering this question creates a context for becoming an active reader. It sets a purpose for reading and establishes motivation. It moves me away from passively accepting the

text, which limits comprehension. I am making the choice to read, comprehend, and use the information I learn from the text. Answering the *why* helps me, and any reader, accept the discomfort that comes from not immediately knowing how to approach the text.

Why should I read the computer paragraph? As an immediate goal, I need to know how to use my computer and I can't always rely on other people to help me troubleshoot. In the longer term, using the computer is part of my job, and I want a sense of independence and accomplishment. So I will endure the discomfort I will experience in the process of finding the skills to help me understand this passage.

Helping students to establish a reason for enduring difficult texts, even when the immediate goal isn't readily apparent, is a good first step toward developing active reading skills.

2. What Type of Text Am I Reading?

To help me comprehend the computer paragraph, I must identify the type of text so I can use appropriate reading strategies. I know that I am reading a technical passage that involves math, so I will read methodically to get specific information and analyze information from tables, formulas, equations, understand specialized vocabulary.

Students, too, must identify the type of text they are reading so

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Learning to Read...

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they can select different skills necessary for reading in different genres. Reading a novel is different from reading a technical manual, and teachers need to teach these differences explicitly. In my case, identifying my paragraph as an excerpt from a dreaded but necessary manual-like book, *Using Word Perfect*, sets me up for doing a certain kind of reading

3. What Do I Already Know About This?

I draw upon my prior knowledge of computers and my personal experiences with computers to help me understand the paragraph. This reflection, along with my knowledge of the type of text—the dreaded technical manual—allows me to understand the vocabulary in context. The words *dialog*, *attribute*, and *character* have many meanings, but I understand that this is a manual on computers, not a poem by Shakespeare, so I read accordingly.

Students, too, must access their prior knowledge of a topic and of the type of text they are reading. They can ask: “What do I already know about this subject? When have

I read a similar kind of book, and how did I do it?” Teachers can assist students in activating their prior knowledge through prereading activities. They can also help increase a student’s knowledge of a difficult subject by reading lower-level materials to build that missing knowledge base. Students can learn to do this themselves by seeking out materials on a similar subject written at a lower level in order to build background knowledge.

4. How Can I Get the Big Picture of What I’ll Be Reading?

In my case, I’m trying to understand a short excerpt from a longer manual. Still, it helps me to skim the manual so I know how that paragraph fits into the longer text. Then I can locate more information if I need to.

If students can establish a big picture for what they are reading, they can increase their comprehension of, say, a chapter of a text. They can skim the chapter for basic ideas, scan for specific information, use titles and headlines to predict what they will be reading about. By establishing a kind of scaffold before reading, their chances of understanding that chapter are much bet-

ter than if they open to page one and start reading.

5. How Will I Evaluate the Material I am Reading ?

In the case of the computer paragraph, my ability to evaluate the cause-effect relationship and to verify the value of evidence in this passage will allow me to apply it to a concrete situation when I need to. If I have read the paragraph correctly, I should be able to set the six attribute ratios for my fonts. If I can’t do it, I have to read it over again.

When students read longer and more complex materials—social sciences, history, applied sciences, for example, they will have to use a variety of reading skills: they will have to evaluate fact vs. opinion and assess the value of theories. They will have to compare and discriminate between ideas and theories based on following and evaluating reasoned arguments. All of these skills need modeling and explicit teaching in the GED or ASE classroom because they do not come as naturally as, say, reading a story or narrative.

To read my computer paragraph successfully, I had to draw on skills I don’t use regularly. As an advanced reader, I access those skills unconsciously. But our students must learn these skills through explicit exposure and practice, if they are to succeed in college level reading.

Jessica Spohn has worked in education for 15 years. She currently coordinates the ABE-to-College Transition Project at the NELRC/World Education and can be reached at (617) 482-9485 or <jspohn@worlded.org>.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s Taxonomy is a useful rubric for teaching reading to students who plan to go on to post secondary education. For a clear and useful chart illustrating Bloom’s taxonomy with implications for teaching reading, go to the following Web sites:

<www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/bloom.html>
<www.ops.org/reading/blooms_taxonomy.html>

Reconsidering Learning Disabilities

by Rachel Martin



During a workshop at an adult literacy program located within a two-year college, each teacher present voiced the assumption that the majority of her students were learning disabled. This conclusion was based on such evidence as the fact that a student had been in the program a long time with little progress, was unable to remember what she's learned in an earlier class, or had a "case history of mental illness or participation in special education classes." Once the preliminary "diagnosis" was made, the student was sent to the "special Needs Center" at the local college for a "battery" of exams including the IQ test.

Included among other criteria commonly used to identify learning disabled students are: loose thought patterns; disoriented in time; often late; cannot retain new information

without excessive rehearsal and practice; seems restless, shifts position often during reading tasks; halting and jerky reading style.

My own reading of the discourse of "learning disabilities" owes much to the works of Peter Johnston (1985) and Gerald Coles (1987). It was Johnston's *Understanding Reading Disability* that first allowed me to consider that reading ability might have more to do with factors such as attitude, motivation, strategies, and situations than neurological dysfunction. And I have seen teachers in programs in which I have worked apply the term "learning disabled" to nearly every student they teach, with no more rationale than that used by the program mentioned at the beginning of this section. That may be because this is easier than seeing our own strategies and classroom structures as ineffective. I believe this situa-

tion results from a literacy field that assumes anyone who can read and "cares" can teach reading, and it places underprepared tutors and teachers in untenable circumstances, where learning disability seems the only explanation for "failure to progress."

Notes:

Coles, G. (1987). *The learning mystique: A critical look at learning disabilities*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Johnston, P (1985). Understanding reading disability: A case study approach. *Harvard Ed Review*. 55 (2) (pp.153-177).

This excerpt is from Rachel Martin's forthcoming book: Listening Up: Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers and Students, Heinemann, January, 2001. Rachel Martin teaches writing to adults and facilitates staff development in radical pedagogy and curriculum design.

Classroom Tip: Responding to Reading

After literal comprehension questions, then what? The following suggestions can help stimulate complex discussions of texts, particularly fiction. Some of these questions can help students present an opinion and support it with reasoning, a skill that can be extended to nonfiction reading as well. These questions were adapted from the Web site <www.covington.k12.tn.us/resources/word/hots6.htm>

- ✓ As a prereading activity, have students read the title of a story only and create their own stories from it. Compare them to the original.
- ✓ Ask students: Decide which character in the story would like to spend a day with and why.
- ✓ Ask students to decide if the story really could have happened and why.
- ✓ Ask students to explain why a character in a story acted as he or she did.
- ✓ Ask students to compare the story with another one the student has read.
- ✓ Ask students to write a letter to one of the characters in the story offering advice or information.

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trast it with their world knowledge, helping to make sense of what is written. The focus here is on the readers as they interact with the text. For those reading theorists who recognized the importance of both the text and the reader in the reading process, an amalgamation of the two emerged—the interactive approach. The interactive model (Rumelhart, 1977; Stanovich, 1980) stressed both what is on the written page and what a reader brings to it using both top-down and bottom-up skills.

Chall, who actually took a more interactive stance in the great debate, served on a blue ribbon panel that helped create *Becoming a Nation of Readers* in 1985. These reading theorists and practitioners described skilled reading as constructive—that is, the reader constructs meaning from and makes sense of the printed page. The panel also described skilled readers as fluent, strategic, and motivated. Moreover, they suggested that skilled readers practice, develop, and refine their reading over their lifetime.

More than a decade and a half later, these descriptors still illustrate the reading process for skilled readers. I'd like to apply these tenets to a reading lesson, and I have divided the lesson into before, during, and after reading.

Before Reading

Skilled reading is constructive

The notion of constructing knowledge refocuses the locus of control in the reading process on

the reader. It is not enough for readers to decode the information from the text, but rather they must bring to mind their own world knowledge and worldview. It demands that the teachers activate their students' schema—that is, help students recognize the knowledge that they already have about the topic of a text. This would be

*...skilled readers practice,
develop, and refine their reading
over their lifetime.*

akin to the building of a foundation in the process of construction.

Activating knowledge about a topic is particularly important for second language readers whose world knowledge often far exceeds their linguistic skills. Teachers need to provide opportunities for all readers to think, write, or discuss what they know about the topic of the reading. In addition, teachers need to focus the students' attention on features of the text that can aid in building a scaffold for what they will read: titles, photographs or illustrations, and if appropriate, the actual structure of the text. (For example, a newspaper is structured a certain way that facilitates skimming, scanning, and locating specific information; a textbook uses chapter titles and subheads to organize topics and concepts.)

Skilled readers are strategic

Teachers can help students recognize the great variation inher-

ent in the reading process and to understand that we do not read each piece of writing in the same way. For example, quite different skills are needed to locate and read the list of show times for a new film in the newspaper than to read a journal article on cell properties. Teachers can serve as guides to the variety of skills and processes used in reading. They can pose questions to help students reflect

on their reading processes: Why are we reading this particular text? What information do we need to glean from it? How closely do we need to read? It is important to help ESOL readers, who may not have even

basic literacy in their first language, to understand differences among texts and to vary the reading skills they use.

Skilled readers are motivated

This descriptor focuses the teacher of reading on the selection of material. Obviously, selecting relevant and interesting material for readers is key to their engagement in the process. But teachers can improve student motivation by creating classroom opportunities for sustained silent reading (SSR). In-class SSR, widely used in public schools, can also be part of an adult reading program. This type of reading had been shown to be effective for ESOL readers (Pingreen & Krashen, 1993; Mason & Krashen, 1997).

Class time during which students are allowed to choose their own reading material should be

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consistently scheduled. Over time, teachers can create a class library with popular material. Double copies would be helpful so that students with similar interests can discuss the same book or article. The class library can be filled with newspapers and magazines as well as novels and adult literature.

During Reading

Skilled readers are fluent

Fluency in reading is a balance between the skillful decoding and ongoing comprehension. This fluency assumes that the decoding of most words the reader encounters is automatic. Readers have only a limited amount of cognitive energy to use during the process. If they spend most of their time on decoding, then they have no energy left for connecting the ideas of the text to make meaning. Therefore, being fluent demands that readers have internalized decoding and can

focus conscious energy on comprehension. Decoding can be particularly problematic for second language learners because they often have a very limited oral based lexicon.

A number of exercises can help readers improve their automatic processing skills. These include identification exercises, matching words, identifying parts of words, and flash cards for sight words. (*Editor's note: See Lee Haller's article on page 21 for examples of reading exercises.*)

Making It Concrete: Using Post-its

To improve top-down skills, ESOL teacher Judy Powers has her students use post-it notes to mark a text as they are reading. The notations on the post-its include: asking a question, answering a question, creating a mental picture, expressing opinion, connecting to life, and connections to reading. These "notes" could include key information, a new vocabulary item, interesting descriptions, or whatever focus seems appropriate. Although students read on their own, they review their reading process by using post-its, also making their reading a more active process.

I remember once helping a student who was studying a chapter in an introductory text for a college course. I asked him how he learned the materials. He responded that he read the chapter through. I asked what he did next, and he responded that he read the chapter a second time. I then asked if he took notes and he said no. I suggested that he examine the headings throughout the chapter and notice the differences in font size

and shape. I then explained that these headings could serve as a guide for his notetaking. He looked at me in amazement and said, "What a good idea!"

This type of direct explanation of what you, yourself, do as a proficient reader is often very helpful for your students: using graphic cues, note-taking, rereading, and summarizing paragraphs or sections. Having students read the summary at the end of a textbook chapter first, for example, provides a good overview. It can help create a schema for students as they approach the beginning of the chapter.

Think Aloud Protocol

Modeling your own reading process might also serve your students. You could choose a text that the whole class might be reading and go through a public think-aloud. In other words, tell the students what you are thinking as you read a text for the first time. I would suggest that you practice on a text to prepare yourself. However, as you share your own process with the students, you should use an unfamiliar text to make the task more authentic.

After Reading

The typical postreading exercise tends to focus on comprehension exercises. I would suggest that rather than short answer or multiple choice exercises, readers might be asked to think about a visual representation of the text: a folded paper with pros and cons; a Venn diagram with traits and similarities; a web map with several different ideas connected by arrows.

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Bloom's Taxonomy

Post reading activities and questions should also take into account the six-level hierarchy of skills that Bloom suggests in his taxonomy. The first level is knowledge, which includes recall or recognition of information. The next level, commonly used in post-reading tasks, is comprehension, where the reader might explain, describe, or rephrase a text. The next four levels focus on the following:

□ **application**, where the reader applies the information learned in the text;

□ **analysis**, where the reader would make inferences or derive generalizations;

□ **synthesis**, where the reader combines several ideas; and

□ **evaluation**, where the reader judges the value or importance of a text.

These levels provide a simple yet helpful guide to the types of questions that you might ask after reading.

Conclusion

Skilled readers practice, develop, and refine their reading over their lifetime. This summative descriptor indicates the importance of practice to develop expertise in reading. With support, practice and inspirations, all readers can improve.

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Smith F. (1971). *Understanding reading*. New York; Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Stanovich, K.E. (1980). Toward an interactive-compensatory model of individual differences in the development of reading fluency. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 16, 32-71.

What is Sustained Silent Reading?

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is a time set aside in the classroom for students to read on their own. Even 15 minutes of SSR is worthwhile.

Students select something suitable and interesting to read, preferably a whole book.

Teachers may or may not have students keep dialogue journals on what they read. Teachers' responses to the journals afford individual attention.

Research has suggested that SSR is valuable in helping students progress in reading and in helping second language students acquire language proficiency.

Having students read on their own allows brief periods for teachers to work on portfolio assessments or to have individual conferences with students.

Oh, Ernesto, I Have Something Wonderful to Tell You: Making Higher Level Readers Out of Lower Level Learners

by Janet Fischer and Richard Goldberg

Note: Because this article was written by two teachers, we have indicated authorship of each section in the subheadings.

As teachers in Boston's Asian American Civic Association, we work with immigrant adult learners at a reading level of 3–4, the grade level equivalents used by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Richard's level I class is slightly lower than Janet's level II class. In this article, we will provide some practical, classroom-based ideas for teaching higher-order reading skills to lower level readers who are nonnative speakers of English.

Richard shows how to get students to read and respond to a whole book on work and family issues. Janet shows how to take a student-generated text and provide reading and writing activities to build background knowledge in order to increase comprehension.

Joining the Literacy Club

Our common goals are to help lower-level learners, in Frank Smith's words, to "join the literacy club," that is, to make reading more enjoyable, to engage with texts, to go beyond the wall of print barrier of "too many new words," and to acquire the kinds of reading strategies necessary for success at higher levels of education and employment. We don't see these goals as mutually exclusive, and we believe teachers shouldn't focus on one at the expense of the other.

Linking Theory to Practice: Richard

In my level I ABE class, students read *Woman's Work, Man's Work* by Roseanne Keller (New Readers Press), a small "chapter book" focusing on the difficulties faced by an immigrant family. The husband, laid off and unable to find work, is forced to stay home and take care of the couple's three children, while his wife works full-time to support the family.

First Steps: Content and Formal Schemata

Since none of the students had ever read an entire book in English, we thought it useful to bring some reading theory into the classroom to support our view that meaning is not found in individual words or texts but as part of an interactive process between a reader's background knowledge and the text (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983). First we examined content schemata (what readers already know about the subject they're reading). Students easily wrote examples of "woman's work" and "man's work," both in their native countries and in the United States, and they were asked if they ever knew of a woman who did "man's work" or a man who did "woman's work." We also discussed how different societies would view

men and women in these situations. These activities provided much useful information for a future lesson on changing gender roles.

Next, we used formal schemata (knowledge of the organizational structures of different kinds of texts—for example, how a book is different from a poem).

Students were asked to skim the entire book by looking at the front cover (a picture of an exasperated house husband), table of contents, names of chapters, pictures, and reading small sections, such as any chapter's first and last paragraphs. Each student then shared her/his findings with the class. Finally, we tried to predict the content of each of the seven chapters by writing one sentence summaries based on the titles ("The Broken Dream," "Anger," "Change of Heart," etc.) and to predict the ending from the last line of the book, "Oh, Ernesto, I have something wonderful to tell you."

Students read the book in different ways: through sustained silent reading in class, by reading a few paragraphs aloud "round-robin style," by listening to the teacher read aloud, and by reading assigned chapters at home. All in-class reading followed a strict "no dictionaries" policy. If students encountered difficult new words or idioms, they

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Oh Ernesto. . .

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would underline them and try to guess meanings from context with the rest of the class, or they would try a “list it and skip it” approach of writing the word in their reading journal and looking up the meaning later. (For an excellent list of strategies that can be used before, during, and after reading, see Auerbach and Paxton (1997).

Reading and Writing as Interactive Skills

In all our classroom work, we use reading and writing together, not as discrete skills. Among the writing assignments was a letter to either Carmen or Ernesto, the two main characters, in which students would give their reactions to the husband’s or wife’s plight and offer suggestions to improve their respective situations. After reading the book, students were asked to write their own ending to the story and predict what might happen to Carmen, Ernesto and their children in the next few years. Finally, they did a longer piece of writing to explain how they would deal with the problem of job loss and shifting child care obligations if those situations surfaced in their own families.

Narrow Reading

These activities were not done in a vacuum but were part of longer units on the changing family and working in the United States. Through this kind of “narrow reading,” investigating a topic in depth

by reading multiple genres—a short book, a newspaper article, a poem—students are able to increase their background knowledge and transfer both content and formal schemata to more challenging readings. Although we do only one chapter of the book in class every day, each time we read this book I have always noticed that many students are reading it at a faster pace on their

the United States before they immigrated here. We next list all of the students’ responses on the board. The following class, students are given a photocopy of the list they generated from the previous class. This list enables students to read their classmates’ responses and validate their own ideas in print. We then discuss similarities and differences among the group. Students respond very positively to this activity because they receive immediate feedback from their peers. It also encourages them to relate their experiences to their peers’ and prepares them to respond to subsequent class readings at more challenging levels.

We continue the theme with a published reading assignment using two excerpts from *I Was Dreaming to Come to America: Memories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project*. New York: Puffin Books, 1995. Students read about the expectations and thoughts of two immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island in 1920. They also read a short biography of each of the immigrants. After referring to their earlier responses in the opening activity, they write a short letter to one of these immigrants. In their letter, they explain how they can identify with the writer’s feelings or experiences and how they themselves reacted in their own situations. Using letter writing provides students with a clear audience for their writing, making it easier to determine tone, level of formality, and other choices any writer has to make.

The challenge is to find themes that all students can relate to.

own, proving that if the material connects with their realities, students often do more independent reading.

Using Student-Generated Writing as Class Texts: Janet

At the beginning of each new class cycle, I try to establish a strong foundation for reading. For example, we begin the first class day with a reading assignment integrated with a writing assignment. Although most students are Chinese, we often have non-Asian students in our classes. The challenge is to find themes that all students can relate to. For my students, immigrating to the United States is a universal experience; therefore, I choose readings related to this theme. What follows reflects a combination of in-class and at-home reading activities.

Students begin by writing about the thoughts they had about

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Oh, Ernesto. . .

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The following day, students do a variation on a role-play using writing instead of talking. Each student exchanges her letter with a partner and takes on the role of the immigrant her partner wrote to. Students write responses to their partner's letter addressing specific issues, concerns, or challenges their partners have faced. These student-generated texts give students opportunities to read more authentic texts with a controlled level of diction. Depending on the class, we will do up to two "letter exchanges" to reinforce their reading and writing skills from multiple perspectives.

Using Charts

The follow-up reading is a longer student-generated text from a former ABE student. We discuss students' reactions to this student's experiences, again drawing comparisons and contrasts. As a final activity, we create a chart comparing the three writers to the class members, examining country; age when immigrated; thoughts before coming to the U.S.; hopes for the future; and advice/suggestions for each person. Through the use of this graphic, we look for commonalities. The use of a chart also provides students with a different reading skill: locating information from a graphic, which is organized differently from a narrative.

Recycling Vocabulary

By following one relevant theme for a period of time, we created a context that helped students increase their comprehension of the reading matter. Vocabulary is

Sample Reading Strategies

(based on Auerbach and Paxton, 1997)

Pre-Reading Strategies

- ◆ Accessing prior knowledge
- ◆ Writing your way into reading (Writing about your experiences related to the topic)
- ◆ Asking questions based on the title
- ◆ Making predictions based on previewing
- ◆ Identifying text structure
- ◆ Skimming for the general idea
- ◆ Reading the introduction and conclusion first

During Reading Strategies

- ◆ Skipping unknown words; guessing from context
- ◆ Predicting the main idea of each paragraph
- ◆ Drawing pictures to show what you see in your mind's eye

After Reading Strategies

- ◆ Revising prereading expectations
- ◆ Making an outline, chart, map, or diagram of the organization of the text
- ◆ Retelling what you think the author is saying
- ◆ Relating the text to your own experience

naturally recycled when you use a theme, so students have the chance to see new words repeated in different readings. Using student-generated texts is a natural way to keep the level of diction low enough for students to read with ease. By introducing published material on the same theme, they have the opportunity for exposure to language somewhat beyond their reach. By combining reading and writing as interactive activities, students see the connection between the two. All of these strategies with low-level students help set the stage for higher order reading skills.

Notes

Auerbach, E. & Paxton, D. (1997) *Its not the English thing": Bringing reading research into the ESL classroom. TESOL Quarterly, 31(2), 7 237-261.*

Carrell, P. & Eisterhold, J. (1983) *Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. TESOL Quarterly, 17 (4), 553-573.*

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A Reader Teaches Reading

by Tina toran

One of my first memories is sitting in my mother's lap while she read to me. This one-on-one connection could not have lasted for long, because I have five younger sisters, but a seed of joy, contentment, and wonder was planted then, and I have been a reader ever since.

From childhood I remember

The Five Little Peppers, Little Women, Little Men (I loved *Little Men*, probably because there were so many females in our house), and *The Bobbsey Twins*. When I was old enough

to baby-sit I was addicted to Nancy Drew books. I made \$.75 an hour, so I would sit and count on the hour (.75, 1.50, 2.25, 3.00...) to calculate how much money I was making so I could figure out how many new Nancy Drew mysteries I could buy. I HATED finishing one without a proper backup. As an adult, I still read just about anything I can get my hands on, but I can always count on Pat Conroy, Anne Lamott, Tom Robbins, and I can read J.D. Salinger over and over.

Reading in Pre-GED

One of the reasons I love teaching a pre-GED class is that I can incorporate my love of literature into my teaching. I teach pre-

GED at the Adult Collaborative of Cape Cod for Educational Support Services (ACCESS) program. Pre-GED covers the same basic material that the GED program covers, but we move at a slower and more thorough pace. Each student has a different educational background, has different strengths and challenges, and learns at a different rate. While

still make it meaningful for my students.

Grammar and Literature

As I was reading *Beach Music* by Pat Conroy, I noticed that I was laughing at the dialogue. In class, we had just covered the use of the comma to separate dialogue from the tag line, and using the dialogue in this book seemed to be a wonderful way to illustrate what we had just studied. I also hoped, of course, that examining the dialogue would spark their curiosity about the rest of the book.

I copied a particularly funny section of dialogue to illustrate the grammar rule, and brought at least two copies of the book in case any of the students wanted to borrow it. They enjoyed the passage (a dialogue between a father and his three daughters), the grammar made a little more sense, and more important, two of the students left with a copy of the book.

The next comma rule we studied was the interrupter and the appositive. I wasn't sure how I was going to illustrate this point until I read *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* by Dave Eggers. It is almost impossible for Dave Eggers to write a sentence without an interrupter, which illus-

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*When I was old enough to baby-sit
I was addicted to Nancy Drew
books...*

the core lesson of the day is the same for all, the students work with the material at a level that they are able to handle. We also have tutors in the classroom to assist with this type of divergence.

My time with students in class is limited to two times per week, three hours per session, and most of my students have so many family and work obligations that I cannot assign any substantial homework. Therefore, I have a very small window of opportunity to share my passion, expose my class to different forms of literature, and prepare for the GED examination. Further, some students find the Literature and Arts section very difficult. Recently, though, I have found some interesting ways to bring my own reading into my pre-GED class and

Pieces of Literature

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trates the point beautifully. I began reading with an eye for content that coincided with what we were studying in class.

Reading Between the Lines

The first page of *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier fit beautifully into our class for reading comprehension. After reading the first page, I asked the students questions like “When did the story take place?” “Did the man in the hospital grow up in the country or the city?”

The students were a bit skeptical about finding all this information from just one page of the novel, but then they really got into reading between the lines. I told the class that we can tell a lot about a novel by just reading the first page, so we tried to extract as much information as we could.

When we examine the first page of a novel, we look for tone, time, word choice, and foreshadowing techniques.

In a similar vein, I used the first couple of pages from *Where the Heart Is* by Billie Letts. This novel of a young, pregnant woman who has no money, no family, and no way to take care of herself, reflects themes of community, friendship, family, and personal growth. Letts’s novel worked well to teach foreshadowing techniques.

After reading a description of Novalee Nation and Willy Jack Pickens, characters from the novel, I asked the class to predict what would happen to the characters. Students also had to support their ideas with examples from the text. To my delight, the class elected to read this book together, and all of them loved it. They were exceptionally proud when they saw the movie that was made from this book and were able to conduct a discussion of the merits

of reading or seeing a work of literature.

Whenever I bring a piece of literature, I also bring the book or text that it came from. The students know that I always carry books to discuss and share, and as a result, we have started a book exchange in the classroom. I collect books at yard sales for that purpose, but adult basic education programs might benefit from adding book acquisitions to their budget for this purpose.

Tina Toran has worked on shrimp boats in Key West, supply boats in Louisiana, and boat deliveries to the Caribbean. She is working on her master’s degree in literature and writing as she teaches pre-GED. She can be reached at ttoran@cs.com.



Still Time to Give Feedback on ABE Teacher Certification

Carey Reid (SABES Staff Development Specialist) and Mary Jayne Fay (ABE Certification Specialist) are still collecting comments on the draft ABE Teacher’s Certification process as described in the Second Interim Report to the Commissioner/DOE.

These comments are brought to the statewide Certification Advisory Committee

meetings where they directly bear on discussion.

Do you support the Teachers’ Competency List in its present form? Do you think the “streamlining” options for experienced teachers make sense?

If you have not provided your comments yet, please do take the time to do so.

The report minus attachments is not very long, and for

those of you especially pressed for time, there’s an executive summary. These are posted on both the DOE and SABES Web sites: <www.doe.mass.edu/acls> and <www.sabes.org>. Please email your comments to <mjfay@doe.mass.edu> as soon as you can, or mail them to: Mary Jayne Fay, ACLS, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5023.

Tools for the Classroom: A First Reading Lesson

by Marcia Chaffee

Author's note: I have used this lesson successfully with my students at the International Institute of Boston; some students are nonliterate and some are semiliterate in a non-Roman alphabet. All have had zero to three years of formal education.

Objective

After this lesson, students should be able to recognize their own name in print and be able to read the sentence: "My name is ____."

Reading Skills Covered

Letter recognition, word recognition, sentence recognition, visual discrimination, introduction of consonant sounds, reading from left to right

Students

Beginner level (SPL 0-1) ESOL students at the basic literacy level. There should be a maximum of eight students in the class.

Length

The whole lesson takes about one and a half hours. There is no need to rush this lesson because so many literacy skills are embedded here.

Background

This lesson works well after students have been in class a few days. Before starting this lesson, students should already be able to:

- ◆ Answer the questions: "What is your name?" and "Where are you from?"
- ◆ Identify the sound made by the first letter of each name of students in the class.

Teachers can begin to teach letters of the alphabet in context by using the first letters of students' names in the class. Teaching letter recognition and sound/symbol correspondence can be facilitated by using an ESOL lexicon. (IIB has created its own.)

Step by Step

1. Oral practice: Students ask each other "What is your name?"

2. Name recognition: Teacher scatters index cards with the names of all the students in the class on a table. Names should be written entirely in uppercase. Each student selects his or her own name from the cards on the table.

Teachable Moments: Sometimes two students will have names that start with the same letter, like Mohammed and Moula. Students may discover their own name or may need the help of the teacher to examine the visual configuration of the name (length and shape), sounds, and any features that distinguish one name from another.

3. Spelling aloud

Students practice spelling their own names aloud. If one student cannot spell her name, the teacher can ask a more advanced student: “Can you spell Mohammed’s name?” This allows for multilevel flexibility.

4. Word recognition/sentence introduction

The teacher writes on board “My name is Ahmed.” and prompts students to guess what it says by asking Ahmed, “What is your name?” The teacher asks other students and guides them to read the sentence by repeating “My” “name” “is” as she points to each word, then substitutes each student’s name.

5. Reading for meaning

The teacher gives each student a strip that says “My name is” and another strip that has a classmate’s name. This is a deliberate trick to get students to read carefully. Students then discover that they have someone else’s name. This usually elicits laughter and makes the process fun.

6. Discovery and correction/reading for meaning

Each student discovers that she has a name that is not her own and exchanges name strips with the appropriate student to make corrections. Each student completes his/her sentence with her own name. Students then read their sentence to the others.

7. Sight words

The teacher reinforces each word by holding up single word cards for “My,” “name,” “is” and the whole group identifies the words.

8. Sight words/sentence structure

The teacher assists each student in cutting up her own sentence into single words and scrambling the words. Students rearrange the words back into the sentence. (“My name is Ahmed.”)

9. Sight word reinforcement

The teacher calls out individual words (“Pick up ‘my’; Pick up ‘name’; Pick up ‘is’.”) and students pick up the corresponding word cards from their reassembled cut-up sentence. Students continue this in pairs.

10. Sentence writing

Each student copies her own sentence.

11. Follow-up

For the next class, the steps above are repeated in a similar manner for “I am from ____.”

Adaptation for staff development: Teachers might enjoy going through this process themselves with the help of a facilitator who can direct them with a language that uses a non-roman alphabet like Arabic or Khmer. This activity can easily be done during a program meeting.

Marcia Chaffee is the Coordinator of Adult Education at the International Institute of Boston and has 21 years of experience teaching and supervising teachers in ESOL and basic literacy for adult refugees and immigrants. She can be reached at (617)695-9990, ext.152, or by e-mail at <mchaffee@iiboston.org>.

From Talk to Print: Preparing Students to Read With Ease

by Sally Gabb

You can do it!! You can talk and listen! Reading is just talking written down!

In 30 years of working with adult learners, I have often heard teachers state this myth as gospel—with good intentions. The intent is usually to encourage the learner by suggesting that reading isn't something foreign, but another form of something he or she can do already. But written language is much more than "speech written down," unless it is the exact recording of a speech or conversation. And even then, it is confined by its limits—no sound, no gesture, no interruptions.

For adults whose language is more oral-based than text-based, becoming an "easy reader" can be an arduous task. First, learners must realize that written language is not "just speech written down"; written language is a special way of using language. When new and inexperienced readers realize this, and when they are given a road map of strategies to help them clarify the expectations from different kinds of print, they can start the journey toward becoming fluent readers.

Examining Oral and Written Language

I have found that "developing readers," those who can decode, but have never become "good readers," can gain some fluency in reading by

looking at the ways written language is different from speech, by being prepared for those differences, and by learning some comprehension skills that help the reader negotiate the difference between story and expository text.

A developing reader told me, "When I watch TV or a movie, I can

ferent from those required in speaking and listening.

1) **Vocabulary:**

When a person doesn't read a great deal, his or her vocabulary tends to be limited to functional terms and specific areas that relate to the person's culture, home life, religion, and occupation. Expanded vocabulary is a key aspect of reading fluency.

Shirley Brice Heath, especially in *Ways with Words* notes that in the so-called oral communities, especially those in which

people seldom travel outside a small social circle, people have many more nonverbal than verbal or text-based communication forms.

Further, students who are still developing proficiency in the English language can benefit from explicit vocabulary development; this might help ease the pressure to use reading mainly as a way to collect new words.

My learners have responded well to building vocabulary through word play, role playing, round-robin writing, and Jeopardy type word games. These games are especially effective when linked to reading that is part of a thematic unit of vital interest to the students.

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For new readers, all written language is called 'story.'

get a feeling for what's happening, I can get the whole picture. With a book, it's too many words, too much work." I have heard this sentiment often in my years of teaching adult reading and GED preparation. But millions of human beings read with ease. Why is it so difficult for some adults to achieve comfort with print in spite of having gained basic decoding skills early in life?

I have found that the following barriers have prevented developing readers from moving into fluency and higher level comprehension. These barriers are often a result of students having more experience with oral language than print. The barriers also relate to the developing reader's lack of understanding about how the printed word makes various kinds of demands on a reader—demands that are very dif-

From Talk to Print. . .

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2) Lack of understanding between narrative and expository text and between fiction and non-fiction:

For new readers, all written language is called "story." In fact, stories (narratives of something that happened to somebody, either real or fictional), are most like spoken language. They are personal, descriptive, time sequenced. They are more like talk written down than any other form of writing.

I have found it useful to talk with developing readers about the differences between spoken and written language early on. We also talk about the definition of story and narrative and the differences between fiction and nonfiction as well. I ask learners to tell family or community stories that have an oral history, to write them down, then to read them back, looking for the differences between the spoken and written form.

I then begin introducing literary elements through the use of these personal narratives. Characters, setting, plot, mood, and point of view can be analyzed through the use of the students' narratives, thus providing a bridge from personal narrative to fiction.

Because they have a limited understanding of the different ways in which print can work, developing readers often read fiction as reality. For example, some readers get angry at a character in a story, demand to know why a character would act a certain way, or put down a story in disgust because of what the character has done. To clarify the difference between their narratives and

true fiction, it's fun to assign some creative fiction writing with students. Those who are hesitant can just change the names and places of a true story they have experienced. By creating their own stories, they can understand the elements of fiction "from the inside out." When learners create their own characters, it dawns on them how fiction works. (Of course, students need some prompts for creating fiction on their own, and teachers may want to consult some books and articles on using creative writing in the ABE/GED classroom.)

3) Inability to comprehend based on lack of background knowledge:

Even fictional narratives can be hard for new readers to understand if they have no background knowledge that relates to the story. It is often hard to relate to a character or story that is totally foreign to his or her experience. Jennifer Cromley, a 1998 NIFL fellow, spent a year researching cognitive strategies for adult learning. In one section she suggests that a major need

of adult learners is massive input of general information: she suggests cramming lessons with new information, "facts, facts, facts," which will broaden the adult learners general knowledge.

Building background knowledge is especially beneficial to students from outside the United States who lack a cultural context for much of the literature they read. New "facts" should be introduced within the context of a topic or theme students are reading about, not in random isolated lists.

An example of an excellent opening for "fact building" within a context can be illustrated by the story *Color* by Judith Ortiz. In this story Ortiz deals with the sensitive topic of skin color and racism. This story might involve the exploration of U.S. immigration patterns (history), numbers and percentages of immigrants across time (math); race and skin color (biology); and poverty and wealth in the US (economics).

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I have often described a situation that happened one evening at a learning center for homeless adults where I was working. I had been tutoring a middle-aged man from North Carolina who had grown up on a farm, and had left school after fourth grade.

A college-aged tutor arrived, and we began chatting. He was carrying a novel I had read, one that I had loved. We started a lively conversation about the book. The man I was tutoring observed our conversation carefully. Finally he burst in: "You guys are talking about that book as if it was a movie!! Like you can see it in your head! That's how I want to be able to read!"

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4) **Focusing on personal interest, rather than the “main idea” of the author:**

Finding the main idea from print is very different from reading the sequential nature of a narrative and requires explicit instruction. For example, in an article about sea life containing one section about fishing boats, the developing reader with experience or interest in fishing boats may focus only on this information, and decide this is the “main idea.” Finding the main idea requires explicit teaching and practice so developing readers can see how the main idea is created.

Expository text is a specific “artificial” form of language. The reader who knows the rules of ex-

pository text knows what to expect. This kind of text is organized differently from narratives; it makes a claim or tries to persuade the reader using facts, argument, and other devices not found in narrative or fiction. It’s important to help developing readers understand that reading expository text means figuring out what the writer wants to say by locating the writer’s proposition, and to clarify that “main idea” relates to the author’s intent and is not always the same as the reader’s main interest.

5. **Lack of experience in reading and talking about what they have read**

For most of us who have the advantage of having gained reading fluency, reading is like watching a movie “in your head,” or having a conversation. The activities outlined

above can provide some awareness and can build some useful expectations of text. But I believe that such “strategies” are only successful when accompanied by one thing: practice. The message arrives through using the medium: To become a reader we have to read.

As teachers, we need to find creative ways to bring learners into conversation about what they—and we—read. We can develop book or book-and-movie discussion groups. We can stage debates and encourage research projects. By talking together with newer readers about reading, we encourage turning the pages, and create the push for practice.

Sally Gabb is the Director of the Genesis Center in Providence, RI. She has been involved in adult literacy for over 20 years. She can be reached at <sgabb412@hotmail.com>.

Putting It All Together

A Review of *Whole Language for Adults* by Judy Cheatham et al

by Lenore Balliro

Whole Language for Adults, a series of books published by New Readers Press, is a practical, concrete resource for teaching reading and writing to adults. Four volumes: *A Guide to Instruction*, *A Guide to Portfolio Assessment*, *A Guide to Initial Assessment*, and *A Guide to Administration and Staff Development* offer excellent strategies for teaching reading and writing in meaningful ways. If I were back in the classroom or running an ABE program, I would not be without this series.

The authors define whole language as “teaching reading and writing as purposeful communication.” (p. 7) Their interpretation results in a guide that combines meaning-making approaches to reading and writing with direct instruction in reading subskills. The authors provide step-by-step lesson plans, including the language experience approach, conducting a directed reading activity, and modeling reading (think aloud

protocol). They also provide a useful chapter on how to teach thematically, offering sample themes (homelessness, work, AIDS) as models. Mini-lessons on word recognition skills, phonics, sound discrimination, and other decoding skills are integrated throughout.

A Guide to Portfolio Assessment is streamlined and practical with reproducible masters. The *Guide to Initial Assessment* includes an informal reading inventory, phonics recording form, and word analysis sheet.

Finally, *A Guide to Administration and Staff Development* offers concrete suggestions for how to make such an approach work program-wide. The authors speak from experience in the classroom and know the joys and constraints of the adult basic education system. *Whole Language for Adults*, published in 1994, is available through New Readers Press, Syracuse, New York. <www.newreaderspress.com>

Getting Strong With the *Fortalécete* Spanish Literacy Curriculum

by Maria E. González

Fortalécete, from the Spanish verb *fortalecer* (to strengthen) is the name of the curriculum guide for a Spanish literacy class developed last year by the Juntos (Together) Collaborative in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

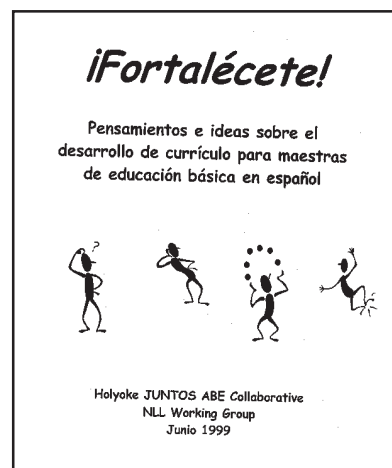
Four teachers and administrators from two of the partners in the collaborative, the Community Education Project and the Care Center in Holyoke, worked on this guide as a curriculum frameworks project and used the English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum Framework as a guide and reference point. The authors' goal was to share their experience and approaches to teaching Spanish literacy to adults in the western part of the state.

Except for the explanatory note in the beginning, the entire curriculum guide is in Spanish; this makes sense since it is about teaching basic literacy to Spanish speakers at two levels, SLL1 and SLL2. Rather than defining the level by "grades," the guide identifies a series of skills in reading and writing that learners would have to acquire to be placed in or move to either level of instruction. The checkoff list for level one reading, for example, starts with recognizing the alphabet and ends with reading out loud. The teachers found that the ELA frameworks standards and strands were useful to develop "level-specific objectives" but ultimately, Juntos teachers made their

decisions based on their experience teaching native language literacy.

ELA Framework

It is interesting that the Juntos Collaborative chose the ELA Curriculum Frameworks, rather than the ESOL Frameworks, as a



model for developing guidelines for teaching native language literacy in Spanish. After all, the ELA Framework does not mention native language literacy (NLL) as a consideration, while the ESOL Frameworks does. There are specific reasons for choosing the ELA over the ESOL Frameworks, however. Members of the Juntos Collaborative noted that although English instruction is an important part of their curriculum, they wanted to assert that Spanish literacy is not an adjunct piece of an ESOL- focused curriculum.

Rather, Spanish literacy is the focus of an entire adult basic education curriculum in the native language of the learners in the same way that the Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks works in other ABE programs.

As one member puts it, the ELA framework is a guide for "native language literacy for native English speakers. We chose the ELA framework (as a guide) because that's the one that's about teaching people to read and write."

It is well known that adult learners who are literate in their native language progress at a faster rate when they are learning English than those who cannot read or write in the language they do speak (Rivera, 1999). The Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) recognizes this fact and funds classes in native language literacy as part of the continuum of ESOL classes in a DOE-funded ABE program.

There is a folksy, endearing tone to this curriculum that reflects the voices of the people who wrote it. It also reflects their philosophy. For example, the teachers talk about teaching with *respeto y humildad* as one of the ways to counteract the low self-esteem and shame that many learners have about their lack of basic education.

The guide offers practical advice that makes a teacher trainer like me happy. For example, a lesson-planning form, sample learner-centered lesson plans, and suggestions for the

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Fortalécete. . .

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first day of classes are included, as well as useful advice on participatory evaluation and assessment.

I found the Level I sample lesson more extensive and better realized than for Level II. It would be useful if the authors could expand the curriculum in the future to include samples of how the Juntos teachers introduce the GED and ESOL in Level II. Many teachers have questions

on how to facilitate this transition from basic literacy in the native language to preparing for the GED or learning English.

Clearly, the authors of the *Fortalécete* Curriculum have taken to heart their own imperative to strengthen themselves by reflecting on their practice and beliefs as they examined the ELA Curriculum. They truly used it as a framework within which to set their own curriculum as teachers of literacy in Spanish. This past year the collaborative used a similar process with which to examine their experiences

and struggles teaching math. I am looking forward to reading *Fortalécete on la Matematica* and getting some tips on how to strengthen my own math teaching skills.

For a copy of the *Fortalécete* curriculum, contact your regional SABES center. The curriculum is included in the Native Language Literacy "Box," a collection of resources about NLL. It will also be available soon as an ERIC document.

Maria E. González is the SABES

Anthologies for Students: "Real" Reading (Thanks to Sandra Darling, ALRI)

Finding authentic reading materials for adult developing readers is important for establishing motivation. The following are some suggestions for readings that can be adapted to ABE, ESOL, or GED reading classes. All of these titles are available at the ALRI library, 989 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA, (617) 782-8956, and may be available at regional SABES libraries as well.

Fox, K., ed. (1992). *Expressions: Stories and Poems*, vols 1& 2. Stimulating collection of readings with teaching tips for each selection. Teachers Guide offers lesson plans.

Lipkin, C., & Solotaroff, V., eds, (1990). *Words on the Page, the World in Your Hands*, vols. 1, 2, & 3. New York: Harper Row. These three anthologies offer short stories, essays, and poems adapted or created by "real" authors, not textbook writers. Suitable for intermediate readers. Teachers' guide available.

Literacy Volunteers of NY (1992). *My Native Land: An Anthology by New Writers*. NY: Literacy Volunteers of New York.

Neimet, C., & Fox, K, eds. (1991). *Viewpoints: Nonfiction*. vols 1 & 2. Anthologies containing accessible readings on a variety of relevant topics. Intermediate-advanced. Teachers' guide offers lesson plans.

Reiff, T., (1989). *Hopes and Dreams*. Belmont, CA: Fearon/Janus/Quercus. This curriculum guide provides an overview of the history of different immigrant groups to the US and is accompanied by several short easy readers. *Hopes and Dreams 2*, published in 1993, continues the stories of new Americans. Low-level.

Modeling Class Activities for Low-Level Literacy Learners

by Lee Haller

All teachers of low-level literacy must be familiar with this scenario: You spend hours planning an activity for class. When the time comes, you explain the activity, holding the paper up where the learners can see it. You pass out the papers and are met with a chorus of, “I don’t understand, teacher.” You explain it again, which doesn’t help, so you show individual learners on their papers how to do the activity. By the time the learners understand what they’re supposed to do, they’re finished with the exercise. How can we avoid this problem? In this article I will illustrate techniques for modeling three kinds of literacy activities—cloze, cut-up sentences, and matching, so learners will be able to do them successfully and independently.

I have modeled these activities with my ESOL students in the literacy level class at the International Institute of Boston.

Don’t Assume Too Much

Most of the activities we do in ABE/ESOL classrooms are unfamiliar to learners who have limited formal education. Teachers assign matching exercises, cloze exercises, cut-up sentences, and comprehension questions because we believe these exercises will improve learners’ comprehension of a particular story and help their reading ability in general. These are “school-

based” activities, unlike reading itself, which is an activity people do both inside and outside the classroom. We can’t assume that students already know how to complete these tasks: People learn how to do



these activities after being in classrooms and doing them repeatedly. Initially, however, they need explicit instruction and modeling before they can do the activities independently. Of course, the end goal of these activities I have chosen to model: cloze, cut-up sentences, and matching is to help beginning readers manipulate text in a variety of ways so they gain confidence and fluency in the reading process.

Can Everyone See?

In general, modeling (where the teacher shows the class how to do something using an example) is a whole-class activity, so the first question is how to make the activity large enough that everyone will see and work with it easily.

Essential Props

An excellent tool for teachers of low-level literacy classes is a pocket chart, available through the Hammett Co. A pocket chart is a nylon fabric rectangle that hangs on the wall; sewn onto the nylon are clear plastic strips to make horizontal pockets. You can put word cards, letter cards, pictures, or whatever you want in the see-through pockets, then take them out and re-shuffle them.

Another prop useful for modeling literacy activities is large paper, such as a roll of newsprint. The ends of rolls of newsprint are often available free from newspaper printers. A more expensive alternative is a flip chart. A pocket chart and large paper are both invaluable props—I honestly don’t know how I could teach low-level literacy without either of them. Most activities can be modeled for the whole class using one of these two props.

Post reading Activities

The exercises I discuss below are postreading activities. All of these exercises start with a reading, either learner-generated, teacher-written, or from a source outside the class. The learners are familiar with the text before beginning any of these follow-up activities. The activities help the reader become more fluent with the text they have initially encountered, helping them

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Modeling Class Activities...

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reinforce vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehension. All three activities can be done using the same original text, allowing for reinforcement of language and reading in a variety of ways.

Cloze Activity

For the cloze activity, the teacher puts blanks in the story in place of some of the words. Learners figure out what the missing words are and write them in the blanks. There are many different ways to do a cloze. Some teachers remove every 5th, 6th, or 7th word arbitrarily from a text. The purpose of this is for readers to skip over the blank, read the rest of the sentence, and select a word that would make sense in the sentence, either from a word bank or from their own vocabulary. Some teachers remove selected words with a grammatical, phonetic, vocabulary, or content focus. For example some remove all the prepositions, some remove “to be” verbs, others remove articles. The teacher can supply a list of words for the blanks, or not. Some beginning readers need to use the original story for reference when completing a cloze.

For Cloze Activities, check out the book: Whiteson, V. (1993). *Cloze the gap: Exercises in integrating and developing language skills*. San Francisco: Alta Book Publishers.

Modeling Cloze Activities

If the original reading the cloze is based on is a language experience story elicited from the class, the teacher may have already written the story on big paper as the learners were telling it, then taken it down to write the activities for the next class.

1. The teacher can put the original story on big paper back onto the wall, then cover some words with post-it notes. A word list can go on the board or another piece of big paper, if desired.
2. Have learners read the story aloud and discuss what words go in the spaces.
3. Have one learner come up to the story with a marker and write the word on the post-it note, then check off the word from the word list.
4. Have another learner come up and write another word and so on, until the cloze is complete.
5. Then lift up the post-it notes to check it against the original.

Alternatively, the teacher can write the whole cloze on big paper with blanks and a word list at the bottom, and individual learners can come up to fill it in as discussed above.

After Modelling

After modeling the activity and making sure students know how to

proceed, the teacher can then hand out individual cloze worksheets and point out step-by-step that the activity is the same as the one they have just practiced as a whole class. At this point, I usually say “no pencils,” so everyone stays with the explanation; otherwise, some students will want to copy from the model. The class can complete the activity orally, using their worksheets, then the teacher can fold up the model and learners can complete the activity on their worksheets in writing.

Cut-up Sentences

A cut-up sentence activity uses sentences from the same story, which have been cut up into individual words. The goal of the cut-up sentence activity is for learners to reassemble sentences, then put the sentences into order to reassemble the story. This is a challenging activity, best done after learners are very familiar with a story. It leads learners to focus on sentence structure and on reading each individual word of a story instead of calling (guessing) or skipping words. This is especially important for literacy-level students

Modeling Cut-up Sentences

To model this activity, use the pocket chart.

1. The teacher can write the story, word by word, on index cards or cut-up manila folders. (These words can often be reused, since there are many common words from story to story).
2. The teacher gives out the word cards, a few to each learner, and asks them to read their words to the class.

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3. Then the teacher can motion to the pocket chart and tell the learners to create the story in the chart. One learner is sure to understand enough to get started and ask others for cards (“I need ‘she.’ Mohammed, do you have she?”) and others will quickly catch on.

4. The teacher can monitor participation, asking particular learners to sit down after they’ve completed some of the story, and encouraging others to get out of their seats with their cards and go to the chart.

5. After they’re finished, the class can reread the completed story from the pocket chart. (If it was difficult, the teacher can choose to repeat the whole-class activity the next day before having learners do the task individually.)

6. Each student then gets an envelope of cut-up words that he or she reassembles and tapes together at her seat. Students can then copy their reassembled words for reinforcement.

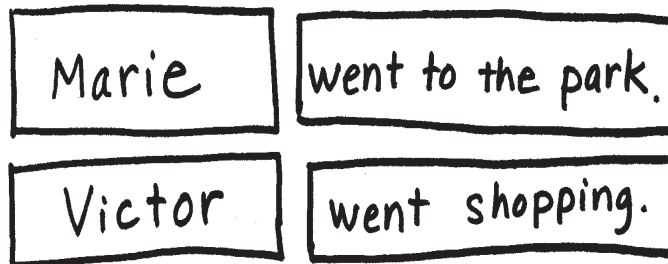
Matching

Matching activities, where a learner draws a line from a list in one column to the corresponding item in the other column, can give additional practice with vocabulary words and can teach sorting or categorizing skills. They can also teach learners to read for specific information. However, they are often difficult for low-literacy learners

and need careful modeling to avoid confusion.

An example of a matching activity might be to match the name of fruits and vegetables with the correct colors. In another case, the worksheet would match names to activities, for example: Victor—go shopping and Marie—go to the park.

Matching activities can be challenging for a few reasons. Learners sometimes get lost and



forget the first item if they don’t find the matching item right away. Drawing the lines can be challenging because they may try to draw more than one line for each item, or they may draw lines straight across the paper instead of looking for matches.

Matching Step-By-Step

I have found that breaking the modeling into two parts works best. The first part uses paper slips rather than drawing lines across columns.

Part One: (Using Paper Strips)

1. The teacher prints out names of students (Victor, Marie, etc.) on one color paper and cuts it into word slips. She then prints out activities (went to the park, went shopping) on another color paper and cuts it into phrase slips.

2. Using the pocket chart, the teacher calls a learner up to the chart and guides the learner to put the names and activities together on one line of the chart. For example, “Victor” with “went shopping,” “Marie” with “went to the park,” and so on.

3. Once students have shown that they understand the concept of matching, they can work in pairs or individually using their own smaller packets of word slips to put together.

4. For extra practice students can copy their matching word slips onto another sheet of paper.

Part Two: (Using Lines)

Once students get the idea of matching, the teacher can move toward modeling the activity using lines across columns. This task aids in locating specific information from a text and can prepare students for reading charts and graphs.

1. The teacher writes the matching activity on big paper.

2. The class reads it together and discusses the answer: that is, which thing in column A gets matched with which thing in column B. For example, names in column A get matched with activities in column B.

3. An individual learner comes to the front with a marker to draw a line connecting the matching items.

4. Students then get an individual worksheet and complete the activity in pairs or on their own.

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As you can infer from the above activities, successful modeling is repetitious: the whole class does the whole exercise, then learners do it individually on their own paper.

Such repetition in the modeling process may sound boring, but in my experience, it never is. It feels like a different activity when the whole class does it versus individual learners working independently.

The repetition, far from being boring, gives learners the practice they need to successfully complete the activities independently.

Resources for props: J.L. Hammett Co. catalog
1-800-333-4600 or
<www.hammett.com>

Lee Haller teaches and supervises the basic ESOL literacy and math program at the International Institute of Boston. She can be reached at <lhaller@iiboston.org>.

Literacy Services at the Boston Public Library

*M*artha Merson, Coordinator of Literacy Services for the Boston Public

Library, oversees literacy events and collections for the main library and 25 branches around greater Boston. Programs might want to explore the literacy and ESOL collections at their

local branches, which are cataloged but arranged in user-friendly browsing arrangements. Many branches have class sets of reading materials, including Sylvia Greene's self-published low-literacy materials: *Sal and Val*, *Main Streets*, and *Next Stop, Love*. Public events offered for developing readers include the popular "Readers Talk to Writers" series. Coming attractions include Marjorie Agosin, Luis Rodriguez, and Arn Chorn Pond.

The main library at Copley and many of the branches offer free conversation groups for people who want to practice their conversational English. Programs with students on waiting lists are urged to refer waiting students to these conversation classes, run by trained volunteers or sometimes ESOL teachers.

For more information about the library's offerings, call the Literacy Services Office at (617) 536-5400, ext. 2296 or e-mail Martha at <mmerson@bpl.org>.



Coming Up: Literacy Services in libraries across the state.

Write for Field Notes : Upcoming Issues

Practitioners are invited to submit articles to *Field Notes* for publication. First time writers are especially encouraged to contribute. The deadlines below are often negotiable.

Winter 2000: Assessment
Call by: October 16
Submit by: October 30

Spring 2000: Health and Literacy
Call by: December 30
Submit by: January 15

Summer 2000: Summer Reading
Call by: March 30
Submit by: April 17

Fluency First: Developing Independent Reading

by Anita Feld

A few years ago, Middlesex Community College in Lowell became part of a grant-funded teacher training project, Fluency First, lead by Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly. Teachers and tutors were trained in a literature-based reading-writing approach for nonnative English speakers. This approach is suitable for intermediate or advanced ESOL students as well as ABE students.

My students were all about 20 years old, so young adult titles appealed to them. One of the books we used in the project was *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. This beautifully written book included evocative vignettes that worked well as catalysts for student freewrites. For example, students completed many freewrites about their names using the chapter "Names" as a catalyst. I found out a lot of important information about my students with this exercise. For example, two of my students were named after famous authors.

Hips

The chapter "Hips" proved to be an excellent bridge for student writing. This chapter turned my students on to writing jump rope songs and other childhood game songs from around the world. As a follow-up, students enjoyed creating a booklet of their childhood memories. We added maps to provide locations for the origins of the childhood songs. We also analyzed the similarities among children's games around the world.

Library Trip

Our final project led us to the local library where each student could select another book. The librarian steered us to the young adult section of the library. My students chose books like: *Circle of Love*, by Jane Peart; *Jacob Have I Loved*, by Katherine Paterson; *Dreams in the Golden Country*, by Kathryn Lasky; and *Souder*, by William Armstrong.

Online Reviews

Students were asked to write in a double-entry dialogue journal for each chapter of their book. They were also asked to write a paragraph about their opinion of their book. Some students write book reviews online for Amazon.com <www.amazon.com>, or Barnes and Noble.com <www.bn.com>, where readers are invited to share their

thoughts on titles. You can imagine the enthusiasm this evoked. One of the students found that she was the first to review a particular book.

As a result of the project, students definitely showed an increased interest in independent summer reading.

Notes:

MacGowan-Gilhooly (1995). A. *Achieving fluency in English: A whole language book*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt

Iancu, Martha. "Implementing fluency first activities in an intermediate-level EAP reading class." *TESOL Journal*, 9 (2) summer, 2000, 11-16.

Anita Feld has worked at Middlesex Community College for nine years. She can be reached at <Stacho11@aol.com>.

Classroom Tip: Double-Entry Journal

On one side of the notebook, the student copies excerpts that interest her from the book she is reading. On the other side, the student writes her reaction to the copied text.

Jamaica Kincaid

At the Bottom of the River

page 37:

I milked the cows, I churned the butter...I baked the bread...

page 77:

I saw a world in which the sun and moon shone at the same time. . .

This reminds me of when I lived on the farm in Georgia and I had to work hard.

This sounds like a poem. I like the idea.

Resources: Books and Articles for Teachers and Students

*Indicates available at ALRI library



Books for Teachers

Cheatham, J. et al. (1994). *Whole language for adults: A guide to instruction*. Syracuse, NY: : New Readers Press.*

Dixon, C. (1983). *Language experience approach to reading and writing*. Alemany Press.*

Freeman, D. & Freeman, Y. (2000). *Teaching reading in the multilingual classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gillespie, M. (1990). *Many literacies: Modules for training adult beginning readers and tutors*. Amherst, MA: Center for International Education.*

Hood, S & Solomon, N. (1987). *Focus on Reading*. Australia: National Curriculum Resource Centre.*

Nessel, D. (1981). *The language experience approach to reading: A handbook for teachers*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Roffman, A. (2000). *Meeting the challenge of learning disabilities in adulthood*. Maryland: Paul H./ Brookes Publishing Co.

Smith, F. (1995). *Essays into human learning and literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann,. (See especially his chapter Learning to read, the never ending debate, pp.39-52

Smith, F. (1997) *Reading without nonsense*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Wrigley, H. & Guth, J.A.. (1992). *Bringing literacy to life: Issues and options in adult ESL literacy*. San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International.

Books for Students (Thanks to Sandra Darling)

Agosin, M. (1997). *Melodious women*. Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press. (poetry)*

Cisneros, S. (1994) *La casa en mango street*./ New York: Vintage Espanol.* (English version also available.)

Gossett, H. (1988). *Sister no blues*. Ithaca, NY. (poetry)*

Mohr, N. (1975). *El bronx remembered: A novella and stories*. New York: Harper Trophy.*

Woodson, J. (1994). *I hadn't meant to tell you this*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell.*

Articles

Auerbach, E., & Paxton, D. (1997). It's not the English thing: Bringing reading research into the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31 (2), 237-261.

Constantino, R. (1994). Pleasure reading helps, even if readers don't believe it. *Journal of Reading*, 37 (6), 504-505.

Rivera, K. (1999). Native language literacy and adult ESL instruction. *ERIC Digest*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

Love and Literacy

Sylvia Greene, ABE teacher at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, has published three high-interest books for beginning readers using controlled vocabulary. They include: *Sal and Val*, *Main Street*, and *Next Stop, Love*. For more information, call Sylvia at (617) 349-6363.

Mark Your Calendar

This issue lists several conferences within Massachusetts and nearby states. Some conferences also provide limited financial aid. This information is included in the listings.

October 4–7, 2000

Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), National Conference 2000
Show Me the Future
Kansas City, MO
Contact: LVA, (315) 472-0001
<www.literacyvolunteers.org/conference/index.htm>
Financial aid for LVA students only.

October 6–8

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Annual National Conference
Teaching Respect for All
Arlington Heights, IL [Chicago]
Contact: Brenda Vollman (GLSEN), (212) 727-0135
<www.glsen.org/pages/sections/news/calendar/conference/2000>

October 20-22

Mass Networks Education Partnership and TERC Joint National conference
“Students as Technology Leaders” Waltham, MA
Contact: Patricia Ward (TERC) (888) 638-1997
<<http://projects.terc.edu/satl/index.html>>

October 25–26

Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE), Network 2000
Marlborough, MA
Contact: MCAE, (800) 339-2498

November 11–16

American Public Health Association (APHA), 128th Annual Meeting *Eliminating Health Disparities* Boston, MA
Contact: (202) 777-2742
<www.apha.org/meetings>

November 13–16

American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE), 49th Annual Conference, Providence, RI
Contact: (301) 918-1913

January 22–24 2001

Center for Study of Adult Literacy, Georgia State University and Centre for Literacy (Quebec) 3rd International Conference on Women and Literacy
Atlanta, GA
Contact: Sandy Vaughn, (404) 651-1400
Email: <alcsv@langate.gsu.edu>

February 28–March 3

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), 35th Annual Convention *TESOL 2001: Gateway to the Future*
St. Louis, MO
Contact: (703) 836-0774
<www.tesol.org/conv/2001>
Financial aid available for TESOL members only. For information, check out <www.tesol.org/assoc/> or <www.tesol.org/isaffil/affil/index.html> You must apply by October, 2000.

March 30 –April 4

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), 2001 National Conference
Meet Me in Memphis
Memphis, TN
Contact: Peggy Davis (901) 855-1101

Information about upcoming conferences relating to adult literacy can be sent to: Lenore Balliro, *Field Notes* Editor, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210.

Click Here: Web Sites for Teaching Reading

www.reading.org/publications/

Lists publications of the International Reading Association.

www.midtesol.org/articles/art1.htm

Teaching Reading Skills: Tips From the Trenches Tracy Henninger-Chiang.

www.rethinkingschools.org/Archives/13-04/wars.htm

Lessons From the Reading Wars. A Review by Jeff McQuillan of *Reading Lessons: The Debate Over Literacy* by Gerald Coles.

www.cal.org/ncle/digests/index.htm

ERIC Digests: National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education. The following are examples of articles you can access online: *Reading and the Adult English Language Learner*; *Teaching Low-Level Adult ESL Learners* by Grace Massey Holt; *The Language Experience Approach and Adult Learners* by Marcia Taylor.

www.covington.k12.tn.us/resources/word/hots5.htm

This is a k-12 site but can easily be adapted to teaching reading to adults.

www.reading.org/advocacy/policies/phonics.html

Summary of the position statement of the International Reading Association: The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction.

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