Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition

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A YEARLY TRADITION: RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND POLICY ON LOW-EDUCATED SECOND LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNERS

Ineke van de Craats and Jeanne Kurvers

In 2005, August 25-27, a small international group of researchers and practitioners from different disciplines met at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. Their common point of interest was the language learner with a low level of education and literacy: LESLLA (Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition). At that moment, a new acronym and a new network were born. The symposium in Tilburg was followed by one in Richmond, Virginia, in 2006, and in Newcastle, in 2007. In 2008, the Karel de Grote-Hogeschool (Charlemagne University College) in Antwerp hosted the fourth LESLLA conference, which was sponsored by the Nederlandse Taalunie (Dutch Language Union), an advisory board with regard to the Dutch language for the governments of Dutch speaking countries. The organising committee was formed by a team from the Karel de Grote-Hogeschool in Belgium, and the Universities of Tilburg and Nijmegen in the Netherlands, reflecting the excellent collaboration between the two Dutch speaking countries.

In those four years the acronym of LESLLA has become the label for a specific type of language learners: those that have a low level of education (at most ten years of education in the country of origin, only primary school or less, or no schooling at all) and often also a low level of literacy. Therefore, authors of several articles in these proceedings write about LESLLA learners, a LESLLA classroom, or even a LESLLA corpus, because they want to emphasize that LESLLA learners behave differently from the group of highly educated language learners, which has been studied much more frequently. In general, their language learning process takes more time and they have less experience with language learning strategies and metalinguistic tasks. Within the group of LESLLA learners, various denominators are used for the lowest group: *non-literate* or *illiterate*. Although LESLLA researchers prefer the term non-literate for adults who never went to school and cannot read and write, neither in his/her first language, the standard language of the country of origin or the second language, many others do not distinguish between these terms. The reader should take into account that both terms are used for the same type of learners (without providing any details about the state of literacy of their first language or the about their success at school). The term *low-literate* is used for an adult who has attended school, but has a reading level below the average primary school level. The *functionally illiterate* (or *non-literate)* is an individual that knows how to read and write but is not able to fully understand and use what he or she has read.

This fourth edition of the proceedings shows that LESLLA has a future: not only is the number of people and countries participating in the conference increasing, the number of contributions to the proceedings is also higher and the volume thicker.

Moreover, the similarity of problems as shown, for instance, in the domain of policy, makes clear – more than ever before – how important an exchange of information in terms of solutions to existing problems can be for LESLLA learners all over the world. A shared problem is, for instance, the low status attributed to these learners and their needs. In England, this reflected by 'the issue of naming the courses, whereas the issue of funding, provision and pedagogy seems more urgent,' in the US by the 'one size fits all' approach, as claimed by *Spruck Wrigley*. The US system of adult education assumes that all foreign adult learners, regardless of degree of proficiency or prior education need more or less the same general life skills. The same holds for literacy: English literacy is the only literacy that counts and the system does not take into account the learners who cannot read and write in any language. *Sunderland & Moon* put it in these words: 'English educational policies disadvantage LESLLA learners. […] LESLLA is gathering evidence of policies and provisions in different countries and publishing this on its website. We would like to propose a campaign [for England (eds.)] that promotes positive policies that support LESLLA learners.' They suggest this campaign to become an international one.

The present volume provides an overview of the majority of the papers presented in Antwerp divided over the three areas that have been highlighted from the very beginning of LESLLA: research, practice and policy, since the goal of LESLLA is to share empirical research findings and information on practice to guide further research on second language and literacy acquisition of the adult immigrant population worldwide. This research in turn will provide, we hope, guidance to the development of best practices and education policy in all those countries in which immigrants not only want to 'survive' but also 'thrive', as stated by one of the keynote speakers, *Heide Spruck Wrigley*.

Within the three domains, research, practice and policy, the focus of the symposium was on the following themes:

- Bringing the outside world into the classroom or taking the class to the outside world?
- What (literacy) skills are minimally required for entering the job market and how many hours does it take to acquire those skills?
- Assessing the non-literate and low-literate adult learner.
- Language technology in the literacy class.

A certain overlap in the delineation of the three domains cannot be avoided, because they are often in continuous interaction: practice and policy are input for new research and research is applied in policy and practice. Good examples are the contribution by *Jeroen Backs,* who explains a new (research-based) policy in Flanders, which has been applied in two pedagogical projects reported in the contributions by *Els Maton* for the vocational field and by *Ellen Colpaert & Lien Strobbe* for family literacy.

In the domain of *Research* there are five papers: three of them focus on literacy (*Onderdelinden*, *van de Craats & Kurvers)* and literacy teaching (*Condelli & Crone; Macdonald*), one on teaching the oral skills to non-literates (*Strube*), and one paper explores what language technology can contribute to literacy education (*Strik*).

Condelli & Crone present the design of a forthcoming study in the USA, 'the first ever to evaluate the impact of an instructional approach on LESLLA learners using a random assignment.' This study will evaluate the effectiveness of a structured language approach to reading instruction (i.e., *Sam and Pat*) on improving reading and speaking

skills of ESL students with little or no literacy in their native language. Direct instruction in phonics, fluency and reading comprehension, as well as cooperative learning and real world tasks are integrated in the new literacy textbook. *Macdonald's* paper is also focused on the role of phonics in teaching English to learners with little or no schooling, this time in the United Kingdom. *Strube*'s study, however, relates to LESLLA learners, but is restricted to the teaching of oral skills only. She regularly attended lessons of six literacy classes for one year and studied the patterns of interaction between teachers with students. The paper by *Onderdelinden, van de Craats & Kurvers* is a replication with non-literate adult second language learners of a study that Karmiloff-Smith (1990) and Kurvers and Uri (2006) did with non-literate and literate children. The findings differ from those of both earlier studies and continue the discussion. The contribution by *Strik* makes clear what computer-assisted language learning (CALL) applications can do: the application system reads utterances and students listen and respond. However, automatic speech recognition (ASR) can also recognize the learner's speech and provide feedback to what has been read by the learners. This application can be particularly useful for literacy learners who are trained in phonics or who are in the process of automatizing the reading process.

The domain of *Practice,* is covered by seven papers in this collection: two studies are concerned with the theme of assessment of the non-literate learner (*Vermeersch, Drijkoningen, Vienne, and Vandenbroucke;* and *Dalderop, Janssen-Van Dieten & Stockmann*), three contributions, all three from Flanders, are related to the theme of bringing the outside world into the classroom (*Colpaert & Strobbe; Van Cauteren & Vleminckx;* and *Maton*), and are examples of how the adult literacy classroom has been moved to the school of their children or to the workplace of a cleaning agency. The two remaining papers focus on the teacher herself: what principles should be involved in a crash course for literacy teachers in Minnesota (*Liden & Vinogradov*) and how to write literature for LESLLA learners (*Young-Scholten & Maguire*).

In order to compare the number of non-literates and low-literates in the various countries and to assess how many hours of instruction these learners will need to considered literate adults there must be a consensus on what exactly is 'literate', or to put it differently: what is the cut-off point between literate, low-literate and non-literate, since there clearly is a continuum between the three. *Vermeersch et al.* explore the pros and cons of a standardized instrument to screen literacy learners, be it L1 or L2 learners. *Dalderop et al.* take a more micro-level view when they report on the development of a consistent assessment system. They depart from the view that autonomous learners (to be) feel the need to know whether they progress. The authors present a consistent structure of views on teaching, portfolio methodology and testing instruments fitting in with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). This way of testing fits in well with the teaching of functional language and a content-based approach, whether it is the language of parents or that of the professional cleaner at home or at a cleaning service company. *Maton* explains the principles of such approach applied to non-literate L2 learners.

In the domain of *Policy*, there are three contributions in which the educational policy with regard to low-educated immigrants is explained for three different countries. In his contribution, *Backs*, as a representative of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Labour, explains the ministerial policy that has stimulated the formulation of end terms and the structuring of the curriculum, consisting of different modules, with which slow learners and fully illiterates don't seem to fit in very well. New insights into teaching

and learning a second language are applied in pilot projects such as those reported by *Maton, Colpaert & Strobbe*, and *Van Cauteren & Vleminckx*. The second paper is by *Sunderland & Moon* who critically review the governmental policy in the United Kingdom, where a core curriculum has been determined. In *Spruck Wrigley's* paper, the policy discussions in the United States are summarized. She advocates a more flexible plan for meeting the needs of both native speakers with literacy needs and non-natives with a low level of literacy in their native language and with limited proficiency in English. Both language education and work force training is necessary for an extremely diverse group, which makes more tailor-made courses necessary in order to guide those groups toward success more quickly and more effectively.

Besides the papers directly related to research, practice and policy regarding the low-literate learner, there was a panel on *African Literacies*, as this theme provides an interesting and important insight into the background of many LESLLA learners: in most African countries it is quite normal to learn how to read and write, not in the mother tongue but in a second language that may be the official language of the country. The four papers presented in the panel by *Beckman & Kurvers* (on Namibia), *Asfaha (*on Eritrea), *Barasa & Mous* (on Keniya), and *Juffermans* (on Gambia) are introduced with some general information about the linguistic and literacy landscape in African countries.

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EVALUATION OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION ON LOW-LITERATE ADULT ESL LEARNERS: A STUDY IN PROGRESS

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1 Introduction

According the 2006 programme year statistics from the US Department of Education (US ED), 46 percent of the 2.4 million students in the federally funded adult education program in the USA were English as a second language (ESL) students (ED, 2008). Of these, about 200,000 are at the lowest ESL level, beginning literacy. These students, who face the dual challenge of developing basic literacy skills - including decoding, comprehending, and producing print - along with proficiency in English, represent a range of nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Although the majority of students come from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries, there are also students from Africa, India, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, and the Caribbean (Wrigley et al., 2003).

In the USA, ESL classes are provided in each state through a federal basic grant program. Within states, content of instruction varies widely but is designed to assist students in their efforts to acquire literacy and language skills by providing a combination of oral language, competency-based, work skills and literacy instruction (Condelli et al., 2003). There is, however, little rigorous research to help guide instruction. A comprehensive review of published research studies on the effects of literacy interventions for ABE and adult ESL learners, Condelli & Wrigley (2004) found that out of 17 adult education studies that used a rigorous methodology (i.e., quasi-experimental or randomized trials) and only two included adult ESL students. Although studies with rigorous methodology were limited, some suggestions of 'promising' approaches emerged.

The review provided several recommendations for future research, including that a systematic approach to literacy development was a promising intervention for low-literate adult ESL learners that would be valuable to study (Brown et al. 1996; Carell, 1985; Cheek & Lindsay, 1994; Chen & Graves, 1995; Rich & Shepherd, 1993; Roberts, Cheek & Mumm, 1994). The factors identified as defining a systematic approach to literacy included: (1) a comprehensive instructional scope that includes direct instruction in phonics, fluency, vocabulary development and reading comprehension, (2) strategic instructional sequence, (3) consistent instructional format, (4) easy-to-follow lesson plans, and (5) strategies for differentiated instruction.

LESLLA learners - students with little or no literacy in their native language - would benefit most from this type of intervention. To succeed in an ESL class, they must acquire the basic text processing skills - decoding and encoding and meaning making—

that allow them to follow along in classes where words, phrases and sentences appear on the blackboard and in textbooks. If these students' literacy skills are not developed, language learning in formal classrooms becomes problematic. Yet, until the last quarter century, schools and resettlement agencies designed ESL classes on the assumption that adult students had the basic education and literacy skills to learn another language (Van de Craats, Kurvers & Young-Scholten, 2006).

To help improve research-based knowledge of effective instruction for LESLLA learners, the US Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funded the Adult ESL Literacy Impact Study to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction based on a promising literacy textbook - *Sam and Pat* - which offers an approach to literacy development that is systematic, direct, sequential, and multi-sensory. It also includes multiple opportunities for practice with feedback. Consistent with characteristics identified as promising through a review of the literature conducted by Condelli & Wrigley (2004), *Sam and Pat* also provides opportunities for cooperative learning, real world tasks, and an explicit focus on reading.

The study will address three key research questions:

1. How effective is instruction based on the *Sam and Pat* textbook in improving the English reading and speaking skills of low-literate adult ESL learners?
2. Is *Sam and Pat* more effective for certain groups of students (e.g., native Spanish speakers)?
3. Do impacts on student outcomes vary with the service contrast?[1]

The evaluation phase of the study began in spring 2007 and data collection will conclude in summer 2009. This paper reports on the intervention and study design. A report of findings will be available in mid-2010.

2 Overview of the adult ESL literacy intervention

2.1 Sam and Pat-based ESL literacy instruction

The *Sam and Pat* textbook (Hartel, Lowry, & Hendon, 2006) is described by the developers as a basal reader or textbook that tailors the methods and concepts of the Wilson and Orton-Gillingham reading systems developed for native speakers of English (Wilson & Schupack, 1997; Gillingham & Stillman, 1997) to meet the needs of adult ESL literacy level learners.[2] *Sam and Pat* was designed to incorporate the following components of the Wilson/Orton-Gillingham systems:

- A focus on moving students systematically and sequentially from simple to complex skills and materials;

[1] The service contrast refers to differences between instruction delivered in classrooms taught by teachers assigned to the *Sam and Pat* condition and instruction delivered in classrooms taught by teachers assigned to the control condition.

[2] Although there is no available research on the effectiveness of *Sam and Pat*, the textbook and its accompanying training and technical support is based on these two reading systems (Wilson & Orton-Gillingham) which have shown promise in teaching struggling readers (Adams, 1991; Clark & Uhry, 1995; Kavenaugh, 1991; Torgesen et al., 2006).

- The use of multisensory approaches to segmenting and blending phonemes (e.g., sound tapping);
- An emphasis on alphabetics/decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension;
- The use of sound cards and controlled texts (wordlists, sentences, stories) for practicing skills learned;
- Continual review (cumulative instruction) of letters, sounds and words already learned.

However, the authors made variations on the base reading systems to make the text useful and relevant to the adult ESL literacy population for which *Sam and Pat* is designed. Specifically, *Sam and Pat* differs from the base reading systems on four dimensions:

- The sequence in which the sounds of English are taught;
- The words chosen for phonics and vocabulary study;
- The simplification of grammar structures presented;
- The added bridging of systematic reading instruction to ESL instruction.

Building on the components of the earlier reading systems, *Sam and Pat* was therefore designed to 1) sequence the teaching of English sound and spelling patterns to ESL students by moving from a focus on simple to complex literacy skills and materials, 2) provide a controlled basal that follows this sequence of patterns, 3) use a simplified grammar, 4) embed a controlled vocabulary that is relevant to the lives of this population of students, and 5) include a collection of stories that are based on simplified themes from daily life.

There are two volumes of *Sam and Pat*. The *Sam and Pat, Vol. 1* literacy textbook is the focus of this study. It is organized into a total of 22 multi-component lessons. The lessons follow what the authors consider to be an optimal sequence for introducing English phonics and high-frequency English sight words to non-native speakers of English. However, the sequence in which English vowels and consonant sounds are introduced has been modified from that usually used in approaches such as the Wilson and Orton-Gillingham reading systems. For example, like the Wilson System, *Sam and Pat* begins with the *short-a* sound, but *short-a* is followed several lessons later by *short-u*, rather than *short-i*. This modification was made to provide the maximum sound contrasts for the short vowel sounds that are notoriously challenging for English language learners to discriminate.

Sam and Pat is also designed to introduce and build basic English speaking and reading vocabulary, as well as foundational skills in basic English grammar. Both the vocabulary and grammar components are focused on the functional needs of new immigrants in the domains of work, their children's school, shopping, family life, and their interactions with the medical system.

Each lesson contains a chapter of an ongoing story that follows the daily lives and adventures of an immigrant family headed by the title characters. Like the basal readers written for English speaking adult beginning readers, the text is *controlled*; that is, it only contains words that follow phonics patterns that have been previously taught, as well as sight words that have also been taught. This is intended to give learners the opportunity to develop word reading skills and fluency in meaningful text, without encountering phonics patterns and sight words they have not been taught.

In addition, because *Sam and Pat* was created for ESL literacy students, the text has also been controlled for vocabulary and grammar content; that is, the learners only encounter word meanings and grammar patterns that have been previously introduced in accompanying oral and written activities. In addition, as the *Introduction* explains, 'Only simple words that students might encounter in their daily lives are used in the stories. The stories are written with simplified grammar, since long sentences and complex structures can interfere with comprehension' (Hartel et al., 2006, p.v.).

2.1.1 Intended use of Sam and Pat

Sam and Pat was designed to provide learners with listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities that are sequenced and designed to reinforce each other. Each lesson is intended by the authors to include at least one day (approximately 2.5 hours) of pre-reading instruction and at least one day of decoding and reading comprehension instruction, with additional review and reteaching added as determined by the teacher.

The goal of the pre-reading instruction day is to explain, demonstrate, and provide practice opportunities for the new phonics, sight words, vocabulary, and grammar prior to reading each new chapter of *Sam and Pat*. The skill areas targeted on pre-reading instruction days include:

- Review/rereading a story for fluency;
- Review of names and sounds of letters learned previously, and introduction of new sounds;
- Pre-reading conversations, grammar and/or vocabulary practice;
- Sight word instruction (review and new):
- Phonics instruction (review and new);
- Pre-reading pictures for the upcoming story.

The skill areas targeted on decoding/reading comprehension instruction days include continued practice from the previous day as well as new activities:

- Review/rereading a story for fluency;
- Review of names and sounds of letters learned previously, and introduction of new sounds;
- Pre-reading review of conversation and vocabulary from previous day;
- Sight word instruction (review and new);
- Phonics instruction (review and new);
- Pre-reading review of pictures from the previous day;
- Reading the new story;
- Written exercises based on text.

As implied by the inclusion of the target skill 'conversation' during both days of instruction, literacy instruction based on *Sam and Pat* does not include reading and writing activities exclusively. In the authors' experience, such activities normally take up about one-third of the total instructional time, although speaking and listening activities also take place connected to the activities in the basal.

Several types of oral language activities, tied to the content, could precede the story part of each chapter. For example, Lesson 1 begins with a line drawing of the characters Sam and Pat and the text, 'This is Sam. This is Pat. They are Sam and Pat.' Before reading this chapter with the students, a teacher might conduct a spoken

language activity. For instance, she may write each learner's name on a place card. She would then point to a person and his place card and say, '*This* is Juan.' Then she would point to another person and her card say, '*This* is Marie.' After giving the class numerous opportunities to practice these phrases in different combinations and with each others' names, the teacher would next point to both learners and say, '*They* are Juan and Marie,' followed by more practice as before.

Whenever possible, teachers are encouraged to use real life objects and line drawings to introduce key vocabulary words that are about to occur in the story. For example, in Lesson 5, the words *van* and *bus* figure prominently. The teacher might use toy vehicles and pictures of vans and buses to make these words concrete for the learners and to engage them in brief dialogues using the words.

The goal of *Sam and Pat* is to provide ESL literacy learners with multiple opportunities for repetition, guided practice, and review. The authors of *Sam and Pat* report that when used correctly and in combination with appropriate spoken language activities, teachers should spend about seven class hours on each chapter of the book, including pre-reading and decoding/comprehension instruction, reteaching as necessary, and supporting oral language activities. At that rate, an ESL literacy class would be expected to spend almost an entire school year to complete *Sam and Pat, Vol. 1*. Given that the study classes in the research study are expected to spend an average of five hours per week on *Sam and Pat* instruction, and last an average of twelve weeks, the *Sam and Pat* teachers should get through an average of nine chapters.

2.1.2 Teacher training and follow-up technical assistance

To ensure fidelity of implementation, the *Sam and Pat* developers provided the teachers selected for participation in the study with three days of intensive training on the implementation of *Sam and Pat*. The training included discussions about the origins and rationale for the *Sam and Pat* approach, the unique characteristics of ESL literacy level learners based on current research, the structure and terminology of *Sam and Pat*, the components of reading and oral language instruction, the Lesson Plan template developed to support implementation, *Sam and Pat* literacy and ESL techniques and activities, and classroom organization and management. It also included multiple opportunities for the teachers to reflect on their current ESL instructional practices, to observe and analyze videos in which the literacy textbook developers model *Sam and Pat* instruction[3], to engage in structured lesson planning with guidance and feedback from the trainers, and to self-assess what they are learning and evaluate the training activities to inform the pace and content of the workshop itself. A refresher webinar training on the same material was held early in winter 2009, before the start of the second data collection period.

The trainers also conducted one or two site visits per teacher to observe instruction and provide feedback. Using standardized procedures, they reviewed the classroom environment (e.g. the availability and use of specific instructional materials, the alignment of observed instruction with the *Sam and Pat* Lesson Plan template, and teacher practice) offered both oral and written feedback on the quality of instruction

[3] *Sam and Pat* trainers gave a DVD to teachers that contained 23 instructional demonstration videos created by the developers for teachers' continued reference outside the training. Developers provided an additional video on phonics instruction after the refresher training.

and suggestions for improvement, and provided other technical assistance to the treatment teachers as needed in response to e-mails or phone calls from the teachers.

3 Study research design

The Adult ESL Literacy Impact Study employs a randomized research design that includes:

- 10 adult education program sites:
- 38 teachers;
- 1,3410 low-literate adult ESL learners.

Within site, teachers and students were randomly assigned to one of two conditions:

- The *Sam and Pat* condition, which includes a minimum of 60 hours of *Sam and Pat*-based instruction per term, with any remaining class time being spent on the types of instruction normally provided by the program.
- The control condition, which consists of the instruction normally provided by the program.

Teachers (or classes) within each program site were randomly assigned in pairs, so that each pair of experimental and control classes met at the same time, in the same building, and for the same number of hours. Across the study sites, the total number of class hours varies and ranges from approximately 60 to 225 total hours, depending on the programs' course schedules.

3.1 The control group: standard ESL literacy instruction

The study is designed to estimate the impact of *Sam and Pat*-based instruction and professional development, relative to standard ESL instruction, that is, the kind of instruction ESL students in study sites would normally receive in the absence of the study. In the USA, adult ESL instruction encompasses a range of approaches and content but the goal is to help the student acquire facility with the English language and function in everyday life. Content includes oral language development, grammar, vocabulary and cultural topics. ESL instruction may also include a life skills approach to language, such as learning how to complete forms, interpret labels, and negotiate tasks such as shopping, dealing with schools, doctors and government agencies (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Crandall & Peyton, 1993).

Typical ESL instruction assumes that students are literate in their first language and therefore does not usually focus on phonics or the other basic literacy skills emphasized in *Sam and Pat* (Wrigley & Guth, 1992; Wrigley, Chisman & Ewen, 1993). In the single quantitative study of instruction of 38 adult ESL literacy classes in seven states, Condelli et al., (2003) found that ESL instruction focused on developing oral English language, vocabulary and life skills. Of the 38 classes, seven included direct literacy instruction for more than half of the total class time, and in 31 classes, more than 40 percent of the time was spent on second language instruction despite the fact that all of these classes were designated as 'literacy level.' Furthermore, across all classes, a majority of total class time (51 percent) was spent on second language instruction.

When literacy instruction did occur, it was considered by the researchers to be unsystematic and of short duration (Condelli et al., 2003). With their limited focus on literacy, the control classes should be sufficiently different from the study classes to produce a differential impact on the study outcome measures.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Data collect for the study began in the fall term of 2008 and continued in the winter term of 2009, and includes a different cohort of students each term. Student-level data collection each term consists of an assessment of native language literacy and student background information collected at baseline, pre- and post-testing in English reading, speaking and listening, and attendance in the study class.

The same group of teachers is participating in the study across the two terms. Teacher-level data collection consists of:

- Background information collected at baseline;
- Follow-up surveys to collect data on both *Sam and Pat* and control teachers' participation in non-study professional development during the year, as well as their use of a variety of instructional materials. *Sam and Pat* teachers are also asked questions about the time they spent preparing for *Sam and Pat* instruction, the number of the last *Sam and Pat* lesson taught each term, and their attitudes about *Sam and Pat* and its ease of implementation.
- Classroom observations to document instructional materials and practices used during both terms of the study.

3.3 Selection of programs and sites

Programs were identified and screened for eligibility for the study through a multi-step process. First, data from the US Department of Education (ED, 2008) were used to identify states with the largest adult ESL enrollments. These states were California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Washington, New Jersey and North Carolina. Evaluation staff contacted the state directors of adult education in each state, explained the study and asked them to identify local programs in their state that might be eligible for the study according to whether the site had:

- An open enrollment policy or enrollment history where a majority of learners enter during the beginning of a course,
- Enrollments of adult ESL literacy learners was large enough to support the study design (i.e., able to enroll about 90 students from the target population per semester in study classes),
- A sufficient number of adult ESL literacy instructors to support the evaluation's requirements (at least three instructors per site in the target classes),
- Common programmatic features (e.g. have classes that are of similar duration both in terms of total class hours and class hours per day/week); and
- In addition, the site could not currently offer instruction based on *Sam and Pat.*

After the state adult education directors identified 130 programs based on the specifications above, they provided us with a list of the names of programs and the telephone, fax, and email addresses of the programs' directors or managers. We then

contacted the program directors to gauge their interest in participating in the evaluation, and to learn more about the types of students they served and the number of classes they provided. We examined the characteristics of the programs and found that, preliminarily, 67 programs served low literacy students. We conducted follow-up screening via telephone conferences with program directors to obtain more information and to ascertain their program's study eligibility. We sought explanation and clarification on enrollment policy, student academic background and attrition, teacher training and qualifications, class schedules, sizes, and locations, and other factors that would provide information on each program's desirability for inclusion in the study.

Of the 67 programs contacted, 32 programs met the selection criteria and showed interest in participating in the study. The program directors of the 32 programs were contacted a second time to confirm their interest in participating and to verify information regarding their program's eligibility for the study. Evaluation staff also provided the program directors with more information about the study, including details about random assignment. Seven programs declined to participate in the study. Among the remaining 25 programs, 12 were interested in participating and appeared to meet the study criteria, and 13 expressed interest but did not meet the study criteria upon further discussion. From a close screening of the remaining 12 programs' enrollment policies, student attrition, teacher training and qualifications, class schedules and location, we selected eight programs that offered 13 instructional sites (i.e., multiple sites within some programs) to visit for further consideration. During the visits evaluation staff again verified that the site conformed to study criteria, and that teachers and site staff were willing to participation.

After site visits, one program was no longer interested in participating in the study and two programs had insufficient numbers of adult ESL literacy students attending.

Table 1: Sites, classes and students in the study

Program Location	Sites	N Class Pairs	Total N Student Enrollment
Florida	Site 1	4	54
	Site 2	2	86
	Site 3	2	109
California #1	Site 4	2	222
Texas	Site 5	3	205
	Site 6	1	72
	Site 7	1	88
Illinois	Site 8	1	88
	Site 9	1	71
California #2	Site 10	2	346
Total		19	1.341

We recruited the remaining ten sites (across five programs) for the study. Within these sites, we identified all pairs of adult ESL literacy classes that met at the same time and location. After eliminating pairs of classes in which teachers did not agree to participate

in the study and pairs of classes with an enrollment of less than 15 students per class, evaluation staff identified 19 class pairs to include in the study. Table 1 shows the sites classes and students at each site.

4 Procedures: flow of study activities

Figure 1 shows the flow of data collection for the study. Before student intake and random assignment of students, teachers completed the Teacher Data Form and were randomly assigned to condition.

Teachers assigned to teach *Sam and Pat* attended a three-day training delivered by the literacy textbook authors in the summer of 2008.

Prior to the beginning of the fall 2008 and winter 2009 terms, students registered for classes as they normally did. If the site staff determined during intake that a student belonged in a literacy level class, the student was considered eligible for the study. The site staff explained the study to the student and obtain informed consent translated into the student's native language. Students who chose not to participate in the study were allowed to take the class and were assigned to a class by the site according to the site's normal procedures for assigning students to classes but were not included in data collection activities.

Eligible consenting students were randomly assigned to either the *Sam and Pat* condition or the control condition on the first day that they reported to the site for class. During the first two weeks of attending class, each student was assessed with a battery of standardized English literacy and speaking/listening pre-tests. Teachers took daily attendance throughout the study period.

4.1 Student assessment

The study assessment battery includes a native language literacy locator and pre- and post-tests that measure the English reading, speaking, and listening skills that are the primary outcomes for the study. Pre-tests scores will be used as covariates in the impact analyses.

The Native Language Literacy Locator (Florida Department of Education, 2006) was used to obtain a measure of student's literacy in their native language. The assessment consists of a short writing sample in the student's native language that allows us to identify their literacy status (literacy level vs. higher level). We asked the sites during recruitment to use these assessments to help inform placement decisions.

In the spring of 2008 we conducted a pilot test of assessments using a sample of 48 adult ESL literacy students attending classes in three adult ESL programs. The students spoke languages and had characteristics similar to students that we expect to be in the study. The piloted assessments were appropriate for use on adult ESL literacy students, measure skills typically taught in adult ESL classes and reflected skills we expect to be taught through instruction using *Sam and Pat.*[4]

[4] Because the students tested for this study are low-literate non-English speakers, they require some accommodation in testing, such as simplified and/or translated test instructions. For this reason, and because they differ from the referent norming population of the assessments, comparisons cannot be made between the study sample and national norming samples.

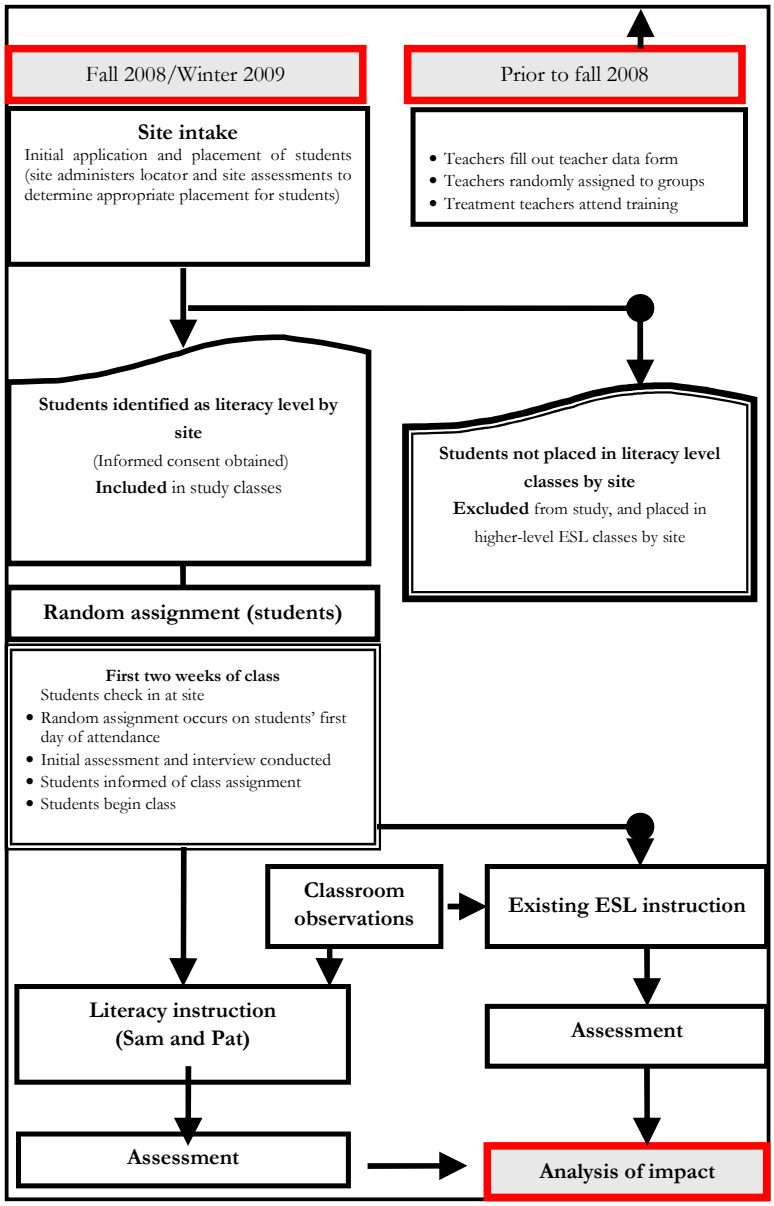

Figure 1: Study procedural flow chart

Based on this pilot, the following assessments were selected for the study:

- *Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement* (*WJ*: Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001). This battery provides subtest and composite scores in several areas of reading achievement. From this battery, subtests from two of the clusters are most relevant for use in this study:
  From the readings cluster:
  - *Letter-Word Identification* – measures participant's word identification skills as indexed by pronunciation of familiar printed words.
  - *Word Attack* – measures skills in applying phonic and structural analysis skills as indexed by pronunciation of unfamiliar words.
  - *Passage Comprehension* – participants read a short phrase or passage, then choose or supply missing words that makes sense in the context.

  From the oral language cluster:
  - *Picture Vocabulary* – participants are shown images and asked to identify the relevant words.
- *ETS SARA – Word Attack*. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) developed the SARA assessment battery for research purposes to measure English literacy skills. The Work Attack subtest from the battery measures skills in applying phonic and structural analysis skills as indexed by pronunciation of unfamiliar words**.** The Letter Naming subtest measures knowledge of the alphabet by asking students to name letters.
- *Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS) – Listening subtest***.** The examiner reads aloud a verbal stimulus and the respondent points to one of four pictures.
- *Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROWPVT)*. The examiner says a word and the participant must point to one of four pictures.

Most assessments are administered at both pre-test and post-test. The exceptions are the SARA Word Attack and the WJ Picture Vocabulary test, which are administered at post-test only.

5 Data analysis

Data analysis for the *Adult ESL literacy impact study* will consist of descriptive, implementation, and impact analyses. The analysis will be conducted in the summer of 2009.

5.1 Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analyses will provide a snapshot of the programs, teachers, and students participating in the study, and include the following:

- Description of the participating programs;
- Description of the teachers and students in the treatment and control groups;
- Analysis of any differences in baseline characteristics between treatment and control groups;
- Description of the rate of student and teacher mobility over the period following random assignment.

5.2 Implementation and instructional analyses

The implementation and other instructional analyses will include both descriptive analyses as well as some relational and comparative analyses, as described previously. These will include:

- Descriptive analysis of the fidelity of implementation of the treatment;
- Descriptive analysis of the instruction in both treatment and control classrooms;
- Comparisons between treatment and control groups on the variables included in the descriptive analyses, including the instructional service contrast between the two groups; and
- Descriptive (non-experimental) analyses of how impacts on student outcomes vary with the level of service contrast.

5.3 Impacts on student outcomes

The basic analytic strategy for assessing the impact of *Sam and Pat* will be to compare outcomes for students who were randomly assigned to either the treatment (*Sam and Pat*) or the control condition. The impact analyses will focus on four types of student outcomes - English reading, speaking, and listening skills, and students' persistence in their study classes.

The impact analyses will use an 'intent-to-treat' approach and include students regardless of whether their enrollment status changes during the term. The estimates of effect will therefore reflect the impact of *Sam and Pat* on the intended sample.

Student as well as teacher or class-level covariates will be included in the model to increase the precision of the impact estimates. Missing values on covariates (e.g., student pre-test scores) will be replaced with the mean value for all participants in the student's site. Students with missing data on the outcome variables, however, will be dropped from the impact analysis for which they lack data.

Because treatment groups are determined at the student level, the primary unit of analysis will be the student, with the difference between the average outcomes for students receiving the intervention and those randomly assigned to the control group representing a reliable and unbiased estimate of the intervention's impact.

The basic strategy to estimate treatment effects in a random assignment study is to conduct a comparison of mean outcomes for treatment and control group members. That is, the treatment effect on an outcome Y is the difference between Y_p and Y_c, where Y_p is the mean outcome for the program group, and Y_c is the mean outcome for the control group. Written as a simple equation and representing the treatment effect with a coefficient b_1, a simple unadjusted intervention effect can be estimated.

Because the number of teachers being randomly assigned to the enhanced ESL program is so much smaller than the number of students randomly assigned, the potential for differences at baseline is greater among the teachers. Therefore it is beneficial for the study to include the teacher background data in the analysis. One major advantage of including teacher-level control variables is that it reduces the effective intra-class correlation in the sample which significantly increases the study's statistical power.

6 Conclusion

This study is the first ever to evaluate the impact of an instructional approach on LESLLA learners using a random assignment design. Findings will reveal how a literacy focused approach will affect the acquisition of English literacy and oral language skills for these students compared to the type of instruction normally offered in adult ESL classes in the USA. This instruction does not usually focus on literacy development. Research on second language development suggests that this approach will result in positive impacts on English literacy development for LESLLA learners. In 2010, a report of findings from the study will provide sound data on the impact of this intervention.

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BRAVING PHONICS AT THE NEWCASTLE ESOL SERVICE: SHARING PRACTICE

Ann Macdonald, Newcastle ESOL Service

1 Introduction

The Newcastle ESOL Service is a community provider of English language learning in Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK, and it mainly works with hard to reach learners not confident to attend the large further education (FE) colleges in the city. Up to 40 learners who enroll each year have had no formal schooling at all, and a large proportion of these learners are women from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Very few of these learners were progressing beyond beginner levels, to elementary and intermediate.

In 2007, the service felt it necessary to set up a programme of learning that included a structured course in phonics for those people who have had no schooling at all. The course would focus primarily on developing student oral skills relating to their needs as the starting point for their literacy programme. Whole text approaches would be combined with a rigorous foundation in phonics to build phonological awareness and develop phonic skills of blending and segmenting systematically.

Until 2007, we had no clear programme of learning for people who cannot read and write. Some teachers followed the whole text approach, the main emphasis being on meaning and some whole word recognition. Any phonics work done consisted primarily of attending to initial sounds and occasional dips into analytic phonics, but the main strategy was whole word recognition, focusing on the visual appearance of words. The teachers occasionally did language experience with students and trained learners to use the 'look, say, cover, write, check' method for independent writing of new words; although straight copying 'busy work' was very prevalent. The strategies used are emphasized in the minimal training input (three three-hour input sessions and a project) on the ESOL specialism qualification required by ESOL teachers in the UK.

Because in our service there were more learners than available teachers, learners were, in fact, often placed in open learning, a self study learning facility, which we have now scrapped. These students were given letter formation worksheets without any context or reference to the sounds they represented. They were also given some decontextualised consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words such as 'pin', 'pen', 'dog' and 'win' and even non-words such as 'pon'. Some whole texts were provided with tapes and while it was possible for students to pick up 'reading' skills from these, it was equally possible for them to simply memorize the text from the tape. Most of the reading books were poorly written and badly illustrated and the quality had further deteriorated with over photocopying. This input hardly helped students who had had

no schooling to learn to read in a meaningful engaged way. For students to learn to read and write in a new language and a new script through self study, in the author's view was absurd.

In this paper the problems we have encountered will be outlined; the theory we have used to inform our curriculum decision making will be argued; the practices we follow described; and the outcomes briefly summarised.

2 Problems

The main problem was that there had been no co-ordinated strategy to deal with a sizeable low educated second language and literacy acquisition (LESLLA) student demand. Furthermore, the Newcastle ESOL Service, like most ESOL providing institutions in the UK in 2007, was beginning to feel squeezed financially because the UK government's funding system altered so that success in exams became the primary qualifier for receiving funding, and not attendance. Given that the Cambridge ESOL exams start at a level that is too high for learners who have had no schooling, this placed our community based service with its high proportion of low educated learners in a difficult financial position. The bottom line was that too many of our students could not achieve exam success and progress to higher levels without systematic literacy support, but without their success we could not fund their support. Basically, a substantial number of people with no prior experience of reading and writing, many of whom are permanently settled in the UK, were becoming a financial burden on the service because of the new funding structure in the UK.

A pressing problem related to these new funding constraints was that there was no end point in the so called 'pre-entry' classes and no course outcomes against which to measure progress, so teachers had nothing clearly defined to work towards. Some learners remained for years in a pre-entry class. Since funding is now based on progression and exam success, and a substantial number of students were not progressing, it was becoming difficult to justify having classes for such people.

In addition, the few LESLLA students with no schooling who progressed to Entry 1, which is the beginner English qualification in the Skills for Life English programme in the UK, seemed to reach a ceiling with reading and writing by Entry 2 which is the elementary course. They did not have the capacity to go on memorizing words without effective independent decoding skills. Thus they could not cope with the higher classes, and so teachers would transfer these students into open learning.

In the classroom itself, it was becoming apparent that heavy reliance on the strategy of looking at words as whole visual features and shapes with some attention to initial sounds was inadequate. A number of students were over reliant on initial sounds, making wildly inaccurate guesses, such as 'th' always being 'Thursday' whatever the context and could only read a 'limiting' range of whole words presented by the teacher. These students were not developing *independent* decoding or comprehension skills and relied too heavily on teacher input. The goal of autonomy was not being reached.

Teachers themselves were not consciously aware of how an orthographically opaque language like English actually works and found it difficult to identify phonic and spelling patterns in an informed way. This meant that if they took up analytic phonics their coverage was patchy and sometimes misinformed. By way of example, a worksheet on /o/ from the *Literacy Resource Pack* (Karlsen, 2004) includes the word 'oil',

indicating insufficient knowledge of the phonemes of English. In addition to this knowledge gap, systematic tracking of sounds, if taught analytically, was not happening, resulting in inadequate coverage.

Another thing that seemed troubling was that words drawn only from context, make it difficult to show the patterns and systems of English spelling, as complex as these are. How does one explicitly demonstrate the systems that do exist if words are only tackled within topics?

The problems outlined above prompted the beginning of a focused exploration into language and literacy at the Newcastle ESOL Service. This is an ongoing project with a long term aim of resolving the literacy side of our language teaching practices at all levels. Our practices are evolving out of struggles, failures and successes.

The project was started with the development of a structured phonics course for people with little or not schooling and setting up a qualification framework for these students. Given the minefield of literacy politics in UK academic circles, this move had to be in a spirit of a brave, expansive adventure for us teachers at the chalk face, and it must remain an open ended journey as we use what we learn about literacy to develop the curriculum at higher levels where there are students who need explicit teaching and support. It is hoped that this continuous approach will enable our service to improve learning and progress rates amongst learners who have had low levels of schooling.

3 Theory informing our practice

To develop a co-ordinated strategy to address the literacy challenges that face the Newcastle ESOL Service, a number of theoretical frameworks have informed our choices so far. These have been drawn from language acquisition theory, reading theory, learning theory, and from theory relating to power and pedagogy.

3.1 Language learning theory

The language learning theory informing our course derives in part from Lewis (1993) who argues for a greater focus on vocabulary learning and on listening at the early stages without pressure on learners to speak until they feel ready. Vocabulary knowledge is seen as vital. Krashen's (1982) concept of the learner's current language level+1 (i.e. language of a slightly higher level) allows teachers to pitch the level at a roughly comprehensible level. The importance of comprehensible input and meaning making is the leading concept, and the vocabulary is largely introduced in topics that relate to the lives of learners, past and present. This allows us to set up small exchanges in which students use their vocabulary to ask simple questions or make requests and respond. Thus the language in year 1 is taught lexically and in holophrastic chunks such as 'What's your name?' and/or functions, and not as analysed grammatical structures. This provides a wealth of material for developing aural phonological awareness whereby the teacher uses new lexis for building student's sensitivity to sounds. For example, after a topic in classroom language, it is possible to play phonics games orally, by giving words students now know, such as 'paper, pen, file and punch' and ask for the odd one out, or to ask them for words beginning with /p/. This has the dual value of providing language to work with when the literacy programme begins at a later stage,

and for year 2 when students begin to engage in some formal analyzed grammar learning.

Having experienced learners making no progress with literacy in self study classes, we are very clear that the particular value of the classroom setting is to provide a place for students to interact and develop their oral language skills, thus building a resource on which to develop their literacy skills. This approach is affirmed in the research by Condelli & Wrigley (2002) where it was found that there was more growth in classes where teachers 'explicitly emphasized oral English communication skills' (p. 14).

3.2 Reading theory

The literature on reading theory reveals just what a complex cognitive, psychological, cultural skill this is, and each model or theory throws additional light on what goes on when people read. In our practice we make use of a variety of models, but here only some considerations will be focused on.

At the beginning of our literacy programme, when students have very few decoding skills, we generate language experience texts that draw on top down guessing skills. LESLLA students with no prior schooling mostly rely on their memory of what was elicited and written down by the teacher, on some rudimentary decoding skills, and on the teacher's decoding and drilling skills. We have found that many students pretend read at this stage, taking their texts home to get help from family members so they can memorise each word and demonstrate 'so called' reading to the teacher the next day. This is not unlike the behaviour of young children who know the words of a book that has been read to them. The value of producing language experience texts, as Spiegel and Sunderland argue, is to give 'voice, value and status to learner's experience, opinions and use of language', (2006:32) and to demonstrate to students that print carries meaning. This gives students an early sense of achievement, enjoyment, and a sense of what print does.

This top down approach to reading on its own, however, is not enough when teaching basic reading skills. Eskey & Grabe's (1988) argument for an interactive reading model based on the claim that 'superior perceptual skills are the cause of superior top down strategies' (p.26), has informed the shift in the Newcastle ESOL Service away from using just whole language strategies. Adams & Collins (1979) describe top down and bottom up processes interacting at different levels. At letter level, one letter triggers an expectation for another letter, and one word facilitates the anticipation of other words likely to occur together. At the syntactic level, the top down process means a search for the sentence structure or the completion of a noun phrase when encountering a determiner. At the semantic level a large amount of the reader's world knowledge is invoked to make inferences and expand the meaning prompted by the text. While each of these processes is described individually these 'top down and bottom up processes operate simultaneously at all the different levels' and 'work to pull the various fragments of knowledge and information into a coherent whole' (Adams & Collins, 1979:21). Later on, Adams (1990) argues that 'it is because of their deep knowledge about orthography that skillful readers look and feel as though they recognize words holistically,' (p. 410) and it is this knowledge that allows skilful readers to process text for meaning and together with their syntactic knowledge 'to pause for repair when faced with difficult text' (p. 415). Adam's portrayal of reading skills not only confirms the importance of building vocabulary and oral communication skills

among LESLLA students who have no schooling prior to teaching reading, to give them the linguistic resources in English to draw on, it also suggests that it is useful for learners to have explicit tuition in the patterns of letters and sounds that make up the words in English. Furthermore, that considerable number of words in English have regular phonic, albeit complex patterning, as well as another body of words that are indeed irregular, where the written form bears only a partial relation to the sound symbols used to write them, needs to be made explicitly known to students early on and built into the programme through pronunciation work and appropriate spelling strategies.

3.3 Genre literacy pedagogy

Genre literacy pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Martin, 1989), wherein teachers bring the format of texts and language appropriate to a particular purpose explicitly to the attention of the learner, was developed within a framework of critical evaluation of the process approach to writing which Boomer (1988) argued 'failed people from 'low socio-economic backgrounds … and certain children from ethnic minorities' (p. 4). With this in mind, we are aware of the need to enable students to develop the discourses that will allow them to conduct their lives independently and autonomously in the UK. As a result of this, in our beginner literacy classes we aim to introduce students to authentic texts or adapt them appropriately, and to design authentic writing tasks all of which involve genre literacy pedagogy.

3.4 Learning theory

Learning to speak in our mother tongue is natural and happens informally, but learning to read requires formal teaching and learning in which solid foundations need to be laid and developed. In terms of the ESOL context, students have the challenge of learning to speak some English and from that base start learning to read and write. Armed with the finding of Condelli & Wrigley (2002) that 'longer scheduled classes resulted in more growth in reading comprehension and oral communication skills' (p. 13), our first struggle was to get the same number of hours of instruction as all other learners in the service. Misconceptions in management reinforced by the UK funding framework meant that our students had shorter classes and fewer sessions per week, making it even more difficult for them to achieve. Gaining equal class time was achieved in October 2008.

Although not directly about teaching basic reading and writing at the beginner levels, Delpit's (1988) expression of frustration on behalf of African American teachers with how the process approach to teaching writing concealed power has informed our practice, echoing Boomer's (1988) plaintive about that failing writing curriculum. Delpit's key assertion was 'that if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring that power easier' (p. 287). This, along with Vygotsky's argument (in Kozulin et al., 2003:16-17) that learning is socio-culturally mediated by teachers and the learning activities they organize, has meant that we consider it important that language and literacy teaching needs to be considered in terms of power, something that, as Delpit argued, was not being consciously acknowledged by mainstream 'white' teachers in the US context embedded in a highly literate print rich home and work environment.

Building on this notion of power, literacy, according to Vygotsky (1978) is 'one of the most powerful of psychological tools' (cited in Kozulin et al., 2003:16). Kozulin argues that the acquisition of symbolic relationships requires guided experience; it does not appear spontaneously, and 'the mere availability of signs or texts does not imply that they will be used by students as psychological tools', (p. 24). In relation to this, he mentions an observation made by DeLoach that:

> learning materials for *young children*[1] are often designed in a way that presupposes that *children* have already mastered the symbolic relationships between object symbols and concepts. In reality these relationships do not emerge spontaneously but should be systematically formed.
>
> Kozulin et al. (2003:24)

It is against this observation that we have found that the resources developed for ESOL Skills for Life[2] learners in the UK seem to presuppose that the Roman symbolic system has been internalized prior to arrival in the classroom. We have found that this internalization is not the case with most of our LESLLA learners, and this hinders their progression. As a result, we have introduced a formal phonics program to 'mediate' the internalization of the Roman script explicitly, but which is viewed as a resource that must work in service of meaning.

4 Practice

As a result of our understanding of language learning, of reading, of power issues and learning theory, a programme of learning has been devised led by the author but with the participation of two teachers, and the support of the Newcastle ESOL Service co-ordinator who successfully raised funds for our work. The main focus is on oral skills and whole text work. This means that the first two hours of each two and half hour lesson is devoted to whole language work. The last thirty minutes is given to phonics and or spelling work, using words drawn from the established vocabulary. As students progress, they begin to be able to write dictated captions and sentences, and this is done to encourage writing autonomy. The words are from the student repertoire, but they are selected in terms of sounds and or spelling patterns, and we are comfortable about doing this, based on evidence that our mental lexicon is organized partly by meaning but also by sound (Aitchison, 1994). To establish a reasonable body of language to exploit, the phonics teaching does not start at the beginning of the course but six to twelve weeks into year 1. Every effort is made to link the topics in the language and communication lesson to at least one of the words used in the focus on phonics. For example, the sound /ng/ will be focused on after a lesson on free time activities that may include swimming, visiting friends, sewing, watching television, and so on. The

[1] This reference to young children can be paralleled with adults who have had no schooling.

[2] Skills for Life is the official government framework within which ESOL provision is delivered in the UK.

model that follows in Figure 1 has been developed by this author to illustrate what we do.

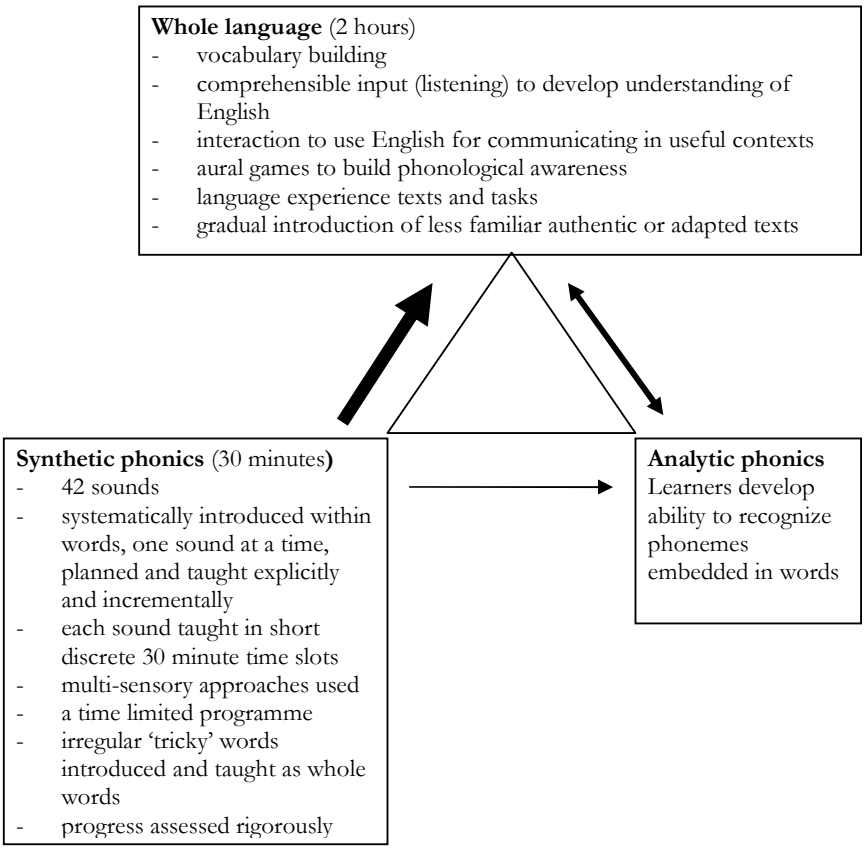

Figure 1: Model of literacy practice

5 Teaching phonics

Given that there are few guidelines for busy ESOL teachers who do not currently receive any substantive training in how to teach phonics to adults, we drew on resources that describe methods and principles of phonics teaching explicitly and practically. Our approach being a practical exploration, has meant that we have found this a good way to start.

The Rose Report (Rose, 2006) offered us a set of clear principles and guidelines for quality phonics teaching and *The Phonics Handbook* (Lloyd, 2005) that accompanies the *Jolly Phonics* programme, which is a a synthetic phonics programme used in the UK, provided process guidelines along with useful resources and ideas which we have

adapted for adult LESLLA users. We view critically the seemingly hard line bottom up approach in *Jolly Phonics* of not giving learners texts to read until they can demonstrate the ability to blend, and we therefore use language experience in the main part of our lessons from early on in our phonics programme because we have found that this is where adult learners can see reading and writing in meaningful use.

I will now expand on the *Rose Report* guidelines, one by one, that have informed our practice.

Be part of a broad and rich curriculum with a range of activities and experiences to develop speaking and listening skills and phonological awareness

As has already been demonstrated in Figure 1, building vocabulary and using this for oral language development is the core focus of the programme. Amongst other things, we use picture cues, jazz chants and verbal dialogues to prompt interactive communication. Students sometimes do short individual and group presentations. We invite people in from the outside when it is appropriate; as for example after a topic on homes, we had a fire safety officer speak to the students. We also take students out to places such as the art gallery and the library, which generates language and texts to read. These activities have a further value in that they prompt real writing events in the form of thank you cards or letters and addressing envelopes, which we teach using a genre approach to writing. Out of the language that students learn, we develop phonological awareness in oral word games, such as identifying initial sounds, making word chains with final sounds as for example 'house > sit > ten > Newcastle > lamb > man', and getting words to rhyme by giving a word such as 'pen' and getting students to come up with words they know such as 'pen', 'hen'[3] or 'when'.

Be multi-sensory, encompassing visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities to enliven core learning

Our challenge has been to keep the 'photocopy' curriculum, whereby teachers organize their courses around photocopied worksheets, to a minimum, and to teach through interactive activities that involve listening, using picture cues, and later word cues (Figure 2), doing flannel board work to set up displays (see Figure 3), human word and sentence making (students have enlarged words or sounds and form words or sentences by moving around), poster making, playing games on the smart board, using tapping and gesture for pronunciation, colour coding and highlighting, and more.

[3] Many LESLLA students with no schooling come from villages and have an interest in domesticated farm animals, which we exploit as a base for teaching 'meat' words such as beef, lamb, pork etc.

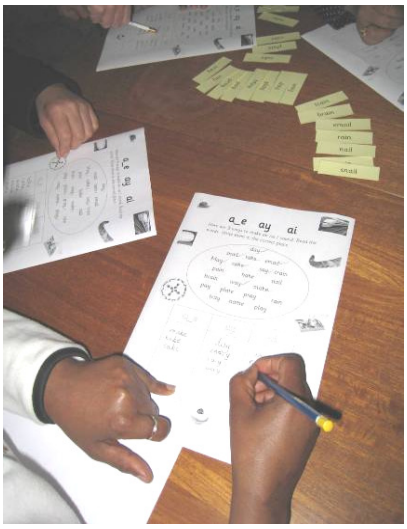

Figure 2: Use of word sorting in combination with a written sorting card.

Figure 3: A flannelboard display put up by students through matching recycling realia with words.

Be time-limited

We have set up a two year course that has an accreditation framework which we have developed together with the Open College Network (OCN), a national awarding body in the UK. The assessment is portfolio based, and is highly flexible, so that students can achieve at the level they have reached. For the portfolio a set of 'I can do' statements have been devised for students to tick as they progress. There are six units overall. Following, is a very general outline of each year and what the students cover.

Year 1

- vocabulary building
- oral language skills focusing on functions and chunks of language
- emphasis on developing listening skills
- language experience texts and tasks
- authentic or adapted texts (e.g. forms, recycling leaflets, fire safety leaflets)
- foundation phonics (42 sounds, developing skills in perception, recognition, letter formation, blending and segmenting)
- irregular 'tricky' words (look, say, cover, write check)
- joined up writing of vowel and consonant digraphs

Accreditation: OCN portfolio Units 1 to 4; and ESB (English Speaking Board) Entry 1 for confident learners[4]

[4] ESB is a national awarding body in the UK that concentrates on speaking and listening accreditation. Students do not require any literacy skills to achieve.

Year 2
- oral language skills, still using functions and chunks
- continued emphasis on listening
- continued emphasis on vocabulary building
- introduction of formal grammar with speaking as the main supporting skill
- reading stamina developed
- ability to write without copying developed
- review of foundation phonics
- introduction of alternative vowel graphemes
- introduction of more complex phonic knowledge
- introduction of formal spelling learning
- joined up writing taught and encouraged
- start transition to Entry 1 Skills for Life curriculum (UK ESOL qualification framework, B on the European framework).

Accreditation: OCN portfolio Units 5 and 6; and ESB Entry 1

Be systematic … follow a carefully planned programme with fidelity, reinforcing and building on previous learning to secure progress … avoiding drawing in too many elements from other programmes
Owing to the fact that we are trying something out in a spirit of learning how it works, we chose the *Jolly Phonics* programme because it explicitly explains how to teach phonics. We have drawn on the principles and methods it clearly describes, using it as the base for our phonics work, and we have developed materials suitable for adults accordingly (Figures 4, 5 and 6). We have found, however, that the kinaesthetic side of the programme, in which there is a movement for every sound is not always appropriate to adult second language learners, as some of the movements have obscure meanings that are not relevant to our learners. By way of example, in *Jolly Phonics* a story about a seal would be followed by 'children' flapping their hands and opening their mouths wide to say '*ah ah ah ah',* as if they are seals. We have also used the programme in combination with student generated texts, which appears to break the 'fidelity' principle as the *Jolly Phonics* programme discourages the introduction of texts until learners can decode.

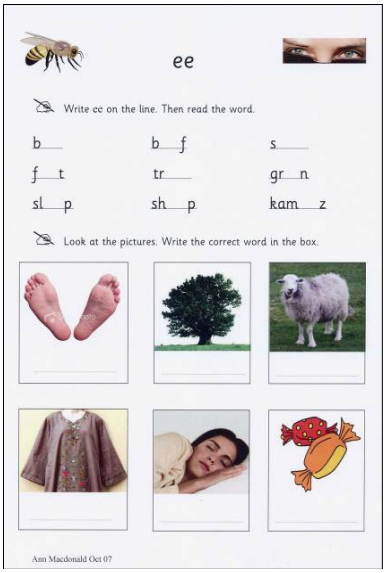

Figure 4: A year 1 phonics worksheet

Figure 5: A year 2 phonics worksheet

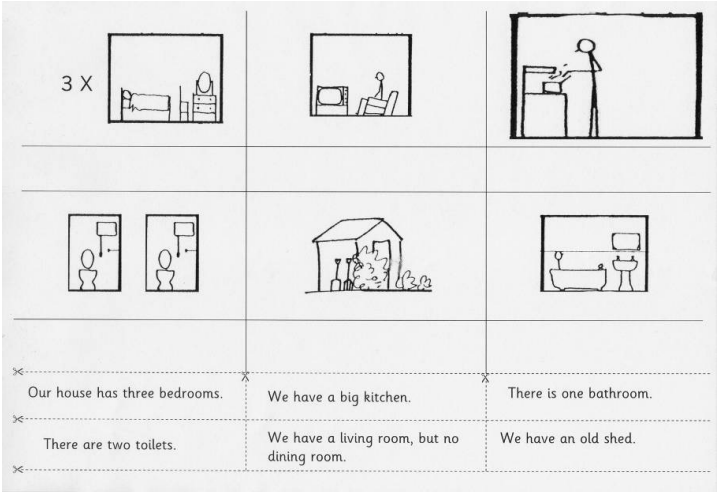

Figure 6: A sentence reading worksheet in which students cut and paste

Be taught discretely and daily at a brisk pace

In a two and half hour lesson, the last half hour is spent on phonics. In that half hour students:

- perceive a phoneme elicited through pictures of familiar lexical items,
- recognize the letter grapheme(s) that represent that phoneme,

- form the letter(s), joined up when more than one letter represents a sound (digraphs),
- blend / read words by sounding out, all the way through, and blending the sounds into words using visual cues and fingers,
- segment / spell words (hear a dictated word, identify the sounds in it, and write them in the correct sequence).

Once students can blend basic CVC and CCVC words, irregular words are introduced (e.g. the, one, two, etc.) and learned visually, through look, say, cover, write and check because in words like these the pronunciation does not correspond adequately with the written form. These words are posted on the classroom wall with a cloud/flower shape drawn around them so students look at them daily, read them and internalise their visual features.

Provide opportunities to reinforce and apply acquired phonic knowledge and skills in activities such as shared and guided reading.
Our students engage in group reading guided by the teacher and in paired reading. A spirit of community learning is encouraged so that stronger students work supportively with weaker students. Very often students sit together and read while waiting for a class to start.

Progress in developing applying phonic knowledge is carefully assessed and monitored
We have several avenues for monitoring progress:
- continuous oral assessment in class,
- tutorials every four to five months, which are used for one to one discussion about progress and individual assessment,
- learning for homework followed by dictated spelling tests,
- students read and dictate short sentences in pairs,
- a portfolio assessment system, allowing students to take responsibility for their work.

For the portfolio, students keep their checklist of 'can do' statements in a special file and add their work to this file as they progress through the course, ticking the boxes as they go. It includes things like filling in a form to join the local library, writing a thank you letter with the teacher's support after a visit, producing a short text on the computer, and copying a short poem in joined up handwriting.

6 Discussion and conclusion

6.1 Positive outcomes

We have had a number of positive outcomes that we plan to build on.

We have set up a curriculum and an assessment framework for learners who have little or no schooling. The topic content of our oral curriculum is flexible so teachers have room to meet the communication needs of students. The phonics curriculum is less flexible but wherever possible teachers make a link between their topics and a

particular sound, and teachers draw on the words from the oral content to teach phonics.

By working with OCN, the outcomes for the portfolio based assessment have been made explicit both to the teachers and to the learners, so they know what they are aiming to achieve. One experimental group has progressed to Entry 1 Skills for Life, and our first round of OCN portfolio based assessments and qualifications will occur in July 2009.

Aligned to the above processes we have generated electronically a bank of adult appropriate topic and phonic resources, for use by all the teachers at year one and year two level, some of which is also proving to be useful in Skills for Life Entry 1 and higher. These resources are visually attractive as we believe learners who experience pleasurable text resources will feel invited to look at them and read them. Remarks from students confirm this view.

Teachers are developing a more in depth, conscious knowledge of the English orthographic system, how and where it is regular and irregular. This is enabling them to do analytic phonics in a more informed way, when appropriate, using the learner generated texts within the topic based part of the lesson; and students themselves are indicating growing ability to recognize letter patterns in words. This staff development is impacting on learners who have literacy difficulties at higher levels, although this second stage impact is only just beginning to happen, and we recognize that there is a large amount of work that still needs to be done to support students with literacy needs at higher levels.

Through regular assessment and tutorials we are able to identify the weaknesses in our teaching. Because we are self training, we have to learn from our mistakes. Weaknesses we have identified are lack of skills in building aural phonological awareness at the outset, and inconsistent attention being paid to teaching irregular 'tricky' words with a result that one or two learners over rely on sounding out. We have also recognized that in class students read better than in tutorials where they do not get as much contextual and peer support. Nonetheless students have reported doing more reading outside the classroom, for example, reading with their children, reading school letters and reading street signs and food labels. Students also borrow books from the small library we have in the classroom and often read in pairs while waiting for class to start. Some of these books and reading cards have been generated in language experience classes.

We have had good retention rates. In the Year 2 class, attendance has been averaging at 88% and we have retained 81%, losing students to child birth and failed asylum. We have noticed a pattern in which certain students would come irregularly at first, and then start coming daily. Students who attend regularly make particularly good progress.

6.2 Concerns and limitations

We have some concerns.

Time is a major difficulty. There are not enough adult learning resources for people with little or no schooling. Organizing a course, generating teaching materials, and setting up an accreditation framework has been very taxing on the service in terms of time.

It is appreciated that some of the insights expressed in this paper are based on informal observations. It is recognized that there is a need for rigorous research to confirm findings. Given the time it has taken to put the course together, this has not been possible to date.

Being firmly on the ground, with the unrelenting demands of teaching, means that we as teachers have little time for participation in the academic debates that surround language and literacy, though through every endeavour, we try to follow them. Our broad observation is that opposing theorists (whole language versus synthetic phonics supporters) appear to be engaged in oppositional thinking. They are seemingly locked in an 'either, or' approach to literacy pedagogy when the literature indicates that reading and writing is complex and probably calls for 'and, and' thinking, rather than 'either, or' thinking. At the end of the day, chalk face LESLLA teachers at the Newcastle ESOL Service draw on both approaches, without very much practical support from researchers, whose arguments and knowledge appear to go around internally and oppositionally within their own academic discourse community.

This means that in effect practitioners conduct a considerable amount of their work in isolation, without external critical evaluation and scrutiny. Given that at the ESOL Service we want to be brave, to try things out and be expansive in the strategies we use, this paper is partly written to invite critical evaluation and discussion and possibly real dialogue between interest groups. This will enable us to progress in our aim to deal with the literacy challenges we face in our service.

This paper shares the current literacy and language practice at beginner level at the Newcastle ESOL Service. It demonstrates that we are trying out synthetic phonics teaching with the intention of learning from it, in order to effectively manage the challenges presented to us by a large number of people who enroll in our classes who have little or not schooling. Rather than allowing students to drift around unsuccessfully in low level classes without any measurable progress, we have worked with OCN to set up a portfolio based assessment framework for our LESLLA learners. The first round of assessments will take place in July 2009, but having the framework is already enabling us to teach a carefully considered programme of learning with purpose.

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WORD CONCEPT OF ILLITERATES AND LOW-LITERATES: WORLDS APART?

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Jeanne Kurvers, Tilburg University

1 Introduction

Over the past 25 or so years extensive research has been done into the development of children's metalinguistic awareness and its role in learning to read. Although results contradict each other regarding the question which of the two appears first, there is undoubtedly some kind of interrelationship between metalinguistic skills and literacy. Some suggest that metalinguistic awareness facilitates learning to read and write (e.g. Bus & Van IJzendoorn, 1999; Karmiloff-Smith, Grant, Sims, Jones, & Cuckle, 1996; Sharpe & Zelazo, 2002), whereas others (e.g. Ehri, 1975; Gombert, 1992; Olson, 1994, 1996; Roberts, 1992) suppose that it is the other way round, viz. that literacy stimulates the development of metalinguistic skills. This paper deals with only one aspect of metalinguistic knowledge, the word concept, which can be defined as an awareness of the word as a linguistic unit demonstrated by the ability to isolate words in a stream of spoken language.

2 Background

2.1 Research among children

Results of previous research have suggested that there is a steady progression in the development of word awareness in children that runs parallel with age and/or literacy acquisition (Downing & Oliver, 1974; Edwards & Kirkpatrick, 1999; Ehri, 1975). In spite of minor differences which may have been caused either by the variety of stimuli that were used or by the way in which the studies were carried out (with or without pre-experimental training), the results of these studies were broadly similar and indicated that young children under 6 or 7 generally do not have a clear concept of words as linguistic units (Downing & Oliver, 1974; Ehri, 1975; Holden & MacGinitie, 1972). Papandropoulou & Sinclair (1974) studied word awareness in 4- to 10-year-old children. They found that young children are not able to distinguish between the word and the object denoted by the word. Young children consider a word to be synonymous with its referent. When asked to name a long word, the youngest children mentioned words indicating objects that were long or big in size. For young children the linguistic term 'word' is inextricably linked with the object referred to by a word. Only gradually a child

develops knowledge of a word as a linguistic unit, which can be distinguished from its meaning.

Already in 1955, Karpova found that 3-7-year-old children were hardly able to break up a sentence into its smaller lexical units (Karpova, 1966). When asked to count the number of words in a sentence, the youngest children appeared to regard a sentence as an unbreakable semantic unit. A 7-year-old boy for example was asked how many words the sentence: 'The boy is laughing' contained. He replied that it consisted of only one word, because 'only one boy is laughing.' Somewhat older children began to analyse sentences in a more formal way, but only some of the oldest children that took part in the study were able to split up sentences into separate words, although they usually left out prepositions and conjunctions.

Research shows that older children (8-12-year-olds) are better at metalinguistic tasks such as segmenting sentences into words than younger children (4-7-year-olds). A remarkable increase in performance usually shows around 7 or 8 years of age. The gap between the correct scores of younger children on the one hand and older children on the other is nowadays generally attributed to literacy, although there is no unequivocal evidence which emerges first, metalinguistic knowledge or the acquisition of literacy.

Apart from the difference in performance of the respective age groups, a significant difference was found in the number of correct responses to open and closed class words. Open class words (e.g., nouns, adjectives and verbs) are usually easier to be identified than closed class words (e.g., conjunctions, prepositions and articles) (Karpova, 1966; Holden & MacGinitie, 1972), because open class words have more semantic content and therefore the relationship between word and referent is more transparent than for closed class words, which most often have a more abstract meaning. Not only open class words are easier to detect in a sentence than closed class words, but also disyllabic words are more easily detected than monosyllabic words, because (i) the latter can be linked to a preceding or following word, especially function words such as the articles *de* ('the') and *een* ('a') (see appendix), and (ii) contrary to disyllabic words, monosyllabic words are often unstressed.

Karmiloff-Smith et al. (1996) introduced a new methodology to assess children's word awareness. They called it an on-line task, because it imitated normal language processing, which is in their opinion not the case in older off-line tasks such as sentence segmentation or word judgment. In contrast with findings of previous studies, they claimed that, thanks to the use of this methodology, it had become clear that 4- and 5-year-old children do have the ability to isolate words in a meaningful context, since 75.3% of the 4-year-old and 96.2% of the 5-year-old children scored correct.

This new methodology was replicated in a cross-linguistic study by Kurvers & Uri (2006) among 4- and 5-year-old children in The Netherlands and Norway with strikingly different results. In their study both the 4- and 5-year-old children scored only 26.6% correct. Kurvers & Uri suggested that literacy may play a role in the development of a child's word concept.

2.2 Research among adults

In short, the studies among children showed that the older the children were, the higher their scores on metalinguistic tasks. Although at present literacy is regarded to be an important stimulating factor, the cause of this progressive development is, however, not yet clear. It might be a result of several factors that coincide when a child grows up,

viz. linguistic development, cognitive development and literacy acquisition. Therefore, it is interesting to carry out the same kind of study among illiterate adults, because on the one hand pre-reading children are to a certain extent comparable to illiterates, in the sense that neither of them is able to read. On the other hand, illiterate adults are, in contrast to pre-reading children, proficient language users. So, studying the development of word awareness in adult illiterates provides an opportunity to investigate whether the development of word awareness is indeed connected to literacy and not to linguistic development or the development of cognitive skills. Of course, these three factors cannot be disentangled in children, since they develop simultaneously in children. If literacy plays a crucial role in the acquisition of word concept, the three factors can be separated better in illiterate and literate (with only a few years of literacy learning) adult immigrants. This context resembles the situation of children, because most illiterate immigrants from outside Europe have not attended school and have therefore not got any instruction concerning the concept of word, whereas most European illiterates did attend school.

The present study was set up in order to investigate the relationship between the development of word concept and literacy in adult second language learners, and to make a comparison between the results of this study and two previous studies among children, those of Karmiloff-Smith et al. and Kurvers and Uri. Taking into account the results of previous research among children, which suggests that literacy plays a role in enhancing one's metalinguistic knowledge, and thus one's word concept, it was hypothesized that low-literates would give more correct answers than illiterates. Some previous research, although with a different type of task (sentence segmentation), indicated the same (Gombert, 1994; Kurvers, 2002). Moreover, all participants were expected to be better on open class words than on closed class words, as found in several older studies with children, and better on disyllabic words than on monosyllabic words for reasons explained above.

Therefore, the hypotheses in this study are as follows:

H1 Low-literates perform better on the word awareness task than illiterates.
H2 Open class words will be better recognized than closed class words.
H3 Disyllabic words will be better recognized than monosyllabic words.

Finally the results of this study will be compared with the findings of Karmiloff-Smith et al. (1996) among monolingual English children and with those of Kurvers & Uri (2006) among 4- and 5-year-old monolingual children in The Netherlands and Norway.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

A small-scale study was carried among 30 adult immigrant participants in The Netherlands, viz. a group of 15 full illiterates and a group of 15 low-literates. Even though the participants came from several different native countries, most of them were from Morocco (13) and Somalia (8). Six of the Moroccan participants spoke Moroccan Arabic and seven of them spoke a Berber language. The other participants

came from Iran, Turkey, Eritrea, China, Mauritania, Syria, Tibet and Afghanistan. All of them had a low SES (socio-economic situation).

Illiterates

In The Netherlands the compulsory education law, which prescribes that each child should go to school, was enacted in 1901. Consequently, there are no 'real' illiterates in the Netherlands any more. Therefore the illiterate participants were recruited from immigrants who had just started to attend literacy courses. The participants of this group had not had any schooling whatsoever in their native country. In order for the participant to be included in the study, she should have a reasonable knowledge of Dutch (at least A1 of the CEF, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), in speaking as well as in listening skills, because the tests were carried out in Dutch, their L2.

In sum all participants of this group met the following requirements:

- no education in native country,
- Dutch speaking skills at least at level A1 of the CEF (assessed by the teachers),
- not able to read nor write.

The mean age of the participants in this group was 43.9 years ranging from 34 to 57. The mean length of residence was 16.6 years.

Low-literates

Since the first group (full illiterates) could only be found among those learning Dutch as a second language, the second group (low-literates) was composed of immigrants, too. This was done in order to avoid unintended side effects which could obscure the results when the scores of immigrant illiterates would be compared with those of native low-literates. All participants of this group had not been to school in their native country and had acquired literacy in the Netherlands, except for one woman who had gone to school in Eritrea for three months, but had learned to read and write in the Netherlands, just like the other participants. This group qualifies as low literate, because the participants had reached reading level A1 of the CEF. On average the participants of this group had been to school in the Netherlands for about two years.

The criteria for this group were:

- approximately two years DSL education in the Netherlands,
- no education in home country,
- speaking Dutch at least at A1 level of the CEF.

The mean age of the participants in this group was 35.8 years, with a range from 24 to 54. The mean length of residence was 8.8 years. In both groups women heavily outnumbered men. In the illiterate group there were three male participants, in the low-literate group two.

3.2 Instruments

Reading task

To both groups a reading test was administered in order to assess the participant´s reading level. It may sound strange to administer a reading test to an illiterate, but this was done in order to examine whether a participant was indeed unable to read. The reading task for the illiterates consisted of a few easy words, whereas the low-literates

had to read aloud a nine-line paragraph from a text after which they were asked two questions about it in order to examine whether they had understood the text.

Word awareness task

In order to investigate whether the development of word awareness in illiterates and low-literates resembles that in children the Karmiloff et al. study was replicated. For the word awareness task a text was taken from a book edited for beginning learners of Dutch as an L2 with stories from oral traditions (Kurvers, 2004:12). The text (a Berber folk story about a man who leaves his seven daughters behind in the wood) was slightly adapted which means that two sentences were added. Otherwise it was not possible to select the intended 32 target words, 16 open and 16 closed class words, which were divided into equal subsets of mono- and disyllabic words, which were in turn equally divided between consonant-initial and vowel-initial words. Like in Karmiloff et al., care was also taken for the possibility that elision errors might occur. This kind of mistake is made when the participant adds the last consonant of the preceding word to the target word, e.g. in the sentence: *Hij nam ook…* (He took also…) giving *mook* as target word instead of *ook*. Therefore in the selection of vowel-initial targets preference was given to those vowel-initial words that were preceded by a consonant-final word. There were 16 vowel-initial words, 13 of them were preceded by words ending in a consonant, 3 of them by words ending in a vowel, e.g. *de oudste* (the eldest), *hij at* (he ate), *ze alles* (she all). See Appendix 1 for an overview of all the target words.

The first two lines of the story did not contain target words. Besides, the first word of a sentence was not selected as a target.

3.3 Procedure

The study was carried out in the same way as described by Karmiloff-Smith et al. (1996). First of all the participants were told that they were going to listen to a story and that they were supposed to repeat the last word when the narrator paused. In order to check whether the participants had understood the instructions a short practice story was administered in which six open class words were selected as targets. No explanation was given as to what a word is. Only when a participant gave an incorrect answer, e.g. by giving a multiword answer, feedback was given in such a way that it indicated which word of the sentence was the last one, but otherwise without any explanatory details. During the actual task no feedback was given at all.

The story was read in a lively tone, at a normal pace and with as natural an intonation as possible. Care was taken to avoid undue emphasis on target words. After each pause and the participant's answer part of the sentence was read again in order to facilitate resuming the thread of the story.

One illiterate participant, a 57-year-old Moroccan woman, had to be excluded from this task, because she was unable to answer any question related to language already in the practice items. One low-literate participant did seem to understand the instruction, but she turned out to be an extreme outlier in not answering any of the items correctly. Her reactions were not included either. Therefore, in the end only 28 participants were used in this analysis, 14 illiterates and 14 low-literates.

After the task had been administered, the answers were analysed for word types (open class versus closed class; monosyllabic versus disyllabic). Subsequently, all answers were classified according to the categories described by Karmiloff-Smith et al.

They distinguished the following classes of answers (the underlined words are the target words):

Correct answer: e.g. ***nieuwe*** (new) in the sentence: 'Op een dag zei zijn nieuwe …' (One day said his new …).

Incorrect answer:

- Multiword answer: e.g. *niet genoeg* ***eten*** (not enough food) instead of: ***eten***.
- Anticipation: e.g. *vrouw* instead of ***nieuwe*** in the sentence: '*Op een dag zei zijn* ***nieuwe*** …'
  wife instead of new in the sentence: 'One day said his new …'
- Single syllable: e.g. *leen* (instead of ***alleen***) lone (instead of alone)
- Elision (resyllabification):
  adding the last consonant of the preceding word to the target word; e.g. in the sentence: *Hij nam* ***ook***… giving *mook* as target word instead of ***ook*** (He took also …).
- Non-target single word:
  e.g. *genoeg* instead of hout in the sentence: 'Toen ze genoeg hout…'
  enough instead of wood in the sentence: 'When they enough wood ...'
- No response: I don't know.

4 Results

4.1 Illiterates versus low-literates

The internal consistency of the instrument was high (Cronbach's alpha .93). First, the correct scores of the illiterate group were compared to those of the low-literate group. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean correct score of the illiterate group was 14.79 (sd 7.54) and of the low-literate group 22.86 (sd 6.16). To examine the differences between the two groups a t-test was performed on the total amount of correct scores of both groups. The scores of the low-literates are significantly higher than those of the illiterates (t= -3.10; df =27; p=0.005). So low-literates are generally better at identifying word boundaries than illiterates.

Table 1: Correct scores on the awareness task by group and word class

Word class	Group	Mean (sd)	% correct
Open and closed	Illiterates	14.79 (7.54)	46.2 %
(maximum= 32)	Low-literates	22.86 (6.16)	71.5 %

4.2 Word types

As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 2 and might be expected from the results of studies among children, which showed that metalinguistic awareness develops together with literacy, the group of low-literates performed better than the illiterate group on all variables. Roughly, the scores of both groups run parallel to each other, the low-literates scoring higher than the illiterates on all word categories. On open class words,

the difference is 28%, on closed class words 22%, on monosyllabic words 25% and on disyllabic words also 25%. So, the results show a clear pattern.

Table 2: Mean percentages correct by group and word type

Group	Open	Closed	Monosyllabic	Disyllabic
Illiterates				
Mean	54.9%	37.5 %	41.9 %	50.4 %
Sd	(29.0)	(21.2)	(21.8)	(26.7)
Low-literates				
Mean	83.0 %	59.8 %	67.0 %	75.8 %
Sd	(20.1)	(19.6)	(19.8)	(19.7)

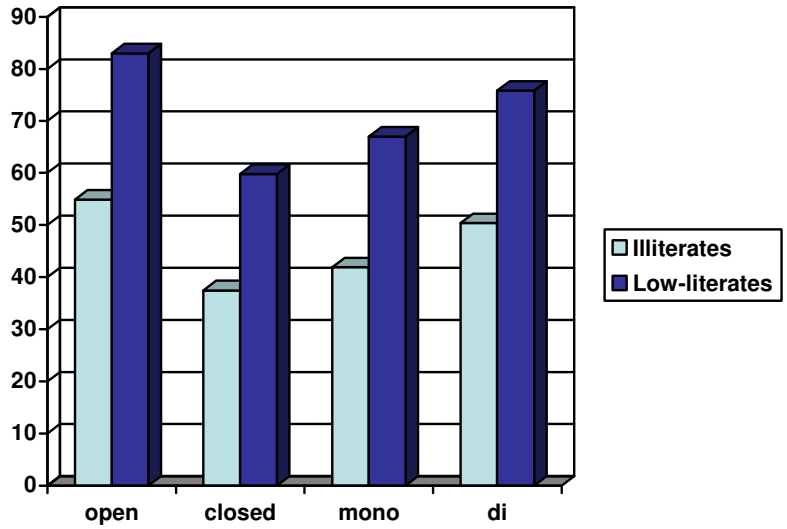

Figure 1: Percentages correct by group and word type

Moreover, a paired samples t-test was carried out to investigate whether the characteristics of the 32 target words proved to be key factors in giving the right answer, both for illiterates and literates. It revealed that word class as well as the number of syllables are of great importance. Both groups had a significant higher correct score on open than on closed class items, see Table 3 (t=7.08; p=.000). Besides, disyllabic words were significantly better identified than monosyllabic words (t=-5.28; p=.000).

Table 3: Word types compared

Word items	t	df	p
Open/closed class	7.081	27	.000
Mono-/disyllabic	-5.277	27	.000

4.3 Answer categories compared

As already said, all answers were classified according to the categories described by Karmiloff-Smith et al. After that an analysis of errors was made. Table 4 presents the response types as percentages of the total amount of responses; the three most frequent error types are presented separately, the other types are taken together in the last column. In the first row the results for the present study are given; rows 2, 3 and 4 provide the response types found by Kurvers & Uri (2006) and Karmiloff et al. (1996).

Table 4: Overview of response types expressed as percentages of all answers in 4 corpora

	Group	Multi-word	Anti-cipation	Non-target single word	Else
Dutch	Illiterates	41.5	4.7	5.1	2.5
(Onderdelinden)	Low-literates	20.8	0.7	4.7	2.3
Dutch (Kurvers)	4-year olds	52.0	15.4	2.0	5.9
	5-year	54.8	12.1	1.5	6.5
Norwegian (Uri)	4-year	46.3	15.1	3.7	6.0
	5-year	50.9	12.5	3.1	4.6
English(Karmiloff)	4-year	17.5	2.9	2.3	0.8
	5-year	0.8	0.0	1.0	2.1

Of all incorrect answers multiword reactions were by far the most common. This holds good for both groups. 41.5% of the total amount of responses by the illiterates were multiword answers and for the low-literates 20.8%. Other errors were anticipations (guessing the next word of the sentence) and giving a non-target single word, but these error types occurred only incidentally. There were not many monosyllabic reactions either and those that occurred were mainly caused by the selection of the ambiguous item *naartoe* (to) as a target, of which the last syllable can also be considered a word in itself. Of the total amount of 18 monosyllabic answers for both groups, *naartoe* (to) was involved 11 times, *allang* (for a long time/long since) 6 times and *alleen* (alone) 2 times. Almost none of the participants gave 'no reply'. Just like in the other studies, not any elision error was made, in spite of the fact that some targets were deliberately selected in order to elicit such errors.

Apart from the multiword answers, which are in the present study more numerous than in the Karmiloff-Smith et al. study (which of course is directly related to the high percentages of correct answers in their study), there are less anticipations compared to the outcomes of Kurvers & Uri. This is probably due to the fact that this study was carried out in a second language.

4.4 Correct scores of the four studies compared

In Table 5 the correct scores of both groups in this study are presented together with those of Karmiloff-Smith et al. (1996) and Kurvers & Uri (2006).

Table 5: Mean scores and percentages correct scores along with the results of the studies by Karmiloff-Smith et al. and Kurvers & Uri.

Word class	Group	Mean (sd)*	% correct
Netherlands (Onderdelinden) n=28			
Open class words	Illiterates	8.79 (4.64)	54.9
	Low-literates	13.29 (3.22)	83.0
Closed class words	Illiterates	6.00 (3.40)	37.5
	Low-literates	9.57 (3.13)	59.8
Netherlands (Kurvers, 2006) n=32			
Open class words	4-year-olds	3.93 (3.09)	24.6
	5-year-olds	3.87 (4.61)	24.2
Closed class words	4-year-olds	3.94 (4.21)	24.6
	5-year-olds	4.20 (4.06)	26.3
Norway (Uri, 2006) n=24			
Open class words	4-year-olds	4.73 (1.56)	29.5
	5-year-olds	4.70 (1.89)	29.3
Closed class words	4-year-olds	4.45 (3.42)	27.8
	5-year-olds	4.23 (3.14)	26.4
England (Karmiloff-Smith et al., 1996) n=48			
Open class words	4-year-olds		76.8
	5-year-olds		97.1
Closed class words	4-year-olds		73.7
	5-year-olds		95.3

* For the Dutch/Norwegian and the present study means and standard deviations are also presented, but not for Karmiloff-Smith et al.

When comparing the present study with the previous studies by Karmiloff-Smith and Kurvers & Uri, it becomes clear that the illiterates were not nearly as good as the English children in the Karmiloff-Smith et al. study. In fact there is a great difference between the correct scores of the English children and those of the illiterates in this study. However, the illiterates performed better than the 4- and 5-year old Dutch and Norwegian children.

5 Conclusions and discussion

On the basis of previous literature, it was hypothesized that

H1 Low-literates perform better on the word awareness task than illiterates.
H2 Open class words will be better recognized than closed class words.
H3 Disyllabic words will be better recognized than monosyllabic words.

The first hypothesis is confirmed by the results found in Section 4.1, viz. that the scores of the low-literates are significantly higher than those of the illiterates. So low-literates are better at isolating words in spoken language than illiterates. The second and third hypothesis are confirmed as well. In Section 4.2 (Table 3), both illiterates and low-literates turned out to have significantly higher correct scores on open than on closed

class items and on disyllabic words compared to monosyllabic words. Realizing that the main difference between the groups was being literate or not, we can draw the conclusion that the word awareness of the low-literate group must have been enhanced by means of their literacy acquisition. Evidently, two years of literacy education have brought about a significant increase in performance of the low-literate group. Although we controlled for size of vocabulary, we cannot exclude the possibility that small differences in vocabulary size may have influenced the results of the task. The results of the present study seem to show that word awareness does not have much to do with age or with linguistic or cognitive development, otherwise the illiterates and low-literates should have performed better than they actually did. So, we can conclude that literacy is an important stimulating factor in the development of one's word concept.

Striking results, however, are the differences found between the various studies. We will compare the adult L2 learners of this study first with the English children and subsequently with the Dutch and Norwegian children.

Adult L2 learners compared with the English children

There are no ready answers to explain the gap in performance between the English children and the adult L2 learners, but one reason is probably the background of the children who participated in the Karmiloff study. They all came from (lower) middle class families. Such families usually introduce their children to books and other printed materials at an early age. In this way children are already made familiar with print before they actually learn to read. Moreover, at school, English children are probably more often and at an earlier moment confronted with early reading practices than in The Netherlands and Norway. Presumably, the English (lower) middle class children of Karmiloff's study had been exposed to printed language more often than the adult L2 learners of the present study. The latter reported that they did not have many literacy experiences in the sense that they had only seldom seen any printed material in their native country. Both groups of adult L2 learners were not literate when living in their native country and only learned to read and write after their arrival in the Netherlands. It is quite conceivable that a person, whether a child or an adult, who comes into contact with written language and sees the spaces that are used between the individual words, will become more aware that oral language also consists of individual units of speech. This may not only explain the fact that the illiterates lagged far behind the English Kindergarten children, but it may also clarify the difference between the illiterate and low-literate group, as the low-literates had more experience with printed language than the illiterates.

One might object that the differences between the adult L2 learners and the English children should be attributed to the fact that the present study was carried out in the L2 of the adults and that they probably did not know each word that was used in the story. This is, however, not very plausible, since the story was taken from a book, which was especially suitable for L2 learners. Moreover, from the participants' reactions (either facial or verbal) it was clear that they understood the content of the story very well. Their reactions varied from laughing at a funny episode to asking concerned questions about the intentions of the witch and breathing sighs of relief when the story took a turn for the better.

Adult L2 learners compared with the Dutch and Norwegian children

When comparing the scores of the Dutch and Norwegian pre-reading children with those of the adult illiterates, one might reasonably have expected the illiterates to perform as badly as the 4- and 5-year-old Dutch and Norwegian children, since neither of them was able to read nor write. It is, however, remarkable to find that the illiterates perform better on this task than the 4- and 5-year-old Dutch and Norwegian children. This difference in performance may be caused by the fact that the illiterates who participated in this study had already learnt an L2. This may have stimulated the development of their word concept, since bilingualism is supposed to foster one's metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 1986). When one realises that bilingualism may enhance one's word awareness, we can assume that the scores of both groups would have been even lower when this study had been carried out among monolingual illiterates and low-literates. This all the more strengthens the claim that literacy plays an important role in the development of the concept "word".

Furthermore, the adult participants found themselves in a different situation from the children. The adults were taking an L2 course and therefore they were probably more focused on words than the Dutch and Norwegian children in the study by Kurvers & Uri. Finally, it is possible that a teacher, in order to increase the learners' vocabulary, had just discussed one or more of the target words orally. Some of the target words, such as *vader* (father), *oor* (ear), *arm* (poor) that had relatively high correct scores, may well have appeared in vocabulary exercises. In that case words are usually better recognized, since they have just been dealt with in class.

Open and closed class words in the three studies

Contrary to the findings of Karmiloff-Smith et al. and Kurvers & Uri, who found no differences in the correct scores on open and closed class words, the present study reveals a significant difference between open class and closed class items. These outcomes are in line with several of the older studies (Karpova, 1966; Holden & MacGinitie, 1972). It shows that both illiterates and low-literates performed significantly better on open class words than on closed class words. Yet, this may not be as remarkable as it seems to be, when one realises that the participants of this study were beginning L2 learners. It is common knowledge that L2 learners first and foremost focus on open class words, because these words explicitly convey content and this is exactly what L2 learners need in their communication. Analyses of the speech of L2 learners show that L2 learners, at least in the initial stages of the L2 acquisition, mainly use open class words (e.g. Van de Craats, 2000:32-34). So, L2 learners are at first not very much concerned about closed class words, since these words are mainly used for syntactic rather than for semantic purposes. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that open class words were significantly better isolated than closed class words.

Open class words that were best recognised by both groups were *arm* (poor) and *aap* (monkey). Both words have a clear meaning. Not surprisingly, closed class target words were also isolated in proportion to their semantic significance. The more lexical content a word had, the better it was recognised as an individual unit of speech.

Word accent seemed to be an influential factor, too. This might explain the difference between monosyllabic and disyllabic words as well. E.g. words like *ander* (other), *eigen* (own) and *waarom* (why) were better isolated than words like *een* (a or an) or *z'n* (his), the latter being unstressed. A closed class word like the article *de* (the) was not noticed to be an individual word by any single participant. This is in accordance with

previous findings (Kurvers, 2002) and comprehensible as Van de Craats states: "It is evident that they [L2 learners] focus their attention on lexical items with the clearest content, and, that they do not even perceive 'unimportant' small function words (often unstressed)" (2000:33). Evidently, both a word's meaning and whether a word was emphasized or not determined the degree to which a word was isolated as an individual linguistic unit.

Moreover, owing to the ceiling effect among the English children, it was impossible to find differences between the two groups. The poor performance of the Dutch and Norwegian children made it equally impossible to detect differences between both groups.

Conclusion

Before making a few concluding remarks, two restrictions should be made concerning the interpretation of the present results and the comparison with the previous studies by Karmiloff-Smith et al. and Kurvers & Uri. The present study was only a small-scale study, so the data from one participant may considerably influence the results of the group as a whole. One might be inclined to think that this has not happened, because the results were quite uniform. Nevertheless, one should always be aware of such unintended effects. The other reservation concerns the comparison between the results of the study by Kurvers and those of the present study, since the story that was used in the present study was not the same as the one used by Kurvers. This was inevitable because the groups of participants greatly differed, the one involving children, the other adults. One does not read a children's story to adult participants, of course.

In this study it was shown that low-literates performed significantly better on a metalinguistic word awareness task than illiterates. Two years of literacy education caused an increase in performance of around 25%. The findings of the present study support the theory that literacy plays a crucial role in the development of one's metalinguistic awareness and confirm the conclusion of Kurvers & Uri that those who cannot read nor write, whether adults or children, do not have a clear word concept and indicate that literacy acquisition enhances one's awareness of words.

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Appendix 1: Target words in the story

	Open class		**Closed class**	
	Vowel- initial	Consonant-initial	Vowel-initial	Consonant-initial
Mono-syllabic	Aap (monkey) Arm (poor) At (ate) Oor (ear)	Hout (wood) Nacht (night) Plaats (place) Kwam (came)	Een (a) Ook (also) Op (on) Uit (out)	Zijn (his) Hier (here) De (the) Ver (far)
Di-syllabic	Eten (eat) Oudste (oldest) Eigen (own) Ander (other)	Nieuwe (new) Koken (boil) Hete (hot) Vader (father)	Alleen (alone) Over (over) Allang (long) Alles (all)	Tegen (against) Jullie (you) Naartoe (to) Waarom (why)

WHAT *DO* TEACHERS DO?
A LOOK AT THE ORAL SKILLS PRACTICES IN THE LESLLA CLASSROOM

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1 Introduction

This paper concerns what teachers say in their verbal interactions with their LESLLA[1] students during the practice of the oral skills. Many studies have focused on interaction in the L2 classroom (Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 1990, 1999; Gass, 1997; Johson, 1995; Mackey, 2007; Van Lier, 1988, 1996, 2001) but none have taken a look at interaction during the practice of the oral skills in the literacy classroom. This paper will do just that. Most of the studies in the past focusing on the L2 classroom have not taken the L2 literacy classroom into account. Consequently SLA theory is largely based on the performance demonstrated by literate, and often highly educated L2 learners. Bigelow & Tarone, who have undertaken one of the few experimental studies on the effect of literacy on the oral production of a L2 state that 'The failure to investigate illiterate learners has resulted in SLA theory that may not account for the full range of contexts in which human beings learn L2' (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004:690). They continue by stating: 'If accepted findings describe only literate and educated language learners, then theory has limited applicability and little value in guiding teachers who work with illiterate learners' (op. cit.). In undertaking a study concerning illiterate learners one must take into account that these learners are, in the first place, low- or not educated and low- or non-literate, meaning that the written word is not available as a support in their study. Parallel to their limited literacy skills, literacy students' command of the L2 oral skills is often very restricted. This means that their vocabulary and the intrinsic knowledge of sounds, words and sentences are inadequately developed. Consequently literacy students have a double challenge: learning to read and write while at the same time working on the oral skills, the building blocks on which learning to read can materialize. Also as Bigelow et al., (2006:666) stated 'lack of L1 literacy may affect not just the acquisition of L2 literacy, but also the use and acquisition of L2 oral skills.' Secondly, through the lack of formal education literacy students have not learned the cognitive skills necessary for learning success in a classroom context. For many of these learners formal education such as in a classroom is their major source for developing these skills. If, for whatever reason, their access to the L2 is restricted, the classroom is their only source. For these reasons

[1] LESLLA is an acronym for Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition. Here I will use this term to refer to this specific type of second language learner.

knowing what goes on in the L2 classroom is of the utmost importance. This study focused on two questions: what characterizes interaction in the L2 literacy classroom during the practice of the oral skills and specifically, how does the student partake in the interaction? In section 2 the method, participants and classroom activities will be described. In section 3 classroom interaction will be discussed. In section 4 student initiations will be examined. The results will be presented in section 5 with a final discussion and conclusions in section 6.

2 Method

The data for this longitudinal on-going study was collected during the practice of the oral skills of six different L2 literacy classrooms at centers of adult education in the Netherlands (see also Strube, 2006, 2007). Each class was observed eight times, once a month in the period from November 2006 to October 2007. The recordings of the classroom sessions were transcribed and analyzed. The teacher-student verbal interactions were then analyzed according to structure and question type. For this paper five minutes of the initial activity in each classroom were selected for analysis. Below, the participants and the classroom activities are described.

2.1 Participants

All the students in the six classrooms belong to the Leslla category of learners, which means that they have had no or just a few years of education in their country of origin and were illiterate or low-literate upon arrival in the Netherlands. Table 1 gives a summary of the students in each class.

Table 1: Student characteristics of the literacy classroom during oral practice for the six classes at onset of the research project circa January 2007

Class room	Age		Gender	Country of origin	Years of schooling				Years in the Netherlands	
					L1		DSL			
	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	35.3	13.3	14 F	various	1.7	2.5	0.8	0.6	9.3	11.8
2	41	10.6	11 F	various	0.3	0.8	1.3	1.4	4.9	3.2
3	46.4	15.8	6 F 1 M	various	1.1	1.9	1.1	0.4	2.6	2.3
4	33.0	13.4	10 F 1 M	various	3.8	3.5	0.8	0.8	3.8	4.7
5	48	7.1	13 F	Morocco	0.6	1.5	1.3	0.3	15.4	7.4
6	42.8	8.5	11 F	10 Mor. 1 Turkey	0	0	1.8	1.2	14.5	7.2

2.2 Classroom activities

In all six classrooms the whole class worked together on one central activity with the teacher in control. She was the one who decided how the activity was to be executed, what material was to be used, and who was allowed to speak, with whom, and when. The initial activity in classroom 1 was the weekend story. First the students, in dyads,

told each other about their past weekend happenings. Then each student had to tell the whole class about his classmate's weekend. Classroom 2 started each lesson in a fixed manner: first the date, then the weather and finally news of the week passed the review. Here a distinction is made between talking and telling (see also Van Lier, 1988: 153-54). Talking refers to a conversation, a spoken exchange of ideas and implies two or more speakers. Telling expresses the giving of information, such as instructions, explanations, or a story and usually involves only one speaker. In classroom 1 the students were telling about weekend events, while in classroom 2 the students were talking about the news. Classroom 3 was working on the topic 'the house', the rooms and their contents. After having located a particular room on a prefabricated floor plan, the teacher would ask each student in turn about that particular room in their own house. In classroom 4 the topic was grocery shopping. Working with a work sheet and real objects the teacher reviewed vocabulary, the formation of the plural and the use of the present singular of the verb to have. In classroom 5 the teacher started by greeting the students, not to be polite, but as a review of the routine. Subsequently she reviewed the days and the months of the calendar. Classroom 6 focused on making sentences. First the teacher placed at random objects in front of each student. Then each student had to name the object along with the correct definite article (Dutch has two definite articles, 'de' and 'het'). With that word, with or without use of the definite article, the student had to construct a simple sentence. Table 2 gives a brief overview of these classroom activities.

Table 2: Classroom activities in the literacy classroom during oral practice for the six classes during a single observation.

Classroom	Topic	Activity objective	Materials
1	Weekend story	Telling about events	None
2	Calendar, weather and news of the week	Vocabulary and talking about events.	None
3	The house	Vocabulary, telling and preposition use	Floor plan
4	Grocery shopping	Vocabulary, plural formation and the verb to have.	Worksheet and real objects
5	Greeting and the calendar	Routines and vocabulary	None
6	Making sentences	Vocabulary and sentence structure.	Real objects

3 Instructional interaction

Classroom interaction tends to have an instructional quality (Ellis, 1990; Johnson, 1995; Van Lier, 2001). For this reason, I have termed this type of interaction as 'instructional interaction' and will focus primarily on verbal interactions between teacher and student. The most common type of instructional interaction is called the IRF exchange pattern. In this pattern I stands for initiation which usually is the teacher's input; R stands for response and is the (student's) reaction to the initiation; F stands for feedback and is the (teacher's) evaluation of or follow-up to the response.

In 1975 Sinclair and Coulthard brought this structure to the attention of researchers and educators. Later researchers such as in 1979 Mehan and Cazden in 1988 showed that in the classroom the IRF pattern is the most frequent type of teacher-student exchange pattern. It occurs most often in teacher-fronted type of classrooms where the teacher controls all the events from topic choice to activity and interaction structure (Ellis, 1990, 1999; Johnson, 1995; Van Lier, 1996, 2001). There has been considerable criticism on a too frequent reliance on this structure in the language classroom as it does not allow for student variation or experimentation. The IRF exchange pattern does not leave room for asking questions, expanding on requests, self-correcting or even initiating an exchange outside the requested response (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982; Ellis, 1999; Mercer, 2001; Van Lier, 2001). In spite of these drawbacks, Van Lier (1996, 2001) proposed that the IRF exchange can be a valued pedagogical tool with different pedagogical purposes. Depending on the type of questions asked the student can be requested to produce learned material, explain usage or even display understanding. If viewed from this angle the IRF exchange structure becomes an important didactic technique in classroom interaction. It is not a question *if* this pattern occurs, but rather *how* it is manipulated. In this paper is discussed how the IRF exchanges manifest themselves in the Leslla classroom and what effect these exchanges have on L2 learning. In subsection 3.1 the types of questions that teachers pose are discussed and in subsection 3.2 the pedagogical focus of these questions are discussed.

3.1 Types of questions in instructional interaction

Within the IRF pattern variation can occur through the types of questions the teacher poses and through the focus of her questions, either on form or meaning. Question types can broadly be grouped into two main categories: referential versus display questions and open versus closed questions. Referential questions are also referred to as real or genuine questions by Spada and Fröhlich (1995). The answers to such questions are not known by the teacher beforehand and they are usually not restricted in form and often contain more than a few words. An example of a referential question is: What did you do yesterday? In contrast to referential questions stand display questions. These types of questions are also referred to as test or tutorial questions in that the teacher expects a predetermined answer (Ellis, 1990). These questions are frequently routine type of questions which check for knowledge or understanding, such as: When is your birthday? The student's response is often restricted in form and is usually short.

The second category is the open versus closed questions. Open questions require more than a mere 'yes' or 'no' answer. Often they contain who, what, where, when, why and how questions, such as: Where will you go on vacation? Open questions are frequently referential questions. In contrast stand the closed questions for which only one answer is possible. It could be a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, such as in: Is today Friday? or a choice out of a closed set of possibilities, such as in: What day is it today? Example (1) illustrates the basic IRF pattern taken from classroom 6 where the students have to name an object along with the correct definite article.

(1) *Basic IRF pattern in the classroom*

1 Teacher:	*En wat is 't, de of het vaas?*	(initiation – closed display)
	And what is it, (de) or (het) vase?	
2 Student:	*De vaas.*	(response)

	(de) vase.	
3 Teacher:	*De vaas, goed zo, ja.*	(feedback)
	The vase, good, okay	

Here we see that the student's response in turn 2 is sandwiched between the teacher's question and her feedback. The teacher's closed display question, checking on grammar knowledge, seeks only one answer – the correct definite article for the given noun. In her feedback, turn 3, the teacher concludes by adding a positive reinforcement signalling that the response was correct. As to be expected, not all interactions strictly follow the IRF pattern as in example (1). Most interactions are variations of extended IRF patterns with re-initiations and multiple feedbacks. A wrong answer to a question might even be ignored by the teacher who then re-initiates her question by rewording it or by changing from an open referential to a closed display question. When the student responds to her feedback the teacher may continue with another feedback. In the following sections expanded types of IRF exchange patterns will be illustrated.

3.2 Focus and IRF instructional interactions

In addition to questions being open referential, closed referential, open display and closed display, they can also focus on a particular pedagogical purpose – that of form or meaning. A question focusing on form refers to the linguistic content and is directed toward aspects of grammar, vocabulary and/or pronunciation. A focus on meaning pertains to the manner in which the language is applied for communicating ideas, thoughts or information and to the ability to use language appropriately in a particular situation (Canale & Swain, 1980). This involves functional and sociolinguistic knowledge which, when incorrectly used, can result in producing the wrong communicative effect (Hymes, 1972). Example (1) above, is clearly an example of a form focused instructional interaction. The student nor the teacher are engaged in meaningful exchange of information. The focus in example (2) is on meaning and grammatical accuracy plays a subsidiary role. It is taken from classroom 2 in which the students are talking about the calendar and the news of the week. Just previous to this example the teacher stressed the importance of watching Dutch television for language development.

(2) *IRF instructional interaction with a focus on meaning*

1-Teacher:	*Jij, maar kijk jij televisie thuis?*	(initiation – closed referential)
	you, but do you watch television at home?	
2-Student:	*Turkije nee, nee.*	(response)
	Turkey no, no.	
3-Teacher:	*Jij kijkt alleen Turkse televisie?*	(confirmation check)
	You only watch Turkish television?	
4-Student:	*Uuh computer, kenne praten Turkije computer.*	(response)
	Uuh, computer, can talk Turkey computer.	
5-Teacher:	*Jij praat met de computer?*	(confirmation check)
	You talk with the computer?	
6-Student:	*Turkije familie Nederland.*	(response)
	Turkey family Netherlands.	
7-Teacher:	*Okay, maar jij kijkt niet naar de Nederlandse*	(feedback)

televisie?
Okay, but you don't watch Dutch television?

In this extended IRF exchange the teacher has already initiated twice with closed referential questions in trying to get the student to focus on the topic of the moment – the importance of watching television. Example 2 starts with her third initiation to which the student in turn 2 gives a seemingly illogical response. The teacher tries to follow the reasoning of the student by responding with a confirmation check in turn 3. In turn 4 the student is apparently able to demystify the ambiguity of his replies as the teacher's check for confirmation in turn 5 seems to reflect some understanding. In her closing remark, turn 7, the teacher reverts to her original question of watching television and concludes that the student probably does not watch Dutch programs on television. This example distinctly shows how a teacher maneuvers in the face of obvious grammatical problems to comprehend the message the student is trying to convey without correcting linguistic errors.

4 Student initiation

In spite of skilful lesson planning not all that happens in the classroom develops according to plan. The above example (2) is one example of an unplanned interaction to which the teacher must react. In that example the teacher is trying repeatedly to get the student to respond to her questions while at the same time the student is trying to get his own message across. On the surface it appears that the teacher and the student are on different lines of thought, but there is a certain relationship between the two. The teacher, telling the students about the importance of watching television, triggered one student's memory on the subject of using the computer to communicate with relatives in the home land. Van Lier states that "it is predominantly during unplanned sequences that we can see learners employ initiative and use language creatively" (1988:215). Students taking initiative in the initiation phase in IRF exchanges are examples of such unplanned initiatives. In example (2) the teacher repeatedly tried to pull the student back to the subject at hand, while the student did not want to be sidetracked from his own topic. Even though the language the student produced spontaneously was flawed, it was a creative endeavour. In the samples of classroom interactions four types of teacher reactions to student initiations surfaced: a cut-off reply, corrective feedback, negotiation of meaning and negotiation of content. These are discussed in the following subsections.

4.1 Student initiation and teacher cut-off reply

The first example, example (3), is from classroom 5 during a review activity on dates and the calendar. It illustrates how the teacher maintains a tight control over the interaction by using a cut-off technique.

(3) *Student initiation with teacher cut-off reply*

1-Teacher:	*Wat is de datum vandaag?* What is the date today?	(initiation – closed display)
2-Student A:	*Uuh zes februari.*	(response)

	Uuh six February.	
3-Teacher:	*Zes februari.*	(feedback)
	Six February.	
4-Student B:	*Januari thuis.*	(student initiation)
	January at home.	
5-Teacher:	*Ja, januari is thuis. Dit is februari.*	(teacher feedback)
	Yes, January is at home. This is February.	

Turns 1-3 depict a basic IRF exchange during which the teacher initiates using closed display question to ask for specific information. Then in turn 4 another student unexpectedly pops up with a remark, which on the surface seems to have no bearing on the topic at hand. Most likely the mention of the month (February) triggered the student's memory about the preceding month (January). The first two weeks in that month were still Christmas vacation, during which the student probably was at home. To this bit of information the teacher does not respond by evaluating the utterance, as in a corrective feedback, nor does she ignore it. She gives an indication of having heard the utterance – in this instance by repeating it – but does not follow through on it. She then immediately pulls the student back to the topic at hand, consequently closing off any possibility for further development on part of the student and by doing so keeps control of the activity in the class.

4.2 Student initiation and teacher feedback

Example 4 illustrates how the teacher replies to a student initiation with a corrective feedback; in this case a recast. This example was taken from classroom 1 during the weekend story exchange.

(4) *Student initiation with teacher feedback*

1-Student:	*Zondag ook zitten thuis en schoonmaken en eten …*	(student initiation 1)
	Sunday also sit home and Clean and eat …	
2-Teacher:	O*kay*, *prima. En Mina …*	(cut-off reply and initiation)
	Okay, fine. And Mina …	
3-Student:	*En uuh strieken.*	(student initiation 2)
	And uuh eron.	
4-Teacher:	*Strijken, denk ik, strijken hè, strijken.*	(corrective feedback)
	Iron, I think, iron hè, iron.	
5-Teacher:	… *En wat heeft Aida gedaan?*	(teacher initiation continued)
	… And what did Aida do?	

In turn 1 the student is giving a closing remark on the weekend activity of her classmate. The teacher gives a short cut-off reply in turn 2 and immediately goes on to the next student. The student, ignoring or not having heard the cut-off reply by the teacher, continues his message in turn 3. The teacher responds in turn 4 with a corrective feedback on the student's faulty pronunciation. Then in turn 5, as if this interruption had not taken place, the teacher finishes the request she started in turn 2.

4.3 Student initiation and teacher negotiation of meaning

Example 5 is taken from classroom 1 during the weekend story activity. Here the teacher tries to keep the conversation going while at the same time she checks her understanding of the student's message by using confirmation checks. Student A starts off to tell about the weekend of student B. Student B cuts in and the interaction continues between the teacher and student B.

(5) *Student initiation with teacher negotiation of meaning*

1-Student A:	*Ik weet het niet precies voor uuh.* I don't know exactly for uuh.	(response)
2-Student B:	V*oor bril voor mijn dochter.* For glasses for my daughter.	(student B initiation)
3-Teacher:	*Okay.* Okay.	(teacher feedback)
4-Student B:	*Klaar met uuh.* Finished with uuh.	(student B initiation)
5-Teacher:	*Voor de crèche voor de kinderopvang?* For the nursery for the daycare center?	(confirmation check)
6-Student B:	*Nee voor bril.* No for glasses.	(response)
7-Teacher:	*Okay, okay, ze moest 'n nieuwe bril, ah ze moet 'n nieuwe bril.* Okay she had to have new glasses, ah she had to have new glasses.	(confirmation check)
8-Student B:	*Ja.* Yes.	(response)

In turn 2 the teacher accepts student B's interruption by responding with a feedback of acknowledgement (turn 3) while student B continues her story. In turn 5 the teacher concludes in a 'confirmation check in advance' that student B's comment has something to do with the daycare center – information she apparently already was aware of. Her assumption is incorrect as student B corrects her to which the teacher responds with a true confirmation check. Throughout the entire second part of the interaction the teacher is not partaking in the exchange as a conversation partner, but remains a teacher by intermittently checking her own understanding.

4.4 Student and teacher negotiation of content

Example 6 illustrates the use of negotiation of content and is taken from classroom 2 where the topic is news of the week. Three different students partake in the interaction with the teacher.

(6) *Student and teacher negotiation of content*

1-Teacher:	*Hebben jullie het echt niet gehoord?* Haven't you really heard?	(initiation – closed referential)
2-Student A:	*Waarom*? Why?	(student A response)

3-Teacher:	*Dat weet ik niet. Dat weet ik niet waarom.* That I don't know. That I don't know why.	(teacher response)
4-Student B:	*Twee mensen in Zaandam.* Two people in Zaandam.	(student B initiation)
5-Teacher:	*Twee mensen in Zaandam ook?* Two people in Zaandam too?	(teacher response)
6-Student B:	*Ja.* Yes.	(student B response)
7-Teacher:	*Waren dat ook Turkse mensen?* Were they also Turkish people?	(teacher response)
8-Student B:	*Ja, Turkse mensen.* Yes, Turkish people.	(student B response)
9-Student C:	*Waarom altijd Turkse mensen?* Why always Turkish people?	(student C response)
10-Teacher:	*Ik weet het niet. Ik weet het niet, F….. .* I don't know. I don't know, F….. .	(teacher response)

In this exchange, although the teacher initiates in turn 1 with a closed referential question, she is actually demonstrating surprise rather than seeking a response to her question. Thus she veers away from the static question-answer format inflicted by the IRF pattern allowing student initiation and encouraging class participation creating genuine class involvement. To the teacher initiation student A asks why in turn 2 and the teacher answers. Here it is not a matter of non-understanding by the student because of lack of linguistic knowledge. The student clearly understands the message, but wishes more information on the subject. This type of questioning is referred to as negotiation of content (Rulon & McCreary, 1986; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). 'The negotiation of content is the process of spoken interaction, whereby the content of a previously encountered passage (aural or written) is clarified to the satisfaction of both parties, either NSs or NNSs' (Rulon & McCreary, 1986:128). Student B sets in with an initiation in turn 4 spontaneously offering more information. Surprised, the teacher responds in turn 5 with confirmation check on the content of the message and in turn 7 asks for elaboration on the given information. This is a clear example of a social interaction where the participants are spontaneously responding to each other by using negotiation of content.

5 Results

In Table 3 the statistics referring to the IRF pattern and the question types for each classroom are given. Table 4 gives an overview of the types of teacher reactions to the student initiations in each classroom

5.1 Activity focus

All the classes, except classroom 1, focused on vocabulary building. Of these three classrooms, numbers 3, 4, and 6, also focused on grammar. In three classrooms a major part of the activity was focused on talking or telling; these were classrooms 1, 2 and 3. The difference between talking and telling was made in the discussion in subsection 2.3.

In classroom 2 talking involved several students during the topic a certain news item. Classrooms 1 and 3 focused in the activity on telling. In classroom 1 each student had to tell about another student's weekend. In classroom 3 the student told about their own house in response to the teacher's questions.

5.2 Initiations

The results clearly indicate that teacher initiations were most prevalent in all the classrooms, averaging 87%. The classes with the most teacher initiations were classrooms 3, 4, 5 and 6. These were 95.3%, 95.8%, 88.9% and 91.3% respectively, with an average of 92.8%. Classrooms 1 and 2 have the least amount of teacher initiations, 71% and 80% respectively. Student initiations occurred in these classrooms the most: 29% and 20% respectively. In sharp contrast, student initiations occurred in the other four classrooms (3, 4, 5 and 6) 4.7%, 4.2%, 11.1% and 8.7% respectively, or an average of 7.1%.

Table 3: Number of student and teacher initiations in IRF exchanges and the distribution of question types in the teacher initiations for each classroom during the first five minutes of the initial activity.

		Initiations			Teacher initiation question types				
Classroom	Activity focus	Teacher initiations	Student initiations	Total initiations	Referential open	Referential closed	Display open	Display closed	Total
1	Telling	22	9	31	8	8	0	1	17
		71%	29%		47.1%	47.1%	0%	5.9%	
2	Vocabulary/	28	7	35	2	10	0	8	20
	talking	80%	20%		10%	50%	0%	40%	
3	Vocabulary/	41	2	43	9	17	3	5	34
	Telling/gram.	95.3%	4.7%		26.5%	50%	8.8%	14.7%	
4	Vocabulary/	23	1	24	0	0	0	15	15
	grammar	95.8%	4.2%		0%	0%	0%	100%	
5	Vocabulary/	32	4	36	2	1	0	20	23
	Routines	88.9%	11.1%		8.7%	4.3%	0%	87%	
6	Vocabulary/	21	2	23	0	0	1	9	10
	grammar	91.3%	8.7%		0%	0%	10%	90%	
Totals		167	25	192	21	36	4	58	119
		87%	13%	100%	17.6%	30.3%	3.4%	48.7%	100%

5.3 Teacher initiation question types

In each class, except classroom 6, more than half of the teacher initiations were questions. Other types of initiations were, for example, the giving of information or instructions. These types of initiations were not included in the analysis in Table 3 as

they did not require a student response. Four types of questions were taken into consideration: the open and closed forms of referential and display questions, discussed in subsection 3.1. Of these four types of questions, the display closed questions occurred most frequently and the display open least frequently, an average of 48.7% and 3.4% respectively. By taking a look at each class separately another picture emerges. In classroom 4, 5 and 6 an overwhelming majority of the questions were display closed, 100%, 87% and 90%. On the other end of the scale the percentages for classroom 1, 2 and 3 were 5.9%, 40% and 14.7%. Display open questions occurred incidentally in two classrooms, numbers 3 and 6, with 8.8% and 10% respectively.

The occurrence of referential questions gives an entire different picture. Although the averages for the referential open and referential closed were 17.6% and 30.3%, the majority occurred in classroom 1, 2 and 3. In those classes the referential open occurred 47.2%, 10% and 26.5% and the referential closed questions occurred 47.1%, 50% and 50% respectively. In the other three classes, referential questions (open and closed) only were asked in classroom 5 with 8.7% referential open questions and 4.3% referential closed.

5.4 Student initiations and teacher reactions

Student initiations occurred in all the classrooms, but stand out in classrooms 1 and 2 with 29% and 20% of the total number of initiations being student initiations. In the six analyzed samples four different types of teacher reactions to student initiations occurred: cut-off reply, corrective feedback, negotiation of meaning and negotiation of content (see section 4). By looking at the totals it seems that most of the teacher reactions are feedbacks and negotiation of content. In each class feedbacks occurred, but negotiation of content only occurred in classroom 2 and 5. All the other types of teacher reactions occurred sparingly in the classrooms. Cut-off replies were only found in classrooms 1, 5 and 6. Negotiation of meaning occurred only twice and that was in classroom 1. Three responses, which were not further analyzed, were student reactions to student initiations. These occurred in classroom 1 and 3.

Table 4: Student initiations and types of teacher reactions for each classroom during the first five minutes of the initial activity.

Class-room	Total student initiations	Types of teacher reactions to student initiations				Student response to student initiation
		Cut-off reply	Feedback	Negotiation of meaning	Negotiation of content	
1	9	1	4	2	0	2
2	7	0	1	0	6	0
3	2	0	1	0	0	1
4	1	0	1	0	0	0
5	4	1	1	0	2	0
6	2	1	1	0	0	0
Totals	25	3	9	2	8	3

6 Discussion and conclusions

In answering the questions posed at the beginning of this paper, investigated a small sample of teacher–student interactions in six Leslla classrooms during the practice of the oral skills. In using the IRF structure it was illustrated that the teacher could inhibit a student's opportunity to expand on his utterance by using for example a cut-off reply as well as enhance a student's opportunity to speak by using negotiation of content. Classrooms 3, 4, 5 and 6 were strongly form focused classrooms practicing on vocabulary, a routine and/or grammar. Little room was left open for student initiation and expansion. In all four of these classrooms the teacher persisted in using the IRF exchange structure. When a student came forward with an unrestrained remark the teacher responded with either a cut-off reply (example 3) or with a corrective feedback (example 3). Classroom 5 illustrates that during unplanned instances students sometimes do react spontaneously, if not creatively. A broken window and the possibility of a repairman coming that same morning triggered students to react with questions – they were negotiating content. These spontaneous reactions were not bound by the classroom activity as were those during the activity practice. In classroom 2 students also responded spontaneously, but during the activity news-of-the-week. The subject of this particular news item, a liquidation in the Turkish criminal circuit, inspired student involvement in the discussion using negotiation of content. The situation was somewhat different in classroom 1. Although the students just as in classroom 2 were not restricted as to language form while telling the class about each other's weekend events, there was no real exchange of information as in a conversation. The teacher did not get involved in the interaction, but remained on the whole a bystander asking and checking for her own understanding. She was the one who used negotiation of meaning, not the students. Nevertheless through her negotiation she forced the student to rephrase his utterance for better comprehensibility. In classroom 3, where the students also participated by telling about their own houses in comparison to the floor plan worksheet, the teacher held strict control on the developments in the class. Intermittently asking referential questions, but only allowing the students to respond within the set frame of the topic. Although the IRF pattern constrains student responses in order to check for knowledge, it also has positive side. Van Lier (1988, 2001) and Mercer (1995, 2001) express that the IRF pattern while checking on knowledge can at the same time can be used to stimulate creative language use by skilful manipulation of questions. If so, then it is essential that these aspects of IRF be explored.

In this discussion it is evident that the IRF pattern is not static. Its usability depends on the type of questions the teacher asks and how she responds to her students. Van Lier views the use of the IRF structure in the classroom as "building a bridge" to creative language use (1996:156). "In addition, teacher-learner interaction, such as the IRF, that is designed for scaffolding learners' language use (cognitively or socially) must contain within it the seeds of handover, that is, the teacher must continually be on the lookout for signs that learners are ready to be more autonomous language users"(Van Lier 2001:104). By selecting her response to her students wisely in the type of questions she poses or the type of feedback she gives the teacher can fluctuate between focusing on rote learning, checking (vocabulary or grammar) knowledge, scaffolding, modelling or even challenging the students to think creatively.

A final point concerns specifically the Leslla classroom. The above described characterizations could also pertain to other L2 classrooms. Therefore the question arises of what is LESLLA-specific. A typical LESLLA learner, as characterized by the teachers who have collaborated with this on-going research project, is foremost a learner with weak study skills. To accommodate such a learner these teachers advocated the use of modelling and scaffolding techniques and ample positive feedback. In a study by Oliver (2000) age differences in ESL classrooms and pair work concerning negotiation and feedback were examined. She observed that "in the child ESL classes the teacher keeps a tight control over the learner's language production, and the resulting didactic pattern of interaction reduces the opportunity for risk taking, and thus for non-target like production" (Oliver 2000:138). Further on in the same article she states that 'topics selected by the teachers for children, and the opportunity they gave their students to discuss them, meant that the child learners were provided with a linguistic scaffold. This scaffold seemed to reduce the possibility of non-native like production' (Oliver, 2000:138-139). This sounds very similar to what is happening in the LESLLA context where the didactic pattern, the IRF structure, is predominant – only allowing a predetermined selection of responses. In the LESLLA classrooms the topics and the practiced language elements were all preselected by the teachers. Of course the LESLLA learner is not a child, but as a child he is at the beginning of his learning process and cannot apply academic skills learned during L1 schooling as a literate adult. In studying the LESLLA learner in a classroom context it is essential that next to interaction patterns aspects of learning skills should also be considered. Further research of the material will reveal if indeed the above results exemplify what happens in a LESLLA classroom.

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COMPUTER-BASED LEARNING: WHAT AUTOMATIC SPEECH RECOGNITION HAS TO OFFER

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1 Introduction

Teacher-fronted instruction, with a teacher who teaches many students, is a very common teaching setting in many countries. This also applies to language learning, although one could imagine that having a teacher who can devote all his or her attention to only one or a few students would be more beneficial, especially when practicing oral skills. In fact, research has shown that students who receive one-on-one instruction perform as well as the top two percent of students who receive traditional classroom instruction (Bloom 1984). The problem is that, in general, a human tutor for every student is not feasible, because it is too expensive and there are not enough teachers. A possible solution would be to use computer tutors: computer-assisted learning (CAL). Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has already received considerable attention. Many text-based CALL systems have already been developed, in which information is provided on the computer screen (the output of the computer), and the user can interact by means of a keyboard and a mouse (the input of the computer). But what about speech?

Speech-based applications certainly do exist. A well-known example is the screen reader, a program that reads aloud the text presented on the computer screen. Many websites now offer the possibility of listening to the text. Another example is the reading pen (Figure 1) which can be used to make printed text audible by moving the pen over the text line by line. These and other applications are used by people with reading problems, such as visually disabled or dyslexic people. In these applications use is made of text-to-speech technology, which is also referred to as speech synthesis. More applications with speech synthesis will certainly appear on the market. A recent application is a mobile phone that makes texts audible (Figure 2): a photo is taken of the text, optical character recognition (OCR) technology converts the photo to characters, and speech synthesis converts the characters into speech.

Text-to-speech technology is also used in CALL programs, thus making it possible to practice listening skills. For speaking skills, programs have been developed in which the learner is invited to speak: however, often nothing is done with this speech, no assessment is carried out, or the speech is recorded and the learner has to decide for herself whether her utterance was correct by comparing her utterances to the stored examples. Although self-assessment is better than no assessment at all, it is known from the literature that L2 learners are not always able to detect their own errors. In addition,

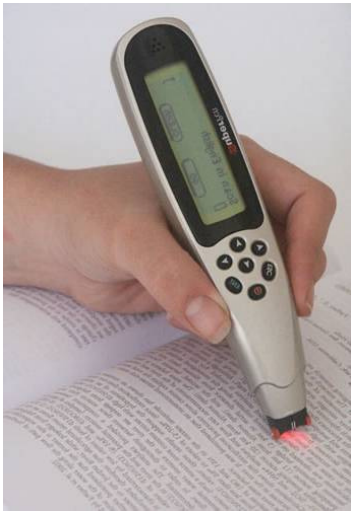

Figure 1: Reading pen

Figure 2: Mobile phone for making texts audible

one should be careful in the way comparison between the learner's output and example utterances is carried out (Neri et al., 2002). In some CALL programs oscillograms (waveforms) or spectrograms of the example (target) and the learner's utterance are shown. In general learners are not clearly instructed about how to interpret these displays and are encouraged to imitate the example utterance. Many learners find such displays difficult to interpret and non informative. Furthermore, imitating examples obviously is not the optimal way to learn languages. A better way of helping learners would be providing corrective feedback on the basis of an automatic analysis of their speech. Teachers do this all the time, but the question is whether computers can do it.

A possible way to do this is by using automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology. However, up till now relatively little use has been made of ASR in computer-based learning. In the current paper a short overview is presented of some possibilities that ASR has to offer in computer assisted learning (CAL, section 2), computer assisted language learning (CALL, section 3), and finally in literacy training (section 4).

2 ASR-based CAL

In speech-driven CAL applications the system first has to recognize the utterances. This can be done by means of automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology. ASR is already used in many applications. In dictation systems ASR is used to convert speech spoken into the microphone into words that appear on the computer screen. In fact, this is exactly what I am doing now in 'writing', or better dictating, this text (by using a dictation system that I have installed on my computer). Sometimes the dictation system

makes errors, but these errors can easily be corrected, and even if you consider the time needed to correct errors, dictating for me is more efficient than typing.

ASR is also used for 'command and control'. A well-known example is that on many cellular phones one can speak a name or another short 'command' (like "call home" or "call mother") to dial a number. And with the same program that I am using to dictate this text, I can also 'command and control' my PC. For instance, when I spot an error in the dictated text, I utter commands such as "scratch that" and "correct that", and the PC follows my orders. It is also possible to select text and format it, to select files and open them, to read or send e-mails, etc., all through voice commands. ASR is also present in so-called spoken dialogue systems which can be used to obtain information (over the phone) on different topics such as train time schedules (Strik et al., 1997), and weather (Zue et al. 2000).

ASR is gradually improving, thus opening up possibilities to use it in new applications. One of them is ASR-based tutoring. These systems, which are also referred to as Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), are spoken dialogue systems for learning. For example, ITSPOKE is a system for learning physics (e.g. Litman and Silliman, 2004), and SCoT is about shipboard damage control (Pon-Barry et al., 2004). In these ASR-based tutoring systems the students are thus communicating through speech, while the subject is not necessarily language, it can also be another topic such as physics or math. On the other hand, in ASR-based CALL the subject matter is language and speech.

3 ASR-based CALL

ASR-based CALL received increasing attention in the late nineties. In 1998 the 'Speech Technology in Language Learning' (STiLL) workshop was organized in Marholmen (Sweden). This was probably the first time that the CALL and speech communities met, and it was the starting point of a number of STiLL and InSTiL (Integrating Speech Technology in (language) Learning) activities. In 1999 a special issue of CALICO appeared, entitled 'Tutors that Listen', which focused on ASR. It concerned mainly so-called 'discrete ASR', i.e. the recognition of individual words that are uttered with pauses between the words. Obviously, this is not the preferred way of communicating when learning a language. Therefore attention has shifted towards continuous speech. For an overview of the history in this field see e.g. Delcloque (2000) and Eskenazi (to appear).

Most applications that use ASR, e.g. the ones mentioned in the previous section, concern native speech. However, in CALL applications ASR has to deal with non-native speech. Non-native speech is much more challenging for ASR than native speech. In general, non-native speech shows more variation than native speech and is likely to contain non-native speech sounds and more disfluencies such as filled pauses, repairs, restarts and repetitions. ASR is not flawless, not for native speech, and certainly not for non-native speech. Note that this is not even the case for (speech recognition by) humans. Native listeners may have a hard time in understanding what non-native speakers are trying to say. In a normal conversation this is not necessarily a problem: we do not have to recognize each word perfectly to understand the message, and if we do not understand something, we can always make this clear through verbal or non-

verbal (e.g. raising the eyebrows) communication. Furthermore, we use a lot of extra knowledge (general world knowledge, context of the conversation, speaker-specific information, etc.) to recognize utterances. Out of context many native utterances are even difficult to understand, especially those from 'unfamiliar voices' (i.e. spoken by persons the listener does not know). It is extremely difficult to include these aspects in an ASR-based CALL system.

Even though ASR for non-natives is certainly not perfect yet, it can be usefully employed in CALL applications if one takes its possibilities and limitations into account. This is what we did in our research. We have carried out research on the assessment of oral proficiency, pronunciation error detection, and pronunciation training; and currently we are involved in research on pronunciation, morphology, and syntax training for L2 speaking. Some of these projects are briefly mentioned below.

From 1996-1999 we were involved in the project 'Automatic Testing of Oral Proficiency' (ATOP, http://lands.let.ru.nl/~strik/research/ATOP.html). Methods for testing oral proficiency were proposed, implemented and tested, and the resulting scores correlated well with human judgments. Especially oral fluency could be assessed well by means of automatically calculated temporal measures. Speech technology can thus also be applied to carry out assessments at several levels (for fluency, but also for pronunciation, morphology, syntax, etc.; see below).

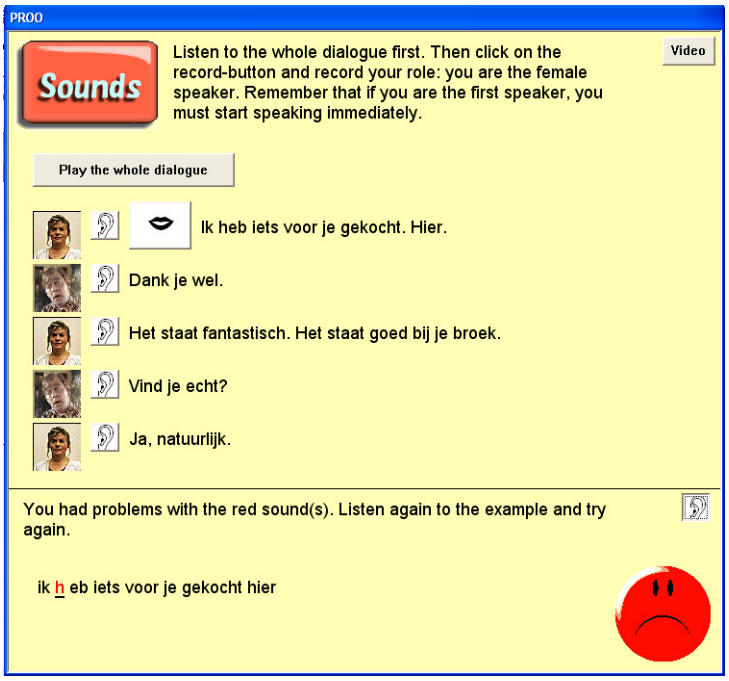

Figure 3: Screen shot of the Dutch-CAPT system.

In the Dutch-CAPT (Computer Assisted Pronunciation Training) project (Cucchiarini, Neri, and Strik, to appear; http://lands.let.ru.nl/~strik/research/Dutch-CAPT/) a pronunciation training system was developed that gives feedback on segmental errors (see Figure 3). In this system we try to simulate a communicative setting. Users first look at a video. Depending on their gender they than play the male or female part, and the system plays the part of the other interlocutor. The system recognizes the spoken utterances, and after the conversation the feedback is presented. For instance, in Figure 3, the feedback is that the first sound of the second word was not pronounced correctly. The user can then listen to the example utterance and a recording of what was uttered by the user, and try again. In addition to these 'dialogue-type exercises' there are also some other exercises, e.g. with minimal pairs (short versus long vowels, etc.). For language learners who used this system the decrease in the number of pronunciation errors addressed in the training was substantially larger, compared to a control group that did not use our system (Cucchiarini, Neri, and Strik, to appear). The language learners only used our system four times (once a week, for 30 to 60 minutes). More intensive training will probably lead to larger improvements.

In the Dutch-CAPT system we gave immediate feedback on pronunciation errors (see Figure 3). In order to do so we developed algorithms for pronunciation error detection. Using a more generic ASR-based technique the algorithms correctly detect the pronunciation errors in about 80-90% of the cases (Cucchiarini, Neri, and Strik, to appear). However, if we focus on certain errors and make use of specific acoustic-phonetic information for each of these errors, the performance of pronunciation error detection can even be improved (Strik, Truong, de Wet, Cucchiarini, 2007; to appear).

Currently we are involved in a project called DISCO: Development and Integration of Speech technology into Courseware for language learning (Cucchiarini, van Doremalen, and Strik, 2008; http://lands.let.ru.nl/~strik/research/DISCO/). In this project we will develop a program for oral proficiency training for Dutch as a second language (DSL). The application optimizes learning through interaction in realistic communication situations and provides intelligent feedback on various aspects of DSL speaking, viz. pronunciation, morphology and syntax. In Figure 4, a syntax exercise is shown: "zinnen maken" ['making sentences']. The prompt is "O, dat is interessant! Wat heb je precies gevolgd?" ['Oh, that is interesting! What have you exactly followed?']. The prompt is shown on the screen, and made audible (recorded utterances). The learner can choose from some possible answers: "Ik (heb) (een opleiding X) (gevolgd)." ['I (have) (a course X) (followed).']. In the final application the word groups within brackets will be presented in a random order. The learner then has to put it in the correct syntactical order, and utter it. The order of the words within the brackets should remain fixed, the complete word groups within brackets can be swapped. Using ASR the user gets feedback on the spoken utterance, and the dialogue then proceeds depending on the chosen answer. The complete dialogue is structured as a tree with various branches, and thus the dialogue could evolve differently the next time the learner enters the exercise. We will develop dialogues on several topics, each of them structured as a branching tree. Within the team of the DISCO project we have people with various kinds of expertise, e.g. on DSL teaching, acquisition, and related pedagogical aspects, on designing language courseware (keeping in mind pedagogical goals and personal goals of the learners), on developing speech technology for language learning, and on

software integration. This project is carried out within the framework of the Stevin Program (http://taalunieversum.org/taal/technologie/stevin/).

Figure 4: Screen shot of the DISCO system.

Furthermore, a new project, 'corrective feedback and the Acquisition of Syntax in Oral Proficiency' (ASOP; http://lands.let.ru.nl/~strik/research/ASOP.html), will start soon. In this project we will compare and test different types of (corrective) feedback, in order to study the effectiveness of different feedback forms.

Finally, we are involved in a demonstration project with the Dutch title 'Alfabetisering met een luisterende computer' (learning to read and write with a listening computer; http://lands.let.ru.nl/~strik/research/ST-AAP.html). In this project we will 'add speech technology' to an existing literacy training course called 'Alfabetisering Anderstaligen Plan' (AAP; http://www.alfabetiseren.nl/). In the current version of the course no evaluation is carried out on spoken utterances. Evaluation of the spoken utterances will be made possible in the ST-AAP project by developing suitable speech recognition technology. This project, like the DISCO project, is carried out within the framework of the Stevin Program.

4 ASR-based literacy training

Research on reading tutors already started long ago, e.g. the Listen system by Mostow et al. (1994) and the STAR system by Russel et al. (1996); and still receives attention, e.g. within the Flemish SPACE project (Duchateau, et al., to appear). Note that in reading tutors it is not the computer that reads, it is the learner that reads. The text that

has to be read is displayed on the computer screen, and the computer tracks the learner (by means of ASR technology) who is reading what is visualized on the screen (e.g. a prompt jumping from word to word). Optionally, the computer can give additional feedback, e.g. if it notices that the learner has problems reading some parts of the text it can provide reading (pronunciation) instructions.

Interesting work has also been carried out in the Foundations to Literacy reading program (see, e.g., Wise et al., 2008). For instance, exercises have been developed to teach phonics (see Figure 5) and fluency, by means of interactive books (see Figure 6). Marni, the virtual person on the top-right, acts as the teacher: natural voice has been recorded and can be made audible, accompanied by synchronized lip movements and facial expressions. In the phonics exercise (Figure 5) the learners look at the screen and listen, and respond by means of keyboard and mouse; and in the interactive books (Figure 6) the learners read the text aloud, and the system tracks them by means of ASR.

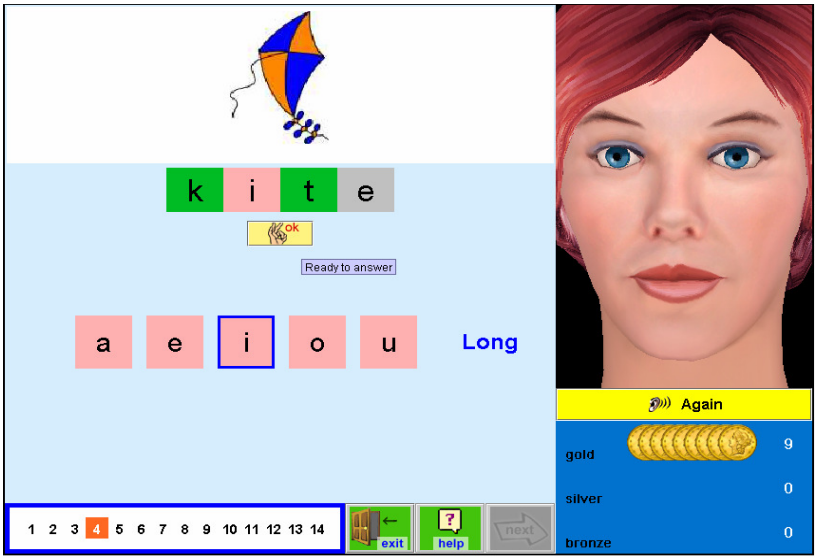

Figure 5: Training phonics

So far, most of the research carried out concerned children, but there is also is a need for literacy training programs for adults. What are the possibilities regarding speech technology for literacy training? First of all, useful listening exercises could be made by using text-to-speech technology. Many good quality text-to-speech programs are available nowadays; the speech is intelligible but does not always sound natural, i.e. one can hear that it is not a human voice but a computer voice. Another option is to use recorded speech, which obviously is more costly and less flexible. Text-to-speech technology is more flexible because it can easily be applied to new texts and because it is easier to change aspects of the produced speech, such as speech rate, pitch, and voice types (e.g. different female and male voices). Given the quality of the current state-of-

the-art text-to-speech technology, an interesting question is for which applications (goals) text-to-speech technology can be applied within the context of literacy training.

Speech technology can also be used for oral proficiency training and assessment. In general, ASR technology can be applied to recognize sounds, words, and utterances. In addition, it is possible to calculate a measure (a so-called confidence measure) that quantifies how well the recognized unit (sound, word or utterance) matches the speech signal. This combination of recognizing different speech units (sounds, words and utterances) and calculating confidence measures for these speech units can be used creatively to develop many exercises for oral proficiency training. Some examples are provided below.

In the ideal case, the software should be adaptive in several ways: the exercises should adapt to the level of the learner, and the errors made by the learner (e.g. the speech rate could be gradually increased; and if someone frequently makes errors regarding vowel length and much less on the voiced-voiceless distinction, that person should be presented many exercises on vowel length and much less on voicing); the user interface should adapt to the preferences of the learner (e.g. someone could have preferences for the amount of feedback (much or little), the type of feedback (at meta level or not), the timing of the feedback (immediate or delayed), etc.). In addition also the ASR should be adaptive. Every speaker, native and non-native, has its peculiarities, and if the speech recognizer can tune in to 'the voice' of that person the performance can be increased substantially (i.e. the number of errors made by ASR can be substantially reduced). There are several ways to do this. The first option is so called enrollment: at the start the user reads some text that is presented on the screen, and the recorded speech material is used to retrain the speech recognizer. This is a kind of adaptation in advance, before actually using the system. Another option is to adapt during use. This can be carried out in a supervised way, in which the user has to confirm whether an utterance was recognized correctly or not, or in an unsupervised way, in which the system has to determine automatically which utterances should be used for a adaptation.

In order to get a better idea of the possibilities of speech technology, and more specifically automatic speech recognition (ASR), for literacy training, some examples are presented here. Practicing phonics (sound letter combinations) has already been briefly mentioned above. One option is that the learner listens to speech sounds produced by the system, and enters what the corresponding graphemes are (Figure 5). Another option is that the learner reads the graphemes presented on the screen, pronounces the corresponding speech sounds, the system checks by means of ASR whether the correct sounds have been uttered, and provides feedback.

Such procedures can be carried out for single speech sounds, but similar procedures can be carried out for combinations of speech sounds, whole words, and even utterances. In all the examples in this paragraph, ASR is employed to analyze what has been said by the learner, and then to provide feedback on it. For instance, the learner reads a complete word on the screen, e.g. "kat" [cat], or listens to the word, and then utters the phonemes one by one (in this example, the three phonemes corresponding to the three graphemes in the word "kat"). It could also be done the other way around: the system pronounces the individual phonemes, and the learner has to utter the complete word. Another possibility is that the student repeats utterances orally. The utterances could consist of single words, combinations of words, complete sentences, or even a couple of sentences (depending on the level of the student). These utterances

could be presented visually (i.e. text on the screen), auditorily (i.e. speech generated by the system), or a combination of both (as done in the Dutch-CAPT system, see Figure 3). In all these exercises, the pace could be gradually increased in order to make the exercise more challenging, and to enhance automatization.

Besides text-to-speech and ASR (speech to text) technology, other kinds of technology might also be useful for literacy training. For instance avatars, virtual persons (of which often only the head is shown) in the form of two- or three-dimensional models, that are often present in computer games. Avatars could be used, either as the interlocutors in a communicative setting (see, e.g., Figure 4), or as a virtual teacher that gives instruction and feedback (like Marni in Figures 5 and 6). For providing instructions and feedback on pronunciation a special kind of avatar may be useful (which is often called a virtual talking head) for which it is possible to show the positions and movements of the articulators. In the future it might also be possible to make creative use of the many resources present on the Internet, such as youtube movies. In many cases it might also be useful to include gaming aspects. Playing games is often stimulating and motivating, not only for children, but also for adults.

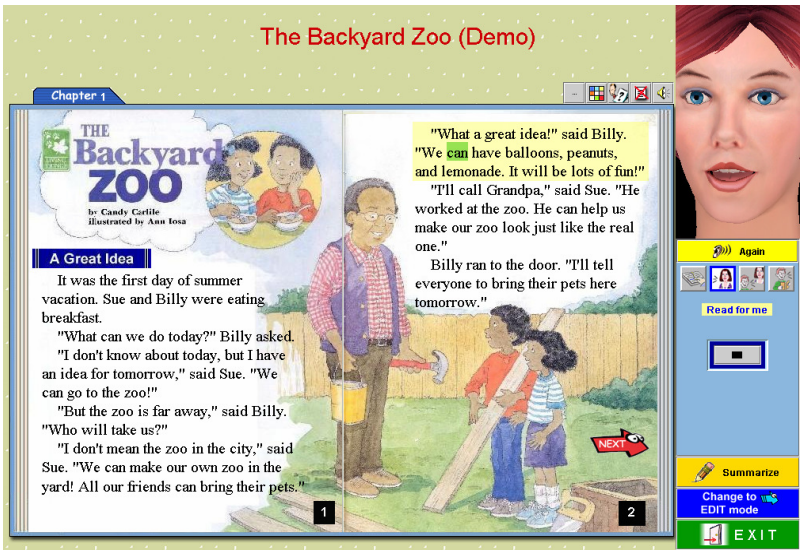

Figure 6: Interactive book

5 Discussion

At the moment the number of text-based CALL systems is much larger than the number of speech-based systems. Furthermore, ASR is used in only a small fraction of the speech-based systems. Given the current state of ASR technology, it is possible to usefully apply it in CALL applications. Using speech has many advantages. First of all,

for many of us it is more natural, easier, and faster than using the keyboard or mouse. The speech signal also contains extra information, such as prosody (which is related to word stress, sentence accent, etc.), which can provide information on the emotional state of the speaker, or the confidence with which the utterances were spoken.

Important aspects of ASR-based CALL systems are that they can provide immediate feedback on errors in the spoken utterances, which is important for successful training. These computer programs can be available 24 hours a day, making it possible to practice more intensively than is usually possible with human teachers. These systems can also be available everywhere. Using them in a more private setting could be less stressful, and could stimulate learners to be more talkative. After all, it is known that many learners are reluctant to speak when others are present and that practicing is important to improve speaking proficiency (Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

ASR is not flawless, as was already mentioned above. Still ASR-based tutoring is possible if one takes account of what is possible with current technology, and what is not. ASR-based tutoring can be useful in cases where the subject matter is not speech, for instance for physics and mathematics (see the examples in section 2). Obviously, ASR technology becomes even more important when one has to practice oral skills, e.g. if one wants to learn another language, or for people with communicative disabilities. In the near future, the number of ASR-based tutoring systems will certainly increase, especially the number of ASR-based CALL systems.

Owing to the increasing mobility of workers around the world, the demand for language lessons is growing steadily in many host countries. In several cases the demand clearly outstrips the supply and immigrants have to wait months before being enrolled in a language course. A compounding problem is that many immigrant workers simply do not have the time to attend language courses. Such situations call for innovative solutions that can make language learning more effective, more personalized, less expensive and less time consuming. ASR-based CALL systems seem to constitute a viable and appealing alternative, or complement, to teacher-fronted lessons. ASR-based CALL is certainly interesting for non-literate learners for whom speech is even more important for communicating; especially for teaching non-literates ASR offers many promising possibilities.

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LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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1 Introduction

The research by Plichart (2003) showed the traditional class-oriented approach in second language teaching is not very suitable for low-educated learners, especially not for LESLLA learners for whom it takes a long time to reach a basic level. Therefore, following Verhallen (1996), who initiated the development of language learning outside the classroom in Amsterdam, we introduced all kinds of extramural learning activities not only for the highly educates learners, but also for low-literate and illiterate learners.

In 2007, we contributed to the project 'Practical language training for non-native speakers: how to help people settle down in culturally diverse Flanders.' This project was carried out by the Flemish Ministry of Civic Integration in cooperation with VOCVO (Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education), Karel de Grote-Hogeschool (a University College) and two centres for basic education (CBE Willebroek and CBE Leuven).

CBE Willebroek developed and implemented the methodology while VOCVO coordinated the project and Karel de Grote-Hogeschool examined the effects of the project in relation to communicative competencies and social integration. The project also produced a complete manual (including a CD-Rom and DVD) with the underlying vision, all the necessary information about objectives, organisation, the target group, a step-to-step-plan and multiple types of exercises and tasks for low-literate and illiterate learners. It is meant for all teachers and facilitators interested in starting practical language training.

In this article we will introduce the manual and comment on the following triptych: 1) 'extramural tasks', 2) 'made-to-measure activities' and 3) 'practical language training'. The course participants we are referring to are illiterate learners and participants with learning difficulties.

2 Why learning activities outside the classroom?

2.1 Vision and goals

Learning activities outside the classroom have become of key importance in our vision of second language education, for literate, low-literate and illiterate learners. 'Klasse', a teachers' magazine edited by the Flemish Ministry of Education (Klasse, 2005) stated

that 70% of the learners can learn best by discussing, 80% through 'acting' and 90% by explaining things to others. Research and experience have shown that people learn to speak Dutch fluently much faster through everyday contacts, than through a programmed and restricted class drill (Verhallen, 1996). Moreover, throughout the years, we have realized that it does not matter whether the immigrant learners have been living here for two or for 20 years; when there is no real interaction in Dutch, they never learn the language.

Learners can also find that the transfer from what they learn in class is too restricted. As a result, participants of language classes may become frustrated because what they learn and exercise in class cannot be applied outside classroom. They wish for more opportunities to have real language practice as they cannot find it in their own language environment. And classical 'homework' that mainly consists of drill exercises, is not of much benefit.

2.2 Learning activities outside the classroom as part of an education programme

As the language acquisition process benefits from frequent real life contacts, learning activities outside the classroom have gone together with our in-class teaching practice. For several years now it has become a working method in Willebroek. In a first phase extramural tasks are introduced, the next step is the made-to-measure training; and finally there is a real practical language training. Practical language training can be used to wrap up language classes and it may act as an incentive for the learners to continue learning.

We start with these learning activities outside the classroom right from the beginning of the language classes, for literate, illiterate and slow learners. It is needless to say that there is an ongoing adaptation process with regard to these learning activities.

The teacher acts as a coach who helps learners learn to realise that extramural contacts are very important for language acquisition. Language education is linked to the learners' actual operating areas through real-life tasks that are handled in class, with feedback being given afterwards. Awareness tasks are used in the beginning to help learners to see the various opportunities to learn language outside the classroom. Their attention needs to be focused towards all kinds of everyday situations where they can hear, speak, read and write Dutch. We focus on these things particularly in the literacy courses.

3 Extramural exercises

3.1 How to proceed as a teacher-coach?

Extramural exercises in the first phase are second language exercises where the preparation and processing and evaluation are done in the classroom but the tasks themselves are performed outside the class so that there can be real language in natural surroundings.

The first thing a teacher-coach has to do is to select a communicative teaching method with functional exercises and tasks, because then it will become easier to find appropriate activities connected with the theme and subjects in the class.

The teacher-coach must also provide functional material including a lot of visual material for illiterate participants. The teacher-coach must not forget that the core of a language task is doing something, acting in a real life setting; for example the learner must ask for directions; he has to make an appointment; he will take notes, etc.
Extramural exercises require these three steps:

1. Preparation in class. The learners must dare to speak, which is not obvious at all, therefore it must be learnt first in a safe classroom environment. This step is important, especially for literacy learners. Learners can practice in pairs or in small groups or the teacher can organise a role play.

2. Realisation of the task. For example, sometimes, the learners perform their task in pairs: then the weaker student can learn while listening.

3. Subsequent discussion in class on the basis of an handout. The learners must evaluate their exercise: What went well? What did not go well and what was the reason? Their experience might be negative or they may have had difficulties with the instructions. The teacher-coach must take sufficient time for the discussion and focus on those learners who try to avoid their extra-mural tasks. He must also try to encourage them to do it better next time.

3.2 Various kinds of extramural exercises

There are numerous opportunities outside the classroom for additional language learning. An example of a very popular task is: at the beginning of each holiday, participants are given a card to record the number of language contacts they have. They must indicate where and when they heard Dutch. It is notable that the higher number of contacts the participants made, the more they seemed to learn. This awareness can also help them to focus on 'how do I learn? It is important for the learning process to give awareness tasks at regular intervals, for example every week, or before or after a new subject.

Tasks can be adapted to all groups and levels: for example social talk with colleagues in the canteen at work, with neighbours or at their children's school with teachers and other parents ; it is also possible to give different tasks to different learners and to differentiate in this way. The contents can be adapted to the needs of the learners, for example for those who work and those who do not work. A lot of supporting visual material is used for the literacy tasks. So they find out that they are all able to do that for example by watching Dutch television, by talking to their neighbours or by actively participating in school.

Some tasks, like 'take a note', or 'understand information,' are linked to the objectives of the modules from the second language course; others like 'listen to people talking on the bus', 'read opening hours', 'ask for a flyer' or 'complete the coupon for a free catalogue' are connected with the four language skills listening, reading, speaking and writing.

3.3 Conditions for extramural learning and results

The teacher-coach must make the learner realise that they are responsible for their own language acquisition and that they can learn or pick up language everywhere. As extramural learning is usually done without a teacher, this should be made clear to the learner. This requires time and energy as it takes quite some time for learners to realize that learning opportunities are all around them.

The outcome speaks for itself: the learner is more motivated. In the end learners become more learning-conscious. Tasks help them to improve the 'language contact quality' in their environment; for example good contacts with neighbours, the courage to communicate with the child's teacher, being able to ask the doctor for extra information. Extramural activities may also be used as means for permanent evaluation in order to get a certificate.

Although there is no doubt about the possible positive results, extramural activities are time consuming in comparison with a normal teaching programme. Most of the tasks are 'classroom-oriented' and still controlled. Some learners, especially in the beginning of a course, do not always consider the tasks to be 'important' at that particular moment. Others are not motivated: they do not understand why these tasks are useful; they only want to do classroom exercises. So the teacher-coach must try to motivate and encourage the learners to do their best to carry out the extramural tasks.

Another important condition is that the language trainee should have the opportunity to have meaningful language contact by being involved in the organisation's daily work. We mostly work with non-profit organisations as they know our target audience and generally work with volunteers as well.

Research on the effects of practical language training particularly of the effects on the social integration and participation of the learners was also part of the project (Peytier & Vanpoucke, 2007). According to the learners, their ability to make language contacts and their 'daring' have increased besides a much greater proficiency of Dutch. So they have now a much better contact with their neighbours and their children's school and they are able to speak Dutch in all their contacts with social services and public authorities. The teachers stress a change of attitude towards work and greater self-confidence.

4 Learning to learn

'Learning to learn' is a method through which learners learn to think about their own way of learning. They must reflect on how they function in their practical experience in order to enlarge their self-reliance. Learning how to learn comes in a later stage as it is related to self learning in practical language usage situations. We observed that extramural exercises were still too classroom-related and that the transfer could be better; the learners also had little insight into their own learning process. We have chosen to use learning how to learn in some groups as this method emphasises the learners' reflection on their own language acquisition and language usage.

The method prepares learners by means of a 4-stage-plan. It is the teacher's task to coach them in order to find meaningful tasks.

1. Orientation

The learner reflects on his situation: what do I know about this situation in my own country? What do I know about the situation in Belgium? What is different? Do I need to know more about it?

2. Preparation
   The learner reflects on the aim of the exercise. What kind of language is necessary?
3. Acting
   The learners carry out what they have prepared.
4. Evaluation
   What can I do better next time?

This method is used with literate groups, including the participants with learning difficulties, but not with illiterate learners. Due to its abstract nature, it is difficult to apply this method to the latter. We are still looking for ways to make this method more transparent, and to introduce it into the higher modules in the literacy courses (*Richtgraad 1.2* level is equivalent to A2 of the Common European Framework).

5 Practical language training

The transition to practical language training appears to be a logical step for all our second language learners. Learners are offered practical language training as 'the icing on the cake'.

5.1 What is practical language training?

Practical language training gives non-native speakers the opportunity to improve their level of Dutch by letting them work for a period of time as voluntary workers in social organisations where natural language acquisition is stimulated. In practical language training the language contact is the most important thing and not the job itself. Language trainees find out that their language competence is not so bad, and that they have to learn to dare to speak.

Practical language training is possible in any organisation or institution.
What tasks can be given to the participants in these organisations?

- Selling in a third world aid shop.
- Collecting, sorting, repairing or selling goods in a centre specializing in recycled goods.
- Logistic support, providing transport to patients in an old people's home or hospital, doing activities with the inhabitants.
- Helping with school-activities in the kindergarten or at school (preferably with the 4 or 5 year old children), helping with the parents' party, supervision. All these activities are also to be encouraged as part of the parents' involvement at school.
- Kitchen help in a sheltered restaurant, running the bar or serving.

The organisation and the learner discuss the practical language training together. The minimum duration of the training is 40 hours, preferably twice a week four hours. The first practical language training session for literacy learners can occur in *Alfa 4* (which

corresponds with the end of Breakthrough 1.1 (A1) of the Common European Framework). This is meant as an incentive, to make their long learning path more interesting and practical; the second practical language training session can be done in the Waystage R1.2. Both learners and organisations can request a second practical language training session or extend the session.

5.2 Who is fit for practical language training?

As practical language training is supplementary to the regular lessons, it is suitable for all learners who have mastered basic Dutch to the extent that they are able to fend for themselves.

This group of language learners also includes learners from various modules who have come to a standstill or have repeatedly failed particular module targets. However, they need at least some knowledge of Dutch. It is important that the teacher-coach expects the learner to be able to succeed in practical language training even if this target group requires an intensive guidance. Sometimes learners with restricted language skills like the participants with learning difficulties discover that they are capable of doing a lot more than they expected, provided they are given the right boost.

This is true particularly for the literacy students who get often stuck during language instruction because of their 'restricted' writing abilities and are thus missing training and work opportunities. After *Alfa 3* learners have had 240 hours of verbal skills instruction so they are able to start practical language training. Ideally however, practical language training does not start prior to the completion of *Alfa* in the Waystage (600 hours R1.1 oral and written skills). That is why we recommend that these learners take a second practical language training session. Some learners do not dare to proceed to practical language training unless they have reached this stage.

In order to be able to start with practical language training a few more important requirements have to be met. Learners need a good learning attitude and they must attend class. Things like being on time or absence notification are important. The first language trainees from the group have to set a good example and be positive pioneers for other learners. Motivation is obviously important as well and is sure to go up when participants hear about the other learners' experiences.

5.3 Coaching of the language trainees

5.3.1 Time to organise

Coaching of the trainees is vital if the practical language training is to be successful; the first thing that has to be done when practical language training is planned is to make time for the teacher or coach to organise it. In a basic education centre there are various options: someone can be the teacher as well as the practical language training coach or a dedicated teacher-coach coordinates practical language training sessions for trainees from various groups (for example, a group with three participants with learning difficulties and two LESLLA learners).

5.3.2 The learners' abilities and interests

When choosing an organisation for practical language training the coach must take into account the learner's interest and abilities. For instance, when someone wants to function on a professional level, he or she may apply for a 'job' in a day-care centre

while a mother who wants to be more involved in her child's school and thus wants to function mainly on a social level, can help in that school. The participants' interest may also depend on the future education the learner has in mind: for a participant who wants to become a nurse, the training location could be a hospital.

5.3.3 The organisations

It is important to provide sufficient time to contact the organisations and to prepare the learners for possible practical language training, for example, by visiting them or by distributing flyers or hand-outs.

5.3.4 Preparation in the classroom

When the language course starts, the learners are prepared to undertake practical language training. Gradually their motivation should increase and their fears diminish.

There will be an intake interview with the organisation which is prepared for in the classroom. The purpose of the intake interview is to have an initial introduction and to discuss terms. The teacher-coach sees to it that the learner is sufficiently prepared to handle any problems, like for example, whether or not to wear a scarf.

A scene from the DVD shows how learners are prepared by the teacher. They have arrived at about week 3, where the teacher tells them that they had been given the opportunity to think about their language training location the week before. Today the learners may discuss their preferred training location. The teacher questions each participant and then tells a language trainee that she can go ahead. So Nadine, who is planning a traineeship in "t Wrak" (a centre specialised in recycled goods), may call at the centre to confirm the appointment. …
In another scene we witness the intake interview with everybody engaged in the language training job introducing him/her, including the human resources manager and the trainee's coach on the shop floor.
There's also the signing of the contract and Nadine at work.

5.3.5 Evaluation

As the practical language training is part of the language course, the trainees are regularly evaluated during their practical language training. There are mid-course evaluations by tasks the trainee has to fulfil and by means of contacts between the teacher and the mentor at the practical language training location. A final evaluation is also prepared by all parties involved.

On the DVD there is also a scene with a final evaluation.

5.3.6 Tasks

During practical language training learners are given a list with tasks to do, for example, interviewing colleagues. All tasks are prepared and discussed in class.

DVD-scene with Boukahar
Boukahar is a trainee in an old people's home and distributes water to the elderly people. Boukahar has difficulties with reading and writing; he has to read from a piece of paper how much water he needs to fetch from the storage area. The old people's home did not allow us to film the inhabitants so that Bouhabar isn't filmed while doing his job..
The coffee break room is the ideal location for the language trainee to speak Dutch. His fellow workers ask questions about his spare time. So Bouhabar was told to have a social talk during the coffee break. He was individually prepared for this task. He had to ask his colleagues some questions like:
- "Do you like watching television?"
- "What do you watch?" "I like watching …"
- "Do you like listening to music? "
- "What music are you listening to?"
- "Have you got any hobbies?"
We can see that they have some difficulty with understanding each other, but the most important thing is that they are speaking Dutch.

5.4 Conditions for successful practical language training

5.4.1 The trainees

The trainees must invest time and commit themselves to reach the goal. They must attend the classes regularly; otherwise they can never be successful. Illiterate learners require more guidance during the lessons as well as at the practical language training location.

As previously stated, the trainees need a suitable job. We were advised by the staff of Assisted Living Homes that were often used as a location for practical language training. They told us that active trainees who prefer to do things are usually better placed distributing meals and drinks, while talkative learners are better off doing entertainment activities.

5.4.2 The practical language training location.

- A maximum of language contact for the trainees in the training location is required, as language acquisition is the major goal and work is less important.
- Because of the importance of language contact, participants should not be left on their own, for example, to do the cleaning.
- Participants need to do tasks that stimulate intensive language contact.
- An open-minded attitude towards migrants is required from the organisation.
- Ideally, there should be one permanent trainer at the location itself.
- The mentor or trainer must also have insight into the learners' profile.
- It is important for the practical language training location to be prepared to handle the LESLLA learners and the participants with learning difficulties.
- They must have some knowledge about the language background, the possible language barriers and the culture of the trainees (like for example, saying 'yes' when meaning 'no', out of politeness!).

5.4.3 The teacher-coaches

As we said before, the teacher-coaches need sufficient time to prepare and coach the practical language training. They have to be committed to their learners in every respect. They need enthusiasm and must be able to kindle enthusiasm in learners. At the same time they must be able to assess sufficiently the linguistic skills required by the organisation, as well as the learner's linguistic skills level.

6 Conclusion

How relevant are all these activities outside the classroom? What do the participants learn from all these things?

The most important thing is that they 'learn to dare'. Apart from their natural language acquisition the participants learn things they will never learn in class for example, they can observe behaviour on the shop-floor; learn to work with others; and deal with real problems. At the end of the training they all come out much stronger. It is like one of our trainees said in an interview: "I 'm now looking at the world with different eyes!"

This initiative also aids integration. The local organisations and the local population come into contact with non-native speakers and immigrants in a natural way, thus a new world opens to all!

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LITERACY: ASSESSING PROGRESS

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1 Introduction

In the past, assessment was mainly used to streamline second language education in the Netherlands. Levels of proficiency were based upon empirical data, gathered through language tests. The problems with this practical approach were manifold. Since it was not based upon a view of language, levels could not be properly described. There was also a lack of pedagogical underpinning of the use of these instruments, which resulted in the use, or some might say the misuse, of the tests for accountability reasons only. Although the test constructors tried to emphasize the function of measurement for learning by providing self assessment instruments along with formal tests, this did not lead to the intended results. Self assessment appeared not to be used at all. Another problem was that the data was collected from a very heterogeneous, but literate population. As a result, it was hard to tell whether the established levels were based upon language progress or upon complexity of tasks. This made these instruments less suitable for low-educated students and of no use at all for illiterate students.

Some of these problems were solved by the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF) and the portfolio methodology. The former provided a description of language levels upon which assessment procedures can be based and the latter stressed the didactic function. In the Netherlands, this resulted in the development of the *Raamwerk NT2* ('Framework Dutch as L2') and the *Portfolio NT2* (Dalderop, Liemberg & Teunisse, 2002) for literate students. There were, however, still no suitable, valid instruments for literacy students.

This gap was partly filled by the development of the *Literacy Framework* and *Literacy Portfolio* as described in Stockmann (2005). In section 3 of this chapter the literacy portfolio will be discussed in more depth. Section 4 will focus on the development of placement and achievement tests for literacy students. In section 2 we will look at pedagogical considerations underlying the above mentioned instruments.

2 Low-educated adult second language learners

The people concerned in this issue have three main characteristics in common. They are adults, they are learning a second language and they have little or no formal

education. We will briefly explore these characteristics and their consequences for education.

2.1 Adult education

In 1989, Geoff Brindley (Brindley, 1989) stated that adult second language education ignored basic principles from adult education, such as encouraging the active participation or autonomy of the learner and using an approach oriented towards the learning process and towards transfer. The latter means: organising language education in such a way that what is learned can be applied adequately in real life situations.

Autonomy, however, is sometimes viewed negatively by both learners and teachers. Learners can show a lack of self-confidence or can have certain expectations on the teachers' role. Teachers can be over-protective and can feel that their students are not ready to make their own choices or to communicate in the outside world.

We believe that for learners who take up a dependent position, a learning how to learn approach seems an appropriate method. The aim of adult education, including adult literacy is to equip students for personal autonomy and life long learning.

According to Richterich & Suter (1988) components of learning how to learn are: learning how to identify needs and decide on learning objectives, becoming aware of the fact that learning is a matter for the learners themselves, learning how to use personal and institutional sources, learning to discover learning and communication strategies and how to use them. It also implies learning how to make choices and decisions in the learning process and, a very important feature in this context, learning how to evaluate learning and learning outcomes. The key word for all these components is reflection.

2.1.1 Second language learning

The second language learner is in the paradoxical position that he has to learn the language to be able to communicate and has to communicate in order to learn the language. Contact with native speakers is vital in the learning process. Within the dominant language community, however, social and cultural prejudices are confirmed by deviations in social and linguistic behaviour of the L2 learner. The perception of this behaviour often leads members of the dominant language community to consider L2 learners as persons with little communicative competence, with inadequate social behaviour and with little intelligence. This, in turn, discourages L2 learners from making contact with native speakers and creates feelings of incompetence (Perdue, 1982). It is, therefore, important that second language education provides opportunities for contacts in real life situations and also that second language learners learn how to deal with feelings of incompetence. It is also of major importance that learners learn to realistically assess their own learning performance.

While the frequency of language contact is important; the nature of it seems to be even more important. Most contacts that L2 learners make are with formal bodies, like doctors, school teachers, or immigration officers. Research (Klein & Dittmar, 1979) has shown that voluntary contacts in leisure time are much more beneficial for learning. Failure to communicate adequately in formal situations makes learners think that they did not learn anything in class. Often, in formal situations, the discrepancy between what they have learnt and the language level required to communicate effectively is too

great. It is, therefore, very important that education enables them to see progress and to experience success.

2.1.2 Learners with a low educational level

The impact of the above mentioned second language learning situation is even stronger for learners with a low educational level. They are more vulnerable and tend to avoid contacts even more. In educational situations they are strongly inclined to adopt a teacher dependent attitude.

When we add these observations to the fact that an approach in which initiative of the learner is expected, may be less effective in learning basic skills (Boekaerts,1987), one could wonder whether it is wise to promote such an approach. Nevertheless we hold that this approach, albeit in a moderate form, is still a good one. This opinion is backed up by a study by Decharms (1984) and an experiment carried out in the late eighties.

Decharms distinguishes origins and pawns. An origin is a person who determines his own behaviour and strives for his own goals. A pawn is, in his behaviour, dependent on what others do and want. Both notions are based on the concept 'personal causation'. Origins experience an internal, and pawns an external, 'locus of causality'. This means that origins feel that they manage the learning process themselves and pawns feel that they are directed by others or by the situation. People are neither origins nor pawns by nature but depending on the situation, they behave more like origins or like pawns.

Initially, learners may, in learning basic skills, need more support and guidance to gain success. A suitable amount of guidance does not necessarily diminish the feeling of personal causation. Decharms emphasizes that stimulating origin behaviour does not imply a 'laissez-faire' climate in the classroom. On the contrary, he promotes freedom of choices within boundaries and a disciplined climate. Gradual freedom goes along with responsibility for yourself and your fellow students. Decharms trained pupils in deprived schools and five years later these pupils still behaved like origins and had better results than the control group.

2.2 A field experiment

In 1989 we carried out an experiment, inspired by Decharms, by learning how to learn principles and by positive results in Sweden with self-evaluation (von Elek, 1982). Self-assessment and evaluation is a tool which enhances the learning process and its only, but very important, function in education is a formative one. In a setting in which one has to report to external bodies it is less usable. Self-assessment enhances the development of a reflective attitude. It helps to give insight in evaluation criteria. It stimulates goal orientation and task analysis. It facilitates communication between student and tutor on diagnosis and remedial follow up.

This is not the place to describe that study and the results in detail (Janssen van Dieten, 1992; Janssen-van Dieten, 2000) However, to summarise, three teachers were trained to apply a learning how to learn approach in their classes. There were no illiterate students in these classes, but all students had a low level of education. We observed these classes and their teachers once a week and we think that the conclusions based on those observations are of importance in this context.

First of all, from the three teachers only one succeeded in applying the approach in the intended way. She will be referred to as teacher three. It was only her class in which a change of attitude could be observed. Students in her class were able to describe what had changed and told us that they learnt more and enjoyed the new way of learning. Since we did obtain positive results in this group, we explored those factors that could have played a part in the success of their training in more detail by comparing the three teachers and their classes. We did that in close cooperation with the teachers involved.

First, we will discuss teacher dependent factors. A teacher's belief in the learner's abilities to direct their own learning process seems to be a very important factor. Teachers one and two often told us that their students could not or would not take responsibility for their own learning.

A second factor could be that teacher three showed a greater concern for the correct application of the underlying principles than teachers one and two who seemed to be driven by a technical cognitive interest, which means that the activities were central rather than the principles.

A third factor is the teacher's style of instruction. Teacher two was very dominant and he told us that he was unable to change that behaviour. In his class, there were almost only teacher hits, which means that all initiatives came from the teacher. In class one, nearly all hits were student hits and in many cases they came out of the blue and had nothing to do with the subject involved. In class three we observed a balance in teacher and student hits.

We already mentioned that Decharmes set great store by discipline. That was an obvious difference in these groups. In groups 1 and 2 students often did not attend at classes without giving a reason. In class 3, absence was rare and if so, fellow students delivered the absentee the necessary papers.

What we said about the teacher's concern for the underlying principles showed up in the way activities were carried out. All teachers discussed their student's needs but only teacher three met them. In group 3 students chose which problem they wanted to work on, in other words, they formulated short term goals. In groups 1 and 2 all class activities and homework were the same for all students. This differentiation was made possible by teacher three by providing a range of different tasks and exercises from which they could make a choice. And by providing a 'blue' binder in which was gathered what they already had done and on which they could look up the things that they had forgotten.

It is more difficult to draw conclusions about the students, since we looked at groups rather than at individuals. Most students, from all three groups, came from non western countries with a more authoritarian education. It is sometimes stated that the acceptation of autonomy goes hand in hand with level of education, but from the three groups group 3 had the lowest educational level. Group 3 consisted of females only, but it would be too speculative to draw conclusions from that fact.

Ideas like creating a reflective attitude, stimulating out of school contacts, short term objectives, making choices, self-evaluation and formal evaluation of learning outcomes can be found in the material that will be discussed in the following sections.

3 Working with the Literacy Framework Dutch as a Second Language (DSL) and the Literacy Portfolio DSL

The *Literacy Framework DSL* and the *Literacy Portfolio* have been exhaustively described in the proceedings of the first LESLLA conference (Stockmann, 2005). This section presents the most important properties of the Framework and the Portfolio, discusses the implementation of these instruments and reports changes made during the past four years.

3.1 The properties of the Literacy Framework

European countries utilise the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF). This framework was developed in order to establish a transparent, unambiguous interpretation of levels of language use in Europe. In the Netherlands, several frameworks and portfolios based on the CEF have been developed for various user groups. For literacy education, there was no framework in Europe or in the Netherlands. Hence, there was a need to expand the bottom range of the *Framework DSL* for the following reasons:

- To make it possible to speak transparently about levels in literacy acquisition (the same rationale as for the CEF);
- To make visible to students, teachers and local authorities (which function as funding organisation) all progress made by students, even very small increments;
- To use the framework as a basis for a portfolio approach and make the portfolio methodology available to literacy students.

The Literacy Framework incorporates both phonics and a functional description of literacy levels. This reflects the view that in literacy acquisition getting access to the writing code goes hand in hand with the increasing ability to use the written language in meaningful, everyday situations. To make users of the Framework focus on both functional skills and phonics, it was necessary to describe both. The framework describes three literacy levels: Alpha A, Alpha B and Alpha C:

- At level Alpha A, the learner has learnt the alphabetic principle and can read short words but still spells words.
- At level Alpha B, reading and writing is more efficient because frequently used consonant clusters and morphemes are read as a unit.
- At level Alpha C, reading and writing has been automated except for long and unknown words. At level C reading is no longer a cause of delay.

In the Netherlands, reaching level Alpha C is the essential goal of literacy training[1]. Alpha C is identical to the lowest level of the CEF, level A1, which is defined as follows:

[1] This is a result of the adult language education policy in the Netherlands. Funding for literacy courses and funding for civic integration programmes come from different sources. Once the literacy student has reached the Alpha C level, he will be considered 'literate' and enter the civic integration programme.

> Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.
> Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, word and basic phrases and rereading as required.
> (Council of Europe, 2001).

3.2 The implementation of the framework

The *Literacy Framework* was not developed by the government, but was a private initiative. The publication was funded by CITO, the institute of educational measurement in the Netherlands. There are several reasons why it was successful. The most important reason was that schools and teachers needed concepts and levels to communicate with the local authorities. Schools were not able to explain students' progress clearly and found communicating with the local authorities time-consuming. They were able to say what part of the course material students had done, but not to give information about student's performance or level.

The separation between phonics and functional aims in the Framework made the teachers less dependent on course material and textbooks. Experienced teachers were quite familiar with the process of acquiring literacy. However, the Framework gave them reassurance that they had not overlooked important aspects and also made it possible to control their course material better. In recent years, there has been a good deal of staff turnover at the regional education centres (ROCs). The Framework facilitated training of new teachers by helping them understand the steps in literacy acquisition. Many schools implemented the Framework through teacher training. Through training, teachers could learn to interpret the Framework and practise evaluating texts written by students.

The connection of the Literacy Framework to the European Framework (underpinning the courseware for literate students in the Netherlands) makes it easy for students who have completed the literacy training, to enter courses at their level. In the past, they were often made to start again at zero.

In 2007, the Framework was revised. The first edition had a few ambiguous descriptions and these have been replaced. The Framework is published on the Internet and is now freely accessible. The ministries responsible for education and civic integration have adopted the Framework and refer to it on their websites.

3.3 The properties of the Literacy Portfolio DSL

In the portfolio, the descriptions of functional reading and writing skills from the Framework are placed in an everyday context. The portfolio provides a checklist for students in which examples of real life tasks are used. Students are encouraged to reflect on questions like: 'Can I find the phone number?', 'Do I understand what this note tells me?' 'Could I copy this address?', 'Could I write my name on this form?' To 'prove' they can do it, students collect evidence of their performance in comparable real life tasks. Three varieties of the checklist have been published, focusing on the domains of bringing up children, labour and general participation in society.

The portfolio methodology is an important innovation in literacy education. It contributes to students' autonomy by providing insight into the objectives of literacy training. This makes them less dependent on their teacher and the education they receive. They can develop activities by themselves to improve their language skills.

The portfolio methodology contributes to learning how to learn: students reflect systematically on their own capacities when they use the examples of the checklist. Also organising the evidence they have collected in their portfolio contributes to the development of study skills as does the responsibility students carry for their portfolio. Many students feel extremely encouraged and stimulated in this approach. They experience success. They become proud of their results. The portfolio empowers the literacy student. The language can be used in a personal context and students can experience use of written language in meaningful situations. Working on the portfolio brings the outside world into the class room.. Acquisition of literacy, just like the entire second language acquisition process, is focused on applicability in daily life. Last but not least students can clearly see the progress they make.

3.4 The implementation of the portfolio

The *Literacy Framework* and the *Literacy Portfolio* have been published at the same time. Not only the Framework but also the Portfolio was received very well. As we mentioned before, teachers and schools were in need for instruments that provided insight into literacy students' progress, not only because standardised tests that existed at that time were not meant for and could not be used for measuring progress in literacy students, but also because existing portfolio-tools had been developed for literate students. So evidence of progress could hardly be given, which was a serious problem for both students and local authorities. The evidence that students collect in their portfolio provides insight into what they have achieved, insight for the student in the first place. This turns out to be of major importance for students, who are proud of the work they have done and are, much more than before, aware of the steps they make. The portfolio evidence has also been used to prove that the course is successful to local authorities.

A fact that may have contributed to the success of the Literacy Portfolio is that the portfolio approach is widely used in the Netherlands. In the past six years, there has been a movement to more competence-based education in elementary, secondary and higher vocational education. In this kind of education the portfolio is a powerful instrument. As a result, it became a known approach, and not just one used only by literacy students.

Many schools implemented the portfolio together with teacher training. In training, teachers learn how to use the portfolio in their classrooms and to do 'homework' in their classes. They exchange experiences in order to stimulate each other. The fact that schools spend time and money on this innovation makes it more important for those involved.

The portfolio is not a fixed instrument. Schools and teachers can adapt the portfolio by choosing examples from the local environment. At present, Cito is developing a new portfolio which is linked to the content of civic integration courses in the Netherlands. This should facilitate meeting the civic integration standards for literacy students and save time reaching this goal.

4 Assessment

This paragraph explains the development of formal testing instruments based on the *Literacy Framework*. After the launch of the *Literacy Framework* and the *Literacy Portfolio*,

teachers began to express the need for standardised measurement instruments in addition to the Portfolio. The need for two types of tools was felt:

- Tools that would help in decision making relating to the placement of new students. This can be either placement in the right group at the student's level, or the choice of the right course materials at the students' level in an individual course.
- Tools that would more reliably and more objectively help determine if a step from one level to the next has been made. The main reason for teachers to want a test in addition to the portfolio is accountability. In the Netherlands the local authorities (as funding organisation) increasingly want more insight into the results of their investment in courses.

There are several reasons to be reluctant about test development for low educated learners. It is easy to develop a test that fails to provide insight in these students' skills. The main challenge was, therefore, to design a test in such way, that it would meet both the interest of students and the needs of teachers, schools and local authorities.

4.1.1 Students' interest

It can be in the interest of students to take tests. Students, who start in a literacy class in the Netherlands, have often been living in the country for a while, and many have been in literacy classes before. As a result of the Civic Integration Act that was launched in 2007, many low-skilled students have started to join courses again. A short course, or a course that is as short as possible, is in the interest of almost every adult, since studying the Dutch language and literacy is a requirement that has to be met alongside fulfilling different kinds of tasks such as working or bringing up children. Adequate placement helps the students to start from the right point so they will not feel frustrated because they are being made to do tasks which are not the right level for them.

Once students have started their course, it is important for them to get insight into their progress. This will help them to keep up their motivation and contributes to attendance and persistence. The portfolio meets this aim in several ways, as said before, but a test can also boost the student's self confidence, as long as it provides a positive experience. Therefore, the literacy assessment toolbox we aimed to develop should have several characteristics to meet the needs of the students:

- Test tasks must allow students to perform their skills. The focus must be on what students can do, not on what they cannot do.
- Test tasks must make sense. Students must be able to recognize tasks. Tasks must have the characteristics of real life tasks.
- The test must provide a positive experience.
- The test must not rely on study skills, computer skills or experience in taking tests.

4.2 The interest of teachers and local authorities

Students are of course the very important 'party' in the triangle that is formed by students, teachers and the local authorities. However, both teachers and local authorities are of great importance, and it is vital to address their needs when it comes

to testing and test development. To understand the importance of test development in the Netherlands, it might be necessary to explain something about the current Civic Integration Act *(Wet Inburgering)*. A civic integration programme is obligatory in the Netherlands for both new arrivals and certain groups of immigrants that have lived in the Netherlands for a longer period of time but do no meet certain standards. Civic integration courses are provided on a commercial basis. This means that local authorities ask several parties to bid for a certain programme and they choose one or more. The emphasis on accountability, therefore, is strong: if an educational institute cannot show clear results, it will probably not been chosen again.

So far, literacy is not part of the Civic Integration Act as literacy students are expected take a literacy course before enrolling in the civic integration programme. However, as an emphasis on accountability is beginning to enter the literacy field, there will be more importance placed on it in future education and regulations.

Both schools and the local authorities could benefit from a tool that provides insight into progress. This insight starts with the entrance level. As previously mentioned, most students are not new arrivals, many have been on courses before and many have some literacy skills. The more a course can meet student's needs and fits with a student's entrance level, the more cost efficient it will be.

A second component of accountability is a measure of progress. As the *Literacy Framework* is implemented more or less all over the country, this progress must be reported in terms of the *Literacy Framework*.

Progress in literacy students often comes slowly, therefore, for both schools and students, it is important that the tools help to make small steps visible. On a big-step-scale, a student who does make progress would not be able to show this progress in the tests. This could cause the funding to be cut as the course would appear to have no effect. On the other hand, we have not tried to meet the wish of those funding organisations that ask for reports of progress every six weeks. We do not think it can lead to reliable measurement and it would put too much focus on testing and would be too time-consuming for both students and teachers.

The time consumed by administering the test is an important point for teachers. As their time is limited, they prefer tests that can be administered quickly.

4.2 What does the literacy tool box look like?

The toolbox consists of a placement test and an achievement test. Both focus on the measurement of reading and writing. The placement test combines two levels in one booklet: there is an AB-booklet for reading skills and one for writing skills, both containing tasks on the levels Alpha A and Alpha B, and a BC-version which contains tasks on the upper two levels. The B-level tasks are presented in both versions. A pre-selector (a very short test) helps deciding which booklet should be offered to the student.

The achievement test consists of one booklet for each level and each skill. Both the placement test and the achievement test have an extended teacher's manual. The tests are administered orally by an assessor in a face to face and one to one setting. The assessor reads the instructions to the student and makes sure the student has understood the instructions. The student can ask questions if the instruction is not clear. The manual tells the assessor exactly what help he can provide. In general this is:

- explaining difficult words;
- repeating the instructions;
- repeating the instructions using different words.

In writing tasks, the assessor can help the student by telling him them where to write unless the task in question is testing whether a student knows where to write, for example, a task asking a student to fill in a form. In the reading test, most questions, apart from those tasks that focus on comprehension of written instructions, are provided orally by the assessor. Answers are given orally by the student. In general, for each test task we have developed, we have asked ourselves the question: 'what skill do we want the student to perform?' and we have removed as many other difficulties from the task as we can.

The one to one administration of tests is time consuming for teachers. One teacher taking part in the field experiment for the development of the achievement test told us that although this was the first time that she had been able to get insight into the students' skills as individuals, the time investment required was more than she could afford. This brings up the question of what the individual programmes actually achieve when you do not know what your students can do. On the one hand, it seems unfair given the time investment they make, to provide students' with a course that 'might' meet their needs, however on the other hand, we realise that teachers are busy and there is no reason to consume more of their time than is necessary. Therefore, the tests are as short as possible, as long as the test reliability could be guaranteed.[2]

In the achievement test, on the higher levels, some multiple choice questions have been introduced. This is for two reasons. Firstly, as these parts of the test can be administered in a group, it makes administration easier for teachers and consumes less of their time. Secondly, introducing multiple choice questions in the test will also mean introducing multiple choice questions in courses, which will help students to prepare for their civic integration tests, which will follow once the literacy programme has been completed.

4.3 Development

The literacy tool box was developed for a small market. There are about 10.000 literacy students in schools in the Netherlands. It was developed by Cito, the Dutch Institute for Educational Measurement and without external funding. As a result, the budget was limited and it was important to think of measures that would guarantee that a certain amount of booklets would be sold. In the Netherlands, as in other countries, teachers photocopy many of their materials. To avoid photocopying, in the last few years, Cito has frequently published web-based tests. For this target group however, a computer based tool was not suitable as many students lack computer skills when entering a course, and because literacy courses are often provided in small local centres with poor facilities. Therefore we have chosen a paper based test in full colour. Some test tasks rely on colour, so a black and white copy will not provide a reliable result. In this way

[2] We have put the standard for reliability of each booklet on .85 and have, after a field experiment, selected only as few as possible tasks for each booklet, as long as the reliability did not come below .85.

we hoped to guarantee that now and in the future, when necessary, tools for this group could be developed without external funding.

5 The future

In the last few years important steps have been made in the literacy field in the Netherlands. The tools that have been developed have made it easier to adopt a goal-oriented approach in literacy training and assessment. Portfolio methodology has helped students in taking an autonomous role or, in terms of Decharms, to become origins. Another benefit of the implementation of the Framework and toolbox is that it aids research in the literacy field. The University of Tilburg (Kurvers & Stockmann, to appear) is currently carrying out a project that should provide more insight into the question of how many hours students need to progress to the next level and what factors may help to make the literacy training effective. Without the Framework which clarifies the concept of levels and steps from one level to another and without tools to measure progress, a study like this would not be possible.

There are still some concerns and some things yet to be achieved in this field. One concern relates to the role of oral skills. As the *Literacy Framework* and the *Literacy Portfolio* both focus on the development of reading and writing, there is a chance that these skills will be over-emphasised and that oral skills will be forgotten or no longer get the important position in the L2 literacy class which they should have. The choice to focus on reading and writing was a practical one: the problems were biggest. That has to do with the fact that the process of developing oral skills is very similar for both L2 literacy students and L2 learners that already are literate. The Common European Framework is useful to refer to in the development of oral skills for both groups of learners.

However, the assessment tools that are available in the Netherlands to assess oral skills are not equally suitable for literate and non-literate students. This really is a gap in the tool box that will hopefully not lead to a lack of attention on oral skills in the training of literacy students.

Another concern we have, relates to the adult education policy in the Netherlands. As we have mentioned before, civic integration courses in the Netherlands have recently become a commercial concern as they are provided by both private and public educational parties. In this process a lot of experienced teachers lost their jobs and a great deal of knowledge and experience in the field was lost. Nowadays, the literacy field seems to be developing in a similar way as policy on literacy education and the funding are to be revised. We can only hope that this will not lead to a similar loss of achievements in the literacy field.

We believe that it could be important for the future to think about the development of an international literacy framework, with enough room for defining language-specific characteristics, and enough common ground to enable international communication about literacy levels, assessing progress, the 'how many hours' question and so on. If we can share our knowledge and experience we can more effectively contribute to the learning process of literacy students. Also, this would open possibilities to co-operate in the development of more costly tools like multi-media applications that would be too expensive to develop in a small country or for the use for one language only.

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'ILLITERATES, INTEGRATED TO A JOB' A MODEL FOR INTEGRATED VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR ILLITERATE SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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1 Introduction

Illiterate second language learners have a very low attendance rate in educational and vocational programs in Flanders. The entry level of Dutch and literacy for these programs is a difficult threshold for this group to meet. As a result, illiterate language learners have to follow a general Dutch course for many years in order to reach the required starting level for vocational training.

The project 'Illiterates, integrated to a job' experimented with recent insights into educational organisation and methodology. The experimental training, which took place from January 2006 until October 2007 and prepared participants for a cleaning job, suggests that it is possible to give successful vocational training to illiterate second language learners and to prepare them for the job market in a reasonable amount of time. This experiment was the foundation for a model of an integrated vocational training for illiterate or low literacy second language learners.

This article deals with the context and general idea of integrated schooling; it also looks at some basic principles concerning the organisation and the methodology of the project. Finally, it suggests the factors which could contribute to the success of the project.

2 Backgrounds and general idea of the project

2.1 Current situation in Flanders with regard to Dutch as second language and literacy learning

In research carried out in 2003 the situation in the academic and vocational training in Flanders was compared to the situation in other European Countries such as The Netherlands, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and also to Canada and the United States (Plichart, 2003). This research showed that language courses in Flanders focus on a general content with several themes such as shopping, education, housing, mobility, etc. Moreover, as they are mostly not intensive it takes participants a long time to reach a basic level. With a course of nine hours a week, it takes at least about three years to

reach level A2, defined in the CEFR[1]. Due to this long training program and to the lack of a concrete goal or concrete results, participants tend to drop out, which jeopardizes their chances of reaching level A2. As programs of vocational training mostly ask for A2 as a starting level, the participation of illiterate or low literacy second language learners (LESLLA learners) is very low.

2.2 Objectives of the project

In 2005 the Karel de Grote-Hogeschool took the initiative to try a different way. The University College set up a partnership with several groups to organize a vocational training for illiterate second language learners with no knowledge of the Dutch language, or any reading or writing skills. Half of the program was subsidized by the European Social Fund and the other half was paid for out of the regular funds of the partner organisations.

The program objectives were the following:

- To organize an integrated curriculum including language and literacy acquisition and vocational training, for a target group of illiterate second language learners.
- To increase the participants' employment opportunities and social integration.
- To develop a methodology and course material for future projects.
- To formulate policy recommendations in order to stimulate the use of this form of education.

2.3 Target group

The target group for this project included both new immigrants and long term residents. The entry level of the participants' oral skills was lower than the threshold level of the CEFR, and for written skills the participants were classed as illiterate or very low literate.

The participants were recruited from the reading and writing groups for illiterate foreign language speakers, organised by the Centre for Adult Basic Education in Mechelen.

2.4 Critical factors

Although experience abroad and theoretical frameworks gave a fundamental justification for this project, there were some critical factors which previous research and experience could not provide satisfactory answers for. The critical factors were the following:

- Will the participants be able to acquire all necessary skills and knowledge to function in an employment situation during the period of the program (18 months)?
- Will the low level of speaking and reading skills hinder the participants in the vocational training?

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[1] CEFR or CEF is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001)

- Will it be possible to find partners willing to provide apprenticeships for people with low levels of literacy and Dutch?

2.5 Partner organisations

The partnership that was set up for this project was unique in Flanders. Normally, several providers are responsible for different parts of the integration route for immigrants. Co-operation between these organisations is encouraged by the government but it is not built into the structure of the integration route as a whole. This means that the different programs within the integration route are not really integrated with each other. For instance, the Integration Centre for New Immigrants ('Onthaalbureau') is responsible for a course to introduce newcomers to Dutch society. This course is mostly given in the mother tongue of the newcomers. At the same time the newcomers have to follow a Dutch language course at a Centre of Adult Basic Education ('Centrum voor Basiseducatie', CBE), but this course is not linked to the content of the course providing an introduction into Flemish society. This Dutch language course rarely gives specific preparation for the vocational training provided by the Government Agency for Employment and Vocational Training ('Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding', VDAB). It is also notable that although each organisation has its own learner coaches, there is little or no co-operation between them.

One of the main aims of the project "Illiterates, integrated to a job" was to build up a strong partnership between the different organisations. This was an important issue for the ESF as a subsidiser. This project was carried out by the following organisations:

- The Centre for Adult Basic Education in Mechelen: they provided the Dutch language courses
- Prisma, the integration centre for new immigrants of Mechelen: they provided the career guidance, the introductory course into Flemish society, initially in the mother tongue of the participants and later, in the Dutch language.
- Levanto, a non profit organisation for vocational training: they provided career guidance, personal coaching and part of the Dutch language course.
- VDAB Mechelen, the Government Agency for Employment and Vocational Training: they provided the vocational training.
- Karel de Grote-Hogeschool: they co-ordinated the whole project and gave methodological support to the teachers.

The co-operation between these organisations was structurally embedded in the project. Each month there was a meeting of the persons in charge of the organisations to set out the lines and to solve problems concerning policy. The teachers themselves met almost every two weeks. They discussed the progress of the participants, the content of the program and the methodology.

3 *Some basic principles*

At the start of the program the partnership set out some basic principles. These principles were based on experience and research concerning effective language learning of low educated and illiterate adults.

3.1 Intensity

First principle: Make sure that the curriculum is as intensive as possible.
The programs currently available for illiterates in Flanders are not as intensive as programs abroad. Organisations often fear that illiterates cannot be motivated for intensive programs, because of their lack of organisational skills, and problems with combining the program with their private lives and responsibilities. Organisations sometimes also assume that the work load on an intensive program will be too heavy for people who have no educational background. Surveys (Kurvers 1990) on this issue and experience abroad (Plichart, 2003) show that this is a misunderstanding.

In the programme 'Illiterates, integrated to a job', participants initially undertook a program of 21 hours a week which increased to 28 hours a week. The attendance of the participants proved to be very high, higher than in other language teaching programs currently available.

3.2 Manageable goals

Second principle: Divide the training in little parts so that participants have a nearby and manageable goal.

To demand a commitment to a training program lasting for one and a half years from participants who hardly know what it means to follow a training program, who have little or no income, who don't know what they will learn or if they are capable of learning is not a realistic option. People take more easily to short term commitments with a defined end date and clear objectives.

Because of this, the program was divided into three parts. After the participants had completed one part of the program they could decide whether they wanted to go on to the next part. This means that although overall it takes a long time to prepare illiterate second language learners for a job, participants in this program only had to commit a short amount of time.

Part one of the program lasted for seven months. For the first four months, the participants followed an intensive general language and literacy course in combination with a social integration course given in their own language. After four months the participants evaluated the program and their learning progress and could decide whether they wanted to continue. Some found that an intensive course of 21 hours a week was too hard to combine with their private life; others were very enthusiastic about the course and wanted to continue.

The following three months of the program consisted of intensive language and literacy training, integrated with a social orientation program delivered in the Dutch language. Thorough career guidance was also part of the program at this stage.

Participants who were interested in the vocational training and responded to the physical and administrative criteria signed up for the second part of the program. The second part of the program lasted for seven months and consisted of intensive language and literacy training, vocational training and apprenticeships. All participants who started this part of the program also finished it.

Part three lasted for four months. During this time the participants focussed on finding a job. Support with job seeking was provided as well as help to refine certain skills. If required, further guidance was also provided at the participant's work place. It

is interesting to note that many of the participants were successful in finding work at this stage.

3.3 Integrated program

Third principle: Strong integration of various components of the program, namely language acquisition, social orientation, career orientation and vocational training.
When programs are linked, it is easier for participants to transfer knowledge from one part of the program to another part. This transfer is a very difficult competence for low educated participants; therefore it is the responsibility of the teachers to support the participants in achieving it. If the transfer of knowledge is successful, the participants will understand why they have to learn some things and how they can adapt this learning material to another situation. In order to enhance participants' competence in transferring knowledge from one situation to another, some learning content is dealt with more than once, but from a different point of view. For instance, an appointment with a doctor can be learned by focusing on the language, by focusing on the cultural conventions, or by focusing on the organisation of the medical system.

In practice, this meant that teachers were required to adapt the course to ensure that it was more integrated with the other parts of the training and was more relevant to real life situations. This was especially difficult for language teachers who were used to working with more general language courses. A close co-operation between the various teachers with some guidance from Karel de Grote-Hogeschool helped the teachers to achieve a real integration of the course content.

3.4 Content based language learning

Fourth principle: Content based language learning.
A recent research review (Cito 2008) shows that content based learning is a vital element in effective language acquisition. The study of Raaphorst (2007) also gives a convincing research review about this topic. Nonetheless, we still see many teachers giving texts and exercises which have no meaning or interest for their participants.

In the programme 'Illiterates, integrated to a job', the language teachers used the content of the social orientation course for the first months of the language training. Subjects such as mobility, social security and housing were linked to the real lives and questions of the participants. The texts and dialogues used were taken from real life and contained information relevant to the participants. After seven months of training, the content of the vocational training was used in the language courses.

3.5 Key skills

Fifth principle: Focus on all key skills.
In 2003 with the introduction of the modular structure in adult basic education, the Flemish Support and Development Agency for Adult Basic Education (VOCB) highlighted the importance of working with key skills in education for low-educated adults. They used the key skills defined in the British educational system and divided them into eight categories:

- Elementary calculus
- Spatial and temporal orientation

- Self evaluation and learning strategies
- Communicative skills
- Problem solving
- Learning to choose
- Learning to work together
- Working with ICT.

The VOCB integrated the key skills with the curriculum targets of the regular education programs for low-educated adults. However, these skills were subordinated to other skills. For example, in a basic adult education Dutch as a second language program, teachers are supposed to work on the key skills with the participants but, as the levels that the participants have to reach in these skills are so low, teachers often fail to place much emphasis on them. For that reason the program "Illiterates, integrated to a job" wanted to focus on the key skills in their training. Lack of these key skills is often a problem for low-educated people when they are looking for a job. For example, not being able to cope with the problem of organising childcare can prevent women from finding a suitable job and not being able to organise their day can mean that a low educated person may often arrive at work late. These are both examples of problems arising from a lack of the key skill 'spatial and temporal orientation'.

In the program 'Illiterates, integrated to a job' the key skills were emphasised as much as the other skills. Some examples:

- When it was nearly Ramadan, the teacher discussed with the participants in the Dutch course what to do during the Ramadan, as not coming would mean less hours of learning. The participants had to solve this problem by themselves. They suggested changing the hours of the course so they would be able to get home earlier to prepare dinner.
- To find their way to the several work places, participants had to be able to find an address independently. They tried out several methods such as asking the way from passers by; using a simple map or asking a relative to show them the way. Afterwards, they were asked to choose the method they found most suitable. The key skills practiced here were making choices and spatial orientation.
- At the end of each lesson the participants were asked if they had grasped the content of the lesson and how they would use it in the following lessons. For example, would they like more practice or more information about an exercise or topic? So to a certain extent, the participants could decide what would be dealt with in the following lessons, based on an evaluation of their own skills. This made use of the key skill self evaluation.

3.6 Independent real life learning

Sixth principle: Independent real life learning: activities outside the classroom and real job experience (apprenticeship) as early on in the program as possible.

The model of integrated learning, as introduced by the ITTA (Institute of Applied Language Science at the University of Amsterdam), consists of three parts that are provided at the same time and that are linked to each other by content. These parts are:

- Education in general skills, such as language education, calculus education and other key skills. These skills are learned, for example, in the context of a professional or a social situation.
- Education in vocational, social or academic skills, such as learning a profession, learning to interact within a school community, or studying to be a doctor. These courses only require a low language level so that participants with a restricted knowledge of Dutch can follow them. Along side this, the teachers work at developing the language skills and other key skills.
- Real life experience, such as visits to a work place, apprenticeships, joining an organisation. By means of these experiences the information and skills gained from the program are given a meaning and use in the real world.

The benefits of integrated training are:

- A focus on skills and knowledge which the student needs in real life.
- A stronger motivation for the students, as they will be able to adapt and use the acquired competencies in real life.
- A more effective method of learning, because the transfer of the acquired competencies to real life means that the key skills and other skills are exercised repeatedly in different ways and from various viewpoints and in different settings.

Principle in practice

In the first part of the program the participants did a lot of extra curricular activities. For example, they visited different organisations; they took the bus; they tried to read a time table and they went to the bank.

The most important experience in real life learning for these participants was the apprenticeships. These apprenticeships were scheduled very early on in the training. Usually in other programs apprenticeships are organised at the end of training when participants are supposed to have acquired all the skills they need in order to work independently. In this program the apprenticeship was introduced as soon as possible so that it could be used as another way of learning general and vocational skills.

After three months of vocational training all the participants started as an apprentice in a real company. The apprenticeship took one and a half days a week over a period of 12 weeks. The participants still followed Dutch courses and vocational training during the apprenticeship. The apprenticeship was cyclic: this means that they went to three consecutive apprenticeships. By doing so, the participants had the opportunity to exercise certain skills several times, for example introducing themselves to new colleagues, getting to know the rules of the work place, finding their way to the work place, organising themselves to get to work on time, understanding the instructions given to them and finding out about the work schedule and safety rules.

To guarantee that participants made use of language and communication skills, language assignments were given to them. These assignments were also cyclic. On each apprenticeship they had to do the same language assignments. For instance they were asked to: ask their manager for some information about job rules such as holidays and what to do in case of illness; to collect some written instructions at their work place; and to start an informal conversation with one of their colleagues.

The participants were encouraged to do permanent evaluation. At the end of each apprenticeship the participants were asked how they had done, what went well, and where they needed some more practice.

The mentors, the staff of the companies that guided the participants, also received some training. In this training they were given some tips and tricks on how to guide illiterate second language learners. The major topics that were discussed with them were: characteristics of the target group; communication with the target group and empowerment of the target group.

Important results of this model of apprenticeship:

- The apprenticeships had a very positive effect on the motivation and self esteem of the participants. Most of them were surprised to see how well they could function within a real work place.
- The apprenticeships gave the participants a better understanding of what it takes to function in a real work situation. Previously, the participants tended to use their own experience and frame of reference from their own country, which is often completely different to the situation in their new country. The apprenticeships gave them a more realistic perspective on the job they were preparing for.
- The apprenticeships gave the participants the ability to feel how well they would be able to function in a real work place.
- The participants acquired a better insight in the pros and cons of various work settings. For example, after the apprenticeships, they had a better idea of the difference between working in a cleaning company and working as a cleaner in private houses.
- They had the opportunity to try out the techniques learnt in the vocational training in real life context, which was much more difficult than in a 'safe' environment.
- They were able to inject some real life experience into the classroom. For example, problems that confronted the participants in the work place, could be discussed, solved and rehearsed in the classroom.

3.7 Extensive individual coaching

Principle six: the participants could count on an extensive individual coaching.
An important characteristic of this target group is that they not only miss the essential basic language and literacy skills, but that they often combine this with other characteristics of deprivation. They may lack a decent income, have poor housing, have a limited social network, have problems with all kind of papers and documents, or lack knowledge on how to use social services. The need for individual coaching is therefore more urgent for this specific target group.

Principle in practice
The project provided extensive individual coaching for the participants. At the beginning of the project this coaching was given in the participant's native language, but later in the program it was given in Dutch. The coaches had an important role in this project and were vital to its success. Because of the extensive coaching the coaches soon became very close to the participants which was very important for this target group. The coaches had several tasks to fulfill:

- First of all, the coaches informed the participants about the content of the program. They explained the organisation, the intensity, how much participation would be required and the possibility of finding a job afterwards. Providing the participants with all the information they need about the course meant that they were not given the wrong expectations about it and that they were able to make a better choice.
- Low literate people often don't have a clear perspective of what they want to do in life and what their talents are. After the first, more general part of the training, the coaches helped to guide the participants in finding out whatsociety can offer them in relation to their own competencies and talents and what they want to do with their lives.
- During the training program the coaches checked up on the participants' performance and motivational issues in close consultation with the participants. If there were problems, the coaches helped the participants to find solutions. For example, when participants tended to leave the apprenticeships in order to take short term jobs, the coaches tried to convince the participants of the importance of education and long term employment.
- Issues concerning the training program are not the only problems the target group has to cope with. A lot of other problems such as child care, mobility, financial problems, paper work and their situation at home may also undermine their attendance and motivation. The coaches also dealt with these types of problem.

4 Methodology

Some basic principles also tell us something about methodology, for example, integrated and content based language learning. However, in this paragraph we want to focus more in detail on how the teachers facilitated the learning process in 'Illiterates, integrated to a job.'

The methodology is based upon two theoretical frameworks which will be introduced here briefly.

4.1 Theme-centred interaction (TCI)

Theme centred interaction is described by both Cohn (1993) and Hendriksen (2004). The most important features are:

- Be your own chairperson. Participants are invited to think, decide and choose for themselves. They are challenged to take responsibility for their own learning process.
- Teaching is maintaining the dynamic balance between the task in hand (It), the group dynamics (We), the individuals in that group (I) and the context factors.
- Priority should be given to disturbances: they are real life learning opportunities in disguise.

These features have some implications for the teacher. Because of the priority given to disturbances, there is a high level of unpredictability in lessons. The teacher should be able to give structure to disturbances and connect them to participants' learning aims. Furthermore the teacher has to challenge the participants to take responsibility for their

own learning process. A positive approach, meaning a belief in the power and possibilities of the participants is also very important.

4.2 *Powerful learning and constructivism*

Views about learning processes are influenced by cognitive psychology and are described in the constructivistic learning theory (Dochy, 2003). This theory suggests that the learners should have the prime role in acquiring their competence, while the teacher serves to facilitate this aquisition. These views suggest a new teaching methodology with the following features:

- Goal oriented learning: the participants' orientation towards clear recognizable goals is essential for their learning output. Teachers should therefore make the targets of all learning activities explicit and link this purpose to the participants' personal learning questions.
- Assessment: Self-assessment, peer assessment and co-assessment aim at the participants' self-knowledge. By assessing their own progress in terms of well-defined goals, the participants can give direction and meaning to their learning process.
- Active learning: Learning equals 'knowledge building' instead of 'knowledge consumption'. One learns to speak by speaking, one learns to clean by cleaning.
- Authentic learning in a meaningful context: Organizing learning situations that resemble the future job situation and that require identical skills and competence.
- Interactive learning: Learning is a social activity that can take place only within a discursive community bringing together reflection and experience. Teachers should utilize the strength of group learning to its fullest.

5 Concluding remarks

The project gave an interesting perspective on how to organise a vocational training for illiterate second language learners. For this research project only one experience group was used so no statistically proven results can be drawn. We have, however, made the following observations which may give interesting results if researched further.

First we deal with observations concerning methodology. The type of methodology used in this program is in accordance with the needs of the target group, because illiterate learners use learning strategies that are based upon practical experience. Therefore active learning and authentic learning is in the line of earlier experiences. Illiterate learners have to deal with low self-esteem, therefore self-assessment and a positive approach improves their self esteem. Illiterate learners have poor mastery of key skills such as solving problems, making choices and self-assessment. Active and authentic learning in a real life setting creates a lot of opportunities to work at these key skills.

With regard to organisation it was observed that the target group can cope with and benefit from an intensive program. The target group needs extensive guidance on career coaching, job seeking and other personal problems during the programme. The target group benefits from an integrated programme that combines language acquisition

with vocational training. A regular and close consultation with all partners is necessary. In short, it became clear that the apprenticeships were a big success because they helped participants to overcome reluctance towards working and gradually enabled the participants to become more self-reliant. The apprenticeships bring the real world into the classroom and are an important surplus (content-based language learning). They contributed to the positive perception of illiterates by employers and bridged the gap between the learning and job situation.

Moreover, it can be stated that the vocational skills were easily acquired and the motivation and dedication and class attendance rate were high. The participants' acquisition of reading and speaking skills was varied and unpredictable.

Concerning employment it can be noted that all participants managed to find a job in cleaning: four participants in regular economy, five participants in subsidized economy. Employers were satisfied with participants, as attitudes towards work and a high level of motivation compensated for low linguistic competence. In short, apprenticeships contribute to positive perceptions of illiterates by employers.

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PARENTS IN (INTER)ACTION

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1 Introduction

The difficulty of communication between teachers and non-Dutch speaking parents of children in primary school, and its possible impact on the educational achievement of these children inspired the Centre for Language and Education to develop the project 'Parents in (inter)action'. The aim of this project is to optimise the communication between school and parents and to increase the involvement of the parents in their children's school. The key principles of the project were: Successful communication with immigrant parents is a shared responsibility of both the primary school and the parents, not of the parents alone. Knowledge of the Dutch language should not be a preliminary condition for participation in the school community; however, participation provides the ideal context in which to learn Dutch. One has to stimulate participation in the school community by providing a 'safe environment' where non-Dutch speaking parents can participate (CTO & Steunpunt, 2007; De Niel et al., 2008).

These principles were used to form a project in which Dutch as a second language classes were organised in the child's school. In this article it will be explained how the concept of 'Parents in (inter)action' aims to increase the Dutch language skills of the parents-students, in order to intensify their participation in the school of their children and to find an indirect way to deal with communication problems between parents and school. A very important aspect in this concept is the combination of language lessons, about 80% of the classroom-time, and project-based activities, the remaining 20%. Both seem to be necessary to reach the three goals mentioned. The language classes dealt with the materials that each specific school submitted. The project-based activities consisted of the organisation of an event, such as a concert, breakfast or exhibition, and was organised within the school by the students themselves.

Several centres for adult education and centres for adult basic education brought this concept of the Centre for Language and Education into practice in a number of primary schools. Some parent groups completely consisted of illiterates; other groups consisted of both literates and illiterates. Candidates were screened beforehand. Based on test results, classes were formed. Depending on the number of enrolments, groups of parents with little schooling were organised. Although we aimed at forming groups of illiterates separate from those of literates, in practice, this dichotomy was not tenable, as our main concern was to include as many parents as possible. Therefore, the majority of our groups of students were very diverse in terms of literacy. As a consequence,

teachers had to differentiate their teaching method and exercises as much as possible within a single group.

In this article the experiences of two teachers of the Centre for Adult Basic Education of Antwerp are described. They both dealt with a group of illiterate parents and they both adopted the same methods and exercises in the language lessons as will be explained in section 2. The project-based activities described in section 3 were applied in one of the groups. The other group chose other project-based activities such as the organisation of a healthy breakfast. The evaluation in section 4 and the conclusion in section 5, therefore, deal again with the experiences of both groups.

2 The language lessons

About 80% of the classroom-time is devoted to Dutch language lessons, the remaining 20% goes to project-based activities. The three main goals of the language lessons are: (1) to improve the mothers' communication and social skills with regards to school and other parents, (2) to enhance the functional, reading and writing skills which these mothers need in the context of school and (3) to give them a better understanding of scholarly events.

To discuss in more detail what really goes on in the classroom, we will focus on that group of students with which we have got the most experience: illiterate mothers. (Regrettably, fathers have not yet found their way to our groups.) These students do not have prior reading or writing skills (not even in their native language); they possess very little vocabulary in Dutch or none at all. Obviously, letters and texts pose a major problem to them. But the lack of schooling also manifests itself in other areas: students master little of those specific attitudes and skills which are normally acquired as a child attends school. They do not have a sound learner's attitude; they have trouble understanding instructions and they struggle with the wide range of different classroom activities. They often need constant and very close guidance when doing exercises, and they work very slowly. They might find it difficult to abstract from a concrete situation. They often fail to apply general rules onto their own specific situations and they have no insight in the set-up of a language.

Of course there are huge differences between the learners in one group. Some of them just missed out on opportunities and are making up for lost time in speed-tempo; others just have mediocre or low learning capacities. For the latter, there's a huge advantage in learning at their children's school. There is no extra mileage and baby-sitting services at hand. A whole lot of practical headaches – that regularly scare these mothers away – needs to be taken care of. Their role in the classroom is clearly defined, too: they are students and (grand)mothers learning Dutch. In contrast to learners in the 'regular trajectory', parents in these school groups are never required to take on different roles (e.g. customer, or employee) in the classroom. This hurdle, which proves to be very hard for illiterate learners in the regular trajectory, is done away with.

2.1 Communication and social skills

The women in our groups have little or no knowledge of Dutch. Facilitating their communication with their children's teachers and other parents is an important aim of

the Dutch lessons in schools. Throughout the year, we specifically target those speech acts and items of vocabulary that are needed in this environment.

Some examples:

- introducing themselves and other family-members.
- putting into words in which class their children are and who their teacher is.
- notifying verbally the school of a child's absence.
- inquiring about a child's behaviour in the classroom.
- asking for clarification when they do not fully understand forms and letters the school has sent them.
- understanding a simple conversation about a child's score card.
- understanding a simple conversation at the school's gate.
- naming the utensils necessary in school.

Introducing and practising the targeted speech acts and items of vocabulary is done - as in the regular trajectory – in class using recorded dialogues and pictures which underscore the contents[1]. The main difference, in regard to the 'regular groups', being that contents-wise everything is oriented towards the concrete school of the children. Cooperation from headmasters and teachers is clearly indispensable to obtain all the necessary information and relaying it correctly to the students. Students are expected to transfer what they learned in the classroom activities to their contact with teachers, for example, in a parents' meeting. The dialogues learners come across in every-day life are however not as clear-cut as those which students have tackled in the classroom. That is why it is so important that the school teachers know which of the parents are taking the course and preferably also what they are learning. They can then encourage the mothers to speak Dutch and involve them in conversation. Acknowledging and respecting the initially receptive phase in the parents' learning process is also very important.

2.2 Functional reading and writing skills

Communication between parents and school often goes through written means. This obviously is a big problem for illiterate parents. Becoming fully literate, or even merely a skilled reader, is not something that happens overnight. It requires serious in-depth and sustained effort from the learner. We, as teachers, therefore opted to focus on functional reading and writing skills. We took typical examples of written communication between schools and parents (e.g. notes, school diaries, invitations) as a starting point for the development of parents' functional reading and writing skills. A few examples are:

- writing one's first and last name.
- writing their children's names.
- recognising the (often abbreviated) notation of the class in which their children are, and writing it down (e.g., K1, L2).
- recognising and writing down a date.
- whole word recognition of terms which often reappear in letters (e.g. mother, parent, child, class).

[1] Examples of pictures: www.betavzw.be and www.sclera.be.

- dealing with the different ways of notating time (digital and on the clock-face).
- selecting relevant information in a letter (who, what, when where) without reading it in its entirety.
- working with a school-diary.
- understanding the organisation of information in a simple table (in order to read a report card).

The students learned to examine the letters for as long as necessary in order to distinguish different kinds of information, such as: who is this letter for? Is there an image that might suggest what the subject is? Are there any dates indicated? They also learned to focus on words in bold type, underlined information, and words in capitals, and they practised recognising words like 'parents' 'teachers' 'class' 'children', which appear frequently on written materials from school.

Some schools make use of monthly calendars, so we started working on the word-images of the weekdays, the structure of the calendars, images used at school and the names of the classes. By connecting all these elements they learned to distinguish when there were swimming lessons, mother's meetings, parents' evenings, etc. In the same way they learned to use the school-timetables and in some groups even the school reports.

To give the parents some extra support we started the acquisition of the technical reading skills by teaching them how to distinguish characters like 'k' (kind 'child') or 'm' (moeder 'mother'), both in an auditory and a visual way. This background also offered the possibility of starting to learn functional writing skills. Our students practised writing their own names and the names of their children. They also learned to write the names of the classes and tried to complete some simple forms. In some groups we taught them how to write dates of birth and addresses. In this way we began teaching them to write.

2.3 Insight into scholarly life

Last but not least of our goals is to promote parents' insight into scholarly life from preschool to university. We try to clarify the scholarly trajectory of a child. The majority of parents in our groups have children in pre- and primary school. We therefore invest a lot of time in exploring the school itself and the activities that take place in it. An employee of the school (e.g., the principal, the learning/pupil support assistant) shows the students around and names each of the classes and other school areas (e.g. the playground, the gym, the cantina, the secretariat) for them. Thus, the mothers get to know their way around the school and are introduced to the school staff. We also discuss what happens in each of the classes. What do toddlers do in preschool, what skills do they acquire by doing these activities, what does their class look like? In primary school, we introduce the different subject areas (e.g., mathematics, language) pupils take, AVI reading levels, the yearly medical examination, the diary and homework - and ways in which (illiterate) parents can assist their children with the latter – and we pay a visit to the library. Other excursions and subjects may be dealt with as long as parents are interested and their language level allows for it.

3 Project-based activities

3.1 Why project-based activities?

As mentioned in the introduction, participation provides the ideal context to learn Dutch. As a result, the concept of 'Parents in (inter)action' includes project-based activities as well as the language lessons. As the school can be considered a 'safe environment' for the parents-students, we encouraged them to participate in a school project. Not only do these project-based activities offer a realistic context to bring Dutch into practice, they also involve the school. In the following example we will see what advantages this can have.[2]

3.2 Which project-based activities?

The choice for certain project-based activities should be supported by and, if possible, embedded in, the school. In this way there will be more chance that the school and the teachers will cooperate with the project-based activities and there will be more openness towards communication with the parents-students.

At The Horizon Primary School, teachers started looking for a way for the parents to help to organise a school event. The school wished to celebrate all the people who actively participate in the school community. This idea inspired us to create an exhibition with the parents who were taking Dutch lessons. The exhibition, titled 'People at school', aimed to introduce all the active groups at school. The opening was foreseen during the yearly school celebration and all the people involved would receive a badge to link them to both the exhibition and their participating roles within the school community.

The choice of these project-based activities offered a few advantages. First, most of the work had to be done during the preparatory stage. Previous project-based activities with the same group of illiterate students had shown that the students were quite capable of asking simple questions, but they weren't ready yet to express themselves in Dutch without having carefully prepared their phrases. Project-based activities without having to speak in front of a large audience were thus advisable. Moreover, the preparatory phase proved to be very instructive for the students. Before being able to introduce the active people or organisations at school, they had to learn more about the different ways those people participated. The students were able to organise the exhibition separately from the other elements of the celebration as putting together the exhibition could be done within the Dutch lessons.

3.3 *The realisation of the exhibition*

During the first preparatory phase, our students had to find out about the different groups active at school. We introduced the images that represented the activities. Here we also continued a process which they had already learned to help them to distinguish

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[2] Examples of other projects:
http://www.steunpuntgok.be/downloads/school_en_ouders_scenario1_het_ontbijt.pdf
http://www.steunpuntgok.be/downloads/school_en_ouders_scenario3_verhalentocht.pdf

the main information in the monthly agendas or in letters from school. The images helped to explain difficult Dutch concepts for all kind of groups gathering in the school such as 'pupil council', parent committee, 'basketball club', 'school paper editors', 'reading volunteers' etc. The students practised recognising the different 'word-images' as well as linking them to the appropriate visual images. They re-checked the monthly calendars to find out when and where the activity groups met. Then they found out how many people were involved in these groups, counting names in written communicative material or getting in touch with people at school. Based on these numbers they could determine how many badges should be provided for the event. They learned how to represent all this information in a table in order to be able to find it back later on.

For the second preparatory phase, our students needed to develop some understanding of the concept of an 'exhibition' in order to determine what could be exhibited. They visited the permanent exhibition in the school-hall and discovered how, by means of drawings and worksheets, life in the classroom was represented. Afterwards we discussed how the activities that took place in the Dutch lessons could be shown to an audience. All the students chose which worksheet out of their files could be hung in the exhibition. We decided that the other activity-groups would mainly be introduced by pictures. They practised the sentence 'Can I take a picture?' and took a camera around the school. Due to lack of time, however, most of the pictures used for the exhibition were taken by the teachers. After that, our students had to judge the pictures based on their qualities, and they tried to match them with the right groups. Each picture always brought up a variety of questions, such as 'Which group is being shown?' 'Who are the people in the picture?' 'What is their function at school?' 'Who knows them?' 'What are their names?' Although looking at the pictures seemed to be the main activity, the questions and conversation about it were actually more important. Language became a means of sharing information and better understanding school life. Interesting information was shared, provoked by the people represented on the pictures. Then they linked the pictures with the appropriate word-images and visual images. The pictures of the staff-members were accompanied by a small card with their names and functions on it. Here the parents could use in a functional way what they had learnt during the language lessons about the abbreviated notation of the classes. Though nine activity groups had been looking at, it gradually became clear that they could be split into three main groups: children, mothers and staff. Each of them received a specific colour to support the course members' insight in the structure of the exhibition and which was to be used as a background in the construction of the exhibition.

The third phase consisted of the construction of the exhibition itself. The pictures that had been selected, as well as the worksheets used in the Dutch lessons, were arranged and glued on to large sheets of coloured paper, along with the correct name and word cards. Asking the headmistress for panels, the students found out that the school has an 'hidden' attic where school materials and 'school history' are stored, a place were they had never been before. They got the panels there and they successfully constructed the exhibition. Finally we still needed to arrange the opening of the exhibition. We discussed how we ought to bring our exhibition to people's attention. Our students asked the headmistress to open the ceremony and she agreed to do this with a short speech and the cutting of a ribbon. The students, with the help of teachers, also arranged for the badges to be distributed and for there to be a suitable ribbon.

They had proved they were able to 'produce' something for which categorical thinking and insight in school life was needed and that they could organise a small event.

The school celebration and the exhibition were a great success. Both staff and children were very proud of the way the exhibition portrayed them. The headmistress felt that the exhibition was a great asset and saved it for future use. The exhibition stayed in the entrance hall for another week, so everybody had the opportunity to see it.

3.4 What was learned?

During the six weeks that our students were working on these project-based activities, they worked in a very practical way in order to accomplish a task. They did not have any real language lessons but they practised other capacities of equal importance, such as, using language to achieve their goals. They also learned to work with written documents, they asked people at school for information in Dutch and they acquired more understanding of the school system. Although, initially, our students were not enthusiastic about these activities as they did not understand the concept of an exhibition, and they did not know what was expected of them and feared that it would not help them to learn Dutch, in the end, they were extremely satisfied with the results. In order to help to combat their doubts we introduced the different phases of the project-based activities step by step.

If we had had more time, our students would have been able to learn about the different groups in a more active way. Although we did have some plans to organise this, it turned out to be too difficult to make our lesson times coincide with the groups' meetings.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true to say that the exhibition was a positive contribution to the school celebration. The exhibition surpassed the expectations of the school-staff; they learned that illiterate mothers, coming from another language context, could make a positive contribution to the school community and expressed a wish that they continued to be actively involved in the school. The headmistress felt that the preparatory phases of the exhibition created a nice atmosphere at school. Course members became visibly present within the school and known by the teachers. Each question asked, each question understood and each question receiving a positive reaction was a great achievement for our students; as a result, their self-confidence increased, and the distance between teachers and mothers shrank.

4 Evaluation

We believe that the project 'Parents in (inter)action' definitely offers positive results on three grounds. First, we managed to raise the language skills of our course members. Secondly, the participation of parents in the school improved. And thirdly, we successfully dealt with the communication problems between school and parents with a different linguistic background.

4.1 Dutch language skills

4.1.1 Communication and social skills

Because the school and communication with the school are of most importance for our lessons, it is to be expected that the students obtain more vocabulary related to the school system. Working on themes that deal with school and children proved to be very useful for our students. It would appear that this contextual way of working increases the speed of language acquisition and enables our students to make more rapid progress than those participating in a normal DSL course. The concrete setting of the school seems to offer the students extra stimulation and guidance. First of all, the vocabulary concerning the school is relevant for them. For many of the students the school of the children turned out to be the only place where they get in contact with the Dutch language. Their wish and motivation to learn how to communicate in Dutch therefore concerns precisely the school and the children. Secondly, newly learned words can be more easily remembered because students can hear and use them also outside the classroom, in interaction with their children or their teachers. At the end of the course, the students declared that they are talking more with the teachers of their children and understand them better then they did before the course. The vocabulary offered during the language lessons about emotions, behaviour, 'likes or dislikes', and subjects of teaching, is used in conversation with the teachers. According to the parents, they now discuss about the emotions and behaviour of their children, or at the very least, understand the teacher when she/he wants to explain what is going on.

Repeatedly practising certain speech acts gives the students the necessary confidence to use those acts in the real world. Many of them were able to call when they were absent, or when one of their children was ill. The project-based activities also stimulate the frequent use of typical language acts. Working on a specified theme leads to the repetition of certain words and phrases. The regular and relevant use of these language functions makes them easier to remember. For instance, every request for information had to be introduced by 'Can I ask you something?' Questions like 'Do you have...' or 'Have you got ....' could be used when a student needed some material. Also the rather abstract but frequently used 'Would you please...' gained a concrete use as course members frequently used this when they needed help.

In our project-based activities, communication in Dutch is never confined to communication between our students and their teachers. On the contrary, they are constantly challenged to ask simple questions to others and react to questions asked to them. The questions always tend to be goal-directed. These kinds of project-based activities help them to embed the speech acts in a certain reality. Above we described how one of our students asked for a ribbon, for this was a very useful act, and the opening of the exhibition depended on it. Moreover, working in this way offers a range of possibilities to differentiate between students. There are many tasks to be fulfilled and the teacher can easily determine who should complete which task by knowing the different capacities of the students. Very often we encourage our students to help each other.

Not only do our project-based activities improve our student's fluency, they also stimulate them to dare to speak. It increases their confidence and willingness to express themselves. The first time they are sent out to ask a question they need a great deal of guidance. First they practice that particular question in the classroom, and then they are sent out of the classroom to ask the question for real. As the project-based activities

continue, the students become more confident and in the end they are able to fulfil a task independently. They leave the class alone and return with the required information or material as a result. It becomes quite natural to communicate with the school staff in Dutch. Daring to speak is an obvious necessity in obtaining speaking skills. At the end of the course, one of the students testified proudly how she was able to communicate in Dutch outside the school context. She had a problem with a cash machine which had taken her bank card and entered the bank to ask to get her card back. She succeeded in explaining the situation and got her card back. Her husband could not believe she was able to do this on her own and kept on asking who had helped her. Although we never talked about banking in the course, this student attributed her capacity to do so to the course. She definitely learned to dare to speak!

As the students also receive reactions from the people they talk to, this means that they can also effectively use their listening skills.

4.1.2 Functional reading and writing skills

Due to the language lessons in which the written means of communication used at school were examined, our students learned to overcome their fears of documents and letters and obtained more understanding of the written means of communication used at school.

Some stronger students are able to distinguish some relevant information in the letters of the school, like the date of an activity. For others the insight in the monthly calendars of which some schools make use was very much appreciated. By the end of the course they were really able to distinguish when there were swimming lessons or parent's meetings. They were using the calendars at home in order to get their children well prepared for the next school day or to plan their own presence at school activities.

Apparently even some weaker students were able to transfer this new attitude towards written documents outside the classroom. At the end of the course, one of the students testified that she now opens the mailbox at home and that she is able to distinguish the letters meant for her. The first time when she proudly showed her elder daughter which letter was for her, she got her amazed by this progress. Another student told that she is now able to differentiate the social security cards of all her children and finds this very useful.

Despite the fact that our students are illiterate, it turned to be possible to work, to some extent, with written material, and through practise, to help our students to obtain some technical reading skills which can be applied in their daily lives.

Writing is maybe even more difficult, but students are proud that they became able to write their own name. Some of them told that they used to sign papers with a 'meaningless' signature and that they are happy to be able to write their full name now. Also writing the name of their children and the names of the classes completing simple school forms seems to open a new world for them.

4.2 Participation by the parents

Since the Dutch lessons take place within the school, and exploring the school is part of the lessons, parents start getting used to the school environment. Consequently, parents feel less intimidated when visiting the school. They do not get lost nor do they feel lost anymore, as they did before. This means a big step forward and it is an important condition for their further participation in the school.

Since the language lessons also deal with insight into scholarly life, the parents-students are always informed about the activities which are taking place within the school. Gradually they feel more confident in interpreting the calendars, letters and school diaries on their own, and they even start telling their teachers what is going on before they have the opportunity to do so. At this stage, the students are more likely to become actively involved in the school. The parents-students start motivating each other to attend information sessions and meetings and to join them together.

However, participation of parents can also be situated on the level of supporting the school activities or homework of their children. For example, a mother, now able to understand when her child has a swimming lesson, will remember to give him trunks and a towel. Previously, she did not understand that her child had a lesson and did not, therefore, provide the necessary equipment. This could have been interpreted as indifference towards the child's school activities. Now that the mother is able to understand what is going on, she is able to demonstrate that she is concerned about her child. Sufficient understanding of the written information handed out by the school and of the scholarly life is, therefore, a basic condition for more participation.

Participation also becomes more attractive through the interaction in the context of the project-based activities. These invite the parents to get involved and to show their involvement in the school. As a consequence, the relationships between parents and school become closer.

4.3 Dealing with communicative problems

This closer relationship between school staff and parents gives us a nice foundation to deal with frequently experienced communicative problems. Both parties derive much benefit from understanding each other better. A school team that feels the motivation as well as the involvement of the parents is more willing to offer them extra help.

4.3.1 Parents start understanding the school's means of communication

The fact that the parents-students subscribed to follow the Dutch course at the school of their children, might be interpreted as their wish to communicate better with the school. Coming to the course twice a week, a whole school year through, gives already an indication of the effort these parents put in order to be able to understand and to communicate better with the school and with their children. In the previous sections it has already been explained that the students really made progress in understanding the school's language, the school's means of communication and in understanding scholarly life. This way they take a huge step in learning to solve communicative problems which exist between school and parents. Although they are learning a lot through this project, it is not yet enough to solve all communication problems. Moreover, they are still illiterate.

4.3.2 The school acquires a deeper understanding of the communicative potential of the parents.

In fact, the understanding is a reciprocal process. The project 'Parents in (inter)action' also helps the school team to understand the parents better. It is very hard for literate people to imagine what it is like to be an illiterate adult. Schools frequently do not realise how difficult it can be to decipher and interpret their written information. Through frequent contact with both the parents and their Dutch teacher, the school gradually develops a more accurate idea of the problems that the parents have to cope

with. Firstly, they see the necessity of complementing the written documents with oral communication. Secondly, the closer contact with parents encourages the school to adapt the written material they sent to parents in order to make it easier to understand, by means of, for instance, simplifying the school calendar, or by consistently underlining the phrases of main importance instead of mixing bold, capitals and underlining as an indication. These are important steps to help the parents understand the written information.

4.3.3 The school starts understanding the manner of life of the parents

As the understanding of the communicative possibilities and constraints of the parents increases, so does the insight into the parents' environments. The school team becomes more conscious of its possible impact on school. During the course of the programme, we sometimes discover surprising matters. For example, a teacher wanted to run errands with the mothers as an organised activity, but some mothers told her that they were not allowed to enter a shop. This case shows that the daily life of these women is often confined to their homes, only interrupted by a small walk to bring their children to school. Their husbands are not likely to tolerate other outings. Also participating in evening meetings at school can be very difficult for these women because their husbands or sons demand their presence at home during meals or when the children need to be put to bed. When a school realises this, it can take this into account when arranging a meeting where they would like these mothers to be present.

These incidents also surprise the school staff. It increases their insight into the mothers' and children's environment and, for example, helps them to understand why these mothers may be absent at meetings or on outings. This means that teachers no longer interpret these absences as a lack of interest on the mothers' part.

Low-educated parents with a different linguistic background are not easy partners for a school community. Quite often the teachers feel annoyed by their inability to speak Dutch or by their absence during meetings. Through project-based activities, the parents can show the teachers how enthusiastic, motivated, and involved they are. They really want to do and mean something for their children's schools. In the example of project-based activities we gave, through the exhibition that our students arranged, the school was able to see their eagerness to participate in the school community, and, as a result, decided to ask them to participate in future school events. The school staff was surprised by their dynamic way of working.

After one year of 'Parents in (inter)action' the school understands both the possibilities and restrictions of the parents' communication skills. This can help them by taking these things into account in their organisation.

5 Conclusion

Before the start of the project, the course members were tested to determine their level of knowledge and fluency in Dutch. They got the same test as candidates for the regular courses. At the end of the project they were tested with the same testing materials as before. It turned out that almost all of them reached a higher level of understanding and speaking Dutch, and that they also had a better insight into some 'supportive' elements such as dealing with numbers and the calendar. A few students made much progress and were able to start two or three levels higher in the regular courses. This

means the method of teaching within and making use of the context of the school of the children is really effective for those parents who are motivated to learn Dutch because of their children.

Besides the general knowledge of Dutch, and the specific vocabulary concerning the school, the course members also obtained insight in the school of their children. The project-based activities helped them to dare to speak also outside the classroom and as a consequence of their growing familiarity with the school and with scholarly life, the parents' participation and involvement at school increased. They really gained a lot.

The project-based activities proved not only effective to get the parents closer to the school, but they also had a positive effect on how the school viewed these parents. Through their interaction, and through the teacher-as-intermediary, it gradually becomes clearer for both parents and school team which steps are necessary in order for them to understand each other and communicate better.

As course members, school staff, language teachers and supportive organisations were all enthusiastic about the initiative, the project 'Parents in (inter)action' is continued. Other schools got the opportunity to join the project and started new groups already.

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ASSESSING ADULT LITERACY: THE AIM, USE AND BENEFITS OF STANDARDIZED SCREENING TOOLS

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Abstract

Large-scale surveys, such as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (OECD & Canada, 2000), provide interesting data on literacy and numeracy skills on a cross-country level. They attempt to answer policy-related questions like: how many adults have low first language literacy or are at risk of becoming low-literate and what are their characteristics? In these studies groups of adults are commonly described as having either high or low literacy skills. But since reading or writing ability itself is a continuum, the question arises: what is the cut-off point? In other words: where does the "problem" of low literacy begin and when is educational or some other kind of intervention in a specific context necessary or desirable?

When answering these questions and promoting adult literacy development, most educational sectors will make use of micro-level analysis to complement the macro-level data. In that case, tools that describe the learning needs and interests of individuals are necessary. The research we report on in this article[1] examines the (practical) possibilities, difficulties and policy measures which underlie the use of such standardized literacy screening devices or basic skills audits among adults having Dutch as their mother tongue[2]. Built upon a qualitative analysis of existing screening instruments in Belgium (Flemish Community) and the Netherlands this study explores how screening procedures are adopted today in different sectors and in which way these procedures are able to identify the particularities of individual adults' literacy skills. By conducting in-depth interviews with experts (policy makers, academic experts, educational practitioners, low-literates) on the topic of (low) literacy, the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of a single and uniform standardized screening tool for different educational sectors were explored.

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[1] D'herteflelt, G, Drijkoningen, J., Van Thillo, W., Vermeersch, L., & Vienne, M. (2007). Studie naar de haalbaarheid van een doelmatig gebruik van een screeningsinstrument voor geletterdheid. Leuven /Mechelen: Centrum voor Taal en Onderwijs (K.U. Leuven) / Hoger Instituut voor de Arbeid (K.U.Leuven) / Vlaams Ondersteuningscentrum voor de Basiseducatie (VOCB).

[2] Although we focused on native speakers, the results of our study and the approach of literacy and screening could also be useful for L2 learners. Moreover nearly all screening devices are only used in that context today.

The results of this study (D'hertefelt et al., 2007) show that not all social domains are equally open to educational assessment using a standardized literacy test in an objective and accurate way. Moreover, the results show that literacy screening may lead to several negative effects. It is argued that in some contexts, those negative effects might overshadow the positive ones. Furthermore, none of the existing tools in Belgium and the Netherlands is able to screen all aspects of literacy in one short and practical way. From this we conclude that although there is a powerful internal logic in the use of one single screening instrument for assessment, the practical benefits of such a device can be questioned and so can the ethical ones. The use of several instruments aligned with the needs of specific target groups is therefore strongly recommended. The context of the screening procedure and the literacy context (such as health care and workplace) should be incorporated in the instrument.

Other results will be presented in this paper, such as the importance of oral feedback on the candidate results, the training of the assessors, the integration of the screening in normal educational procedures and the link between the assessment and the methods of training.

1 Introduction

There is little discussion about the importance of literacy skills nowadays. Most people agree that these skills are essential for the proper functioning and development of society as a whole and for each individual as a part of that society. There is less consensus over what the term literacy actually implies. The developments and trends in the discourse on literacy show a number of fundamental substantive shifts. For many years thinking on literacy was very dichotomous. It was a question of whether or not an individual could read and write. However, today this approach tends to be considered negative and stigmatising, as in this way illiteracy is associated with an isolated problem or with individual failure (Goffinet & Van Damme, 1990; Venezky et al., 1990).

The introduction of the notion of 'functional literacy' has put this into a somewhat different perspective. Literacy is no longer a matter of being able to read or write in a strict sense. The notion indicates that literacy can be interpreted differently, depending on its functionality. The generic definition of 'functional literacy' means that one must operationalize the concept according to the context and situation in which it is used. This means that literacy is no longer an absolute condition but a relative and normative one. There is, in other words, no single fixed view of literacy, but multiple viewpoints exist (Kruidenier, 2002). For instance, there are various types of text and literacy (prose and document literacy, numeracy or quantitative literacy, digital literacy, etc.), various user perspectives (micro, meso and macro) (Verhasselt, 2002) and various contexts and situations in which a person can function by making use of one or more literacy skills. In the process of assessing adult literacy, one must take into account this multifaceted nature of the concept. Over and above that it seems impossible to talk about literacy and low literacy today without including *all* aspects and forms of literacy.

The concept of 'functional literacy' also acquires an instrumental character: literacy becomes a means of attaining a certain specific element of employability. In other words: it refers to the way one *functions* in society, for instance on the labour market. This is enough for some authors (like Payne, 2006) to state that the common use of

the notion of functional literacy is actually trapped in conventional ideas about employability and economy. Payne illustrates this by indicating that literacy surveys usually transmute the term 'adult' to mean only those aged 16-65, which is the working age population. This is true, but still we must realize there are a range of literacy expectations in society (and across societies) of which just a fraction is to be situated on the labour market.

The instrumental nature of literacy is today also incorporated into a broader debate on basic and key skills (Van der Kamp, 1997). In this debate, the central question is: 'What knowledge, skills and attitudes must an individual have so as to put him in a position to attain the appropriate quality in a given social role'? The competence-based thinking assumes that acquiring this knowledge, these skills and attitudes is an active, accumulative and context-driven process (Dochy & Nickmans, 2005). Consequently it is difficult to see acquiring and using literacy separately from acquiring and using other skills, such as problem-solving thinking, communicating, and cooperating. This also highlights the social aspect that is inextricably linked to (learning) literacy. Becoming literate is always a social process of making and transforming meaning as an individual, as a group and as a society. Because of the strong connection between literacy and identity, literacy is connected to all other learning and affects an individual in a variety of ways.

2 Policy on literacy

The developments in the debate on the precise interpretation of literacy mesh with the greater attention being paid to low literacy. Over the past decades interest in (low) literacy has increased in a number of social sectors and among public authorities. The authorities in an increasing number of European countries have expressly engaged in the fight against low adult literacy. In Great Britain and France, a public discussion on adult illiteracy started in the early 70s. Since the late 70s several initiatives were programmed in Belgium and The Netherlands aiming at awareness at a policy level. As a result, increasing literacy in the population has been high on the policy agenda in Flanders for several years now. The Flemish government and the social partners want to see the number of functionally literate people in Flanders increase to at least 72 per cent of the population by 2010 (*Het Pact van Vilvoorde* 'Vilvoorde Pact'; Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2001). According to the IALS (OECD & Canada, 2000), 41.9 per cent of the Flemish population do not have the minimum of literacy skills for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society. This is the so-called *level 3* of the IALS, which more or less equals the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry. Most of the documents of Flemish government on literacy use the IALS definition.

How this goal of 72 per cent should be achieved and whether it is feasible depends directly on the question of when an individual or a group is functionally literate. In other words, where is the boundary between having and not having adequate literacy skills? And how can an individual's position in relation to this boundary be defined?

The way in which the Flemish government aims to answer these questions and the way in which it seeks to achieve the policy objectives were laid down a few years ago in the *Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid Verhogen* (Strategic Plan on Increasing Literacy) of the

Flemish Community (Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2003) and then implemented in practice in the *Operationeel Plan Geletterdheid Verhogen* (Operational Plan on Increasing Literacy) of the Flemish Community (Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2006). One of the objectives set out in these policy documents is the phased and systematic screening of literacy among adults (adults living in Flanders or Brussels and which have Dutch as their mother tongue). Such screening involves detecting low-literacy individuals or groups with a view to providing further route counselling or referring them to educational services to increase their literacy skills.

3 Tools and methods

Whether a standardised screening device or instrument can be used for screening like this is the central question in the feasibility study conducted in 2007 at the request of the Flemish government (D'hertefelt et al., 2007). In addition to the desirability of such a broad instrument, the feasibility, form, practical usability and application of this were also examined.

The study was conducted on the basis of three qualitative research methods and techniques: (1) a literature survey of literacy competencies and the screening of those competences, (2) a document analysis of existing screening devices from Belgium and elsewhere and (3) semi-structured interviews with 33 key figures from Flanders and the Netherlands. For the interviews, a theoretical or purposeful sample of five categories of interviewees was drawn (Patton, 1990): (1) individuals with low literacy levels or their representatives, (2) screening professionals, (3) policymakers (4) academics with expertise in literacy, (5) professionals from secondary education. The aim of this a-priori characterisation of the interviewees was to collect a balanced sample that covers the various perspectives from which the issue of literacy and screening can be examined.

4 Screening

In the technical sense, literacy screening implies that on the basis of behaviour or performance which may or may not be induced, the literacy skills of an individual or group are assessed and evaluated using a benchmark or a norm. Screening therefore assesses performance on an indicator variable, which in turn is related to a specific construct (in this case, 'literacy'). The relationship between the two can be considered in various ways. Our research results indicate that in practice, assessing and evaluating literacy competences depends heavily on a number of starting points.

One starting point is the interpretation and conceptualisation (making a conceptual and operational definition, ways of measurement) of the notion of literacy or functional literacy itself. As previously stated, literacy is a normative and also a vague container term. Thorough operationalisation of this concept is only possible when the individual or target group for whom and the setting or context in which the notion is used is taken into account. The "degree of literacy" of an individual cannot be screened solely on a vertical dimension (referring to the level of the literacy performance), but must simultaneously take account of a horizontal dimension that refers to the various

possible types of text and the range of situations in which an individual can function using written language. A solid literacy performance in one particular situation does not automatically mean that an individual will perform at ease in all situations and with a wide range of texts and text functions in every situation. If one is able to read and understand the bus timetables, for example, this does not mean one is able to read and understand written dosage instructions for a recipe for a birthdaycake. And an employee who is able to read simple instructions, can not necessarily understand more complex safety instructions. So scoring well for the vertical dimension does not necessarily mean that this will also be the case for the horizontal dimension. This does not mean, however, that the two dimensions are entirely separate from one another in practice. The different dimensions might be conceptually distinct, they are nonetheless interrelated (Verhasselt, 2002).

A second starting point concerns what is considered an adequate functionality norm for literacy (often referred to as the cut-off point(s) or the criteria of literacy). This is a question of whether the limit between literacy and low literacy can be established explicitly and if so, who is capable and has the right to make such a decision. The research literature states that a cut-off point is a de facto reflection of the answer to the question "what should someone be able to do?" This question can be answered from the point of view of an individual, a group of individuals or a society. This in itself indicates that any limit is arbitrary and can move depending on perspective as well as place and time (Kurvers, 1990). The context in which the question is answered is also decisive: what a person should be able to do is not the same from a socio-cultural perspective (e.g. social tasks like reading official letters, filling in tax forms, making shopping lists) as from an economic or labour-market perspective (e.g. writing a letter of application, read and understand written instructions and orders).

This means that a universal norm cannot be adopted when screening for literacy. When using a standardised screening device, setting one uniform cut-off point is not without risk. From a theoretical point of view, a norm like this does not do justice to the multidimensionality and complexity of language skills. In practice, it can also lead to a form of exclusion. If the cut-off point is too "high", an overly large proportion of the population will be considered to have low literacy levels. This makes a targeted policy impossible. It can also lead to an overzealous attitude and a situation in which people who do not have a problem or do not feel they have a problem are convinced that they do have a problem. In other words: some of those below the cut-off point risk being incorrectly labeled low-literate (Venezky et al., 1990). The consequence of this is possible over-problematisation on a meso or macro-level and a loss of self-esteem and motivation on an individual level. On the other hand, if the cut-off point is not high enough, this can lead to wrongful acceptance of a lack of minimum basic skills.

The research data do indicate that a threshold level used when screening individual adults also has to be 'accepted' and 'considered useful' by the individuals being screened themselves. If this is not the case, then the individual may not attach any credence to the screening device and will not have any internal motivation to increase his own literacy skills. This makes the fact whether or not a person considers the assessment credible an essential issue. It demonstrates the important idea of the individual having some kind of 'stake' in the process and result.

For the low-literacy individuals and their representatives interviewed, these risks are the main reason for rejecting a generalised and explicit determination of a standard or

considering this of secondary importance. They prefer to talk about screening from the perspective of increasing skills rather than whether or not attaining a critical barrier.

According to the academics and policy makers interviewed, it is possible to define an adequate cut-off point or a series of cut-off points (as symbols of literacy skills in certain contexts or situations), for instance by means of an intense societal or public debate or international comparison. Such a debate or comparison could reflect what acceptable functioning in (a part of) society is. And although a cut-off point will always be just *one* view on social behaviour – and it will inevitably always be a normative one - the interviewed academics and policy actors do consider the use of a cut-off point advisable to measure and assess performance.

Due to this difference in perspective low-literacy individuals and their representatives focus more on the disadvantages at the micro-level, while policymakers tend more to recognise the advantages at the meso and macro-levels.

The research data further show that it is crucial to distinguish between screening and diagnosis: screening only aims to obtain an indication relating to the question of whether the performance of the candidate is adequate or inadequate (problematic), whereas diagnosis aims to achieve a more far-reaching analysis of the factors that have led to certain achievements, or of the profile of the individual skills within the overall skills level.

The literature on language and literacy testing reveals a fairly wide consensus on the fact that standardised tests provide only very limited diagnostic information (Alderson, 2000; Staphorsius & Krom, 1992). Screening literacy competencies provides only a cursory and generalised portrait of performance. It provides neither evidence nor knowledge of the dynamic interplay among literacy skills and experiences. A screening device can only be conducted for a very specific purpose: to identify adults requiring more intensive assessment and intervention strategies (Justice et al, 2002). The data in our research therefore stress the need to embed screening in a process (e.g. intake, assessment) that leads to further diagnosis, follow-up and training. This conclusion is in line with research that analysed screening devices in Anglo-Saxon countries (Sutton & Benseman, 2005; Brooks et al., 2005).

In addition to checking, analysing and monitoring the screening result, another argument for the integration of screening into existing routes or pathways is that in this way screening is not seen as isolated, unexpected or "strange" by those being screened. This increases their willingness to take part in the screening. From this point of view, a good match between the way screening is carried out and the body that carries it out is also advisable. In other words, the screening should not be conducted by 'outside' people, but by people who are familiar with assessment within the context in which the screening takes place.

5 Screening devices

We note that generally speaking there are five 'types' of screening devices:

- *test*: measuring an elicited literary performance using a device developed beforehand (which may or may not be standardised);

- *proxy measuring*: mapping out factors that show a high correlation with low literacy, as well socio-biographic data (unemployment, level of education, etc.) as literacy practices (for example membership of a library, having an email account).
- *self-assessment*: making an estimate of one's own literacy performance level on the basis of structured questions;
- *interview/discussion*: oral questioning of the extent of literacy on the basis of a questionnaire;
- *observation*: consciously observing behaviour with a view to describing and estimating literacy skills.

Our research shows that there is no absolute preference for any of these types of screening devices. Each of the screening methods has advantages and disadvantages that are specific to the device (reliability, validity, etc.). The "weight" attached to these advantages and disadvantages also depends on the way in which the devices are used. The disadvantages of each method individually can be reduced among other things by combining various devices. However, this is not always feasible or affordable in practice. Choosing a screening device therefore also means seeking a balance between the length of time involved and the cost of the screening on the one hand and the quantity of information required as well as the reliability of this information (or quality of the information in general) on the other.

The substantive analysis of 31 existing screening devices – mainly tests - in Flanders and the Netherlands indicates that no single existing device can be considered a screening device for literacy as a whole. The devices do not take 'literacy' as the construct to be tested, but separate individual skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. This indicates that in many cases the screening devices lack a broad focus. For instance, they often screen for one or a few types of text (often prose and document literacy) but leave aside adjacent key skills. So they only screen a fraction of the current concept of literacy and therefore have poor construct validity in terms of general literacy screening. Including literacy in its various types, perspectives and contexts and adjacent key skills in one instrument doesn't seem possible.

The existing devices have also mainly been developed for use with well-defined target groups. With a view to functional screening, this is logical, something which is also confirmed by the interviewees. Adequate screening focuses primarily on groups that display a literacy risk, who moreover can be reached for screening (for instance in schools, providers of vocational training courses, civil-society organisations, etc.) and who are motivated to increase their literacy skills.

However, the target groups on which existing screening devices focus are not always clearly demarcated or they are confined to broad categories such as jobseekers. Further defining subgroups with a uniform needs profile (e.g. long-term jobseekers in need of vocational training) would enable more thorough individual-related and context-specific screening. The screening device can then be adapted better to the group in question and go beyond a purely element-oriented, technical approach. This also means that screening takes on a stronger real-life approach, whereby the individuals screened are confronted with functional, authentic or true-to-life literacy tasks. In this way, the content of the screening also matches the context in which the screened individuals participate or wish to participate. This strengthens the validity of the device.

Although the research data offer good motives for adaptive screening of literacy, which means that the test adapts to the person's ability level, the existing range of instruments contains virtually no adaptive devices. The interview data indicate that the development and appropriate use of an adaptive test is often not feasible in practice (owing to the high cost price, the long development phase, technical implications, etc.).

The existing range of devices is also limited in terms of the various media used. The devices mainly use pen and paper and (to a lesser extent) computers. Screening professionals stress that the medium chosen and the possible familiarity of the screened individuals with this medium must not be allowed to impact on the screening result. This is the main reason why pen and paper screening tends to be the preferred choice.

A large number of points can be made about how difficult it is for a single standardised device to meet the requirements mentioned above (validity, familiarity with the medium, etc.). A certain degree of standardisation is possible, according to the research, but only within a certain context and given a certain target group. How big should or could such a target group be? From the point of view of policy makers in particular (describing the scope, impact, etc. of the problem), and from the point of view of research (objectivity and reliability of the results, basis for comparison, only one device to be developed, etc.), there are strong arguments for standardisation on a large scale. The intention to generate data on literacy at the meso or macro-levels plays a role here.

Finally, as regards the question of who should undertake the screening, the research data do not express any preference for either an external body or the individuals themselves (self-screening). They do emphasise possible application problems (for instance the interpretation of the screening result) in the event of self-screening. The experts interviewed for this study (D'hertefelt et al., 2007) state that not all adults are able to assess their own literacy skills or limitations.

6 Conclusion: putting it all together

Considering the findings of our research project (D'hertefelt et al., 2007), we must conclude that it is very hard to design a standarized screening protocol for adult literacy. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, it is hard to articulate an operational definition of literacy that does justice to the variety of perspectives on the meaning of the term. However, any screening protocol has to take into account a 'multiplicity of literacy' (often referred to as 'multi-literacies' or multiple literacies) simply because there is more than one single literacy or one set of literacy capacities needed to capture what literacy skills people have and how they cope in different societal contexts. Literacy is, and will always be, a 'complex amalgam of psychological, linguistic and social processes layered one on top of another' (Levine, 1986:22). Because of that, literacy is not an ability that can be located on a single continuum, and a screening instrument should not act as if it is. All this, of course, leads to some hard to answer conceptual questions, such as: How can we make literacy skills easily and readily identifiable? How can we make literacy in all of its aspects empirically manageable? How can a screening device sample the right skills, map them onto a set of levels against which people can be measured in a way it

provides vital information on multi-literacies? Is it possible to use a screening instrument of a very general nature within the timeframe of a quick screening protocol? Secondly, it is hard to trace the relation between personal knowledge and skills and social expectations. There will always be between-group and within-group variation in literacy expectations (De Glopper, 1992). This makes the determination of 'critical levels of competence' (the one or more built-in cut-off points in a screening instrument) a delicate matter. Given the multiplicity of literacy, using one single standard seems far from useful. It is simply theoretically out of date. The use of one critical level of competence for all contexts and situations imaginable can also have negative implications for practice. It can easily lead to a new deficit view which defines people in terms of failure and in terms of what they are unable to do. When a screening device simply leads to a label 'at risk', it will put blame upon the person and will not encourage the person to start a learning process, while, according to the interviewees in our study (individuals with low literacy levels or their representatives, screening professionals, policy makers, academics with expertise in literacy, professionals from secondary education) a screening process should actually incite adults to embark on an educational process.

Does all of this make literacy screening impossible and therefore not advisable? Not necessarily. Yet some realism is in order. The interview data in our project explicitly warn against unrealistic expectations. Screening should be seen as a way to focus attention on things that otherwise remain intuitive, but one has to bear in mind that the result will always be just a snapshot in time (Justice et al, 2002; Crossland, 1994).

A screening tool should exhibit several essential features. Every screening device should demonstrate adequate levels of validity and reliability. It should be robust in its ability to identify adults who are at risk, and furthermore, it should be neutral, fair, and efficient. This is why making new screening instruments will require a lot of pre-testing and research.

As important as the screening device itself is the way screening is conducted. It should be part of a formative process and lead to moments of tangible change. It should, in other words, be educative and support the learning process. The implementation of a new instrument should therefore be guided by the particularities of the target group. In other words, it should be sensitive to the unique characteristics of that group. This also means that literacy is measured in a context-sensitive way. Because of this, one standardized screening instrument for a broad category of adults can never lead to reliable information. That is also the main reason why very few organizations that deal with low-literate adults explicitly demand a single standardized screening instrument. Given the complex definition of 'functional literacy' and the link with other basic competences, a screening device attuned to specific target groups and situations appears to offer advantages although it may cost more (money as well as time) than, for instance, a single standardized test.

Conducting literacy assessment should start with the needs of the person involved. The issue is what low literate adults need and demand; the aim is to strengthen adult literacy. This is what the screening information should be used for. This perspective will be more helpful than simply counting the heads of those people that are 'at risk'.

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PRINCIPLED TRAINING FOR LESLLA INSTRUCTORS

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1 Introduction

In our work as teacher educators in adult ESL, we see the spectrum of instructional programs for immigrants and refugees in Minnesota, USA. These programs vary greatly; some are well-funded and enjoy full-time staff and state of the art facilities, others are volunteer-run and meet in church basements or in the high-rise apartment buildings where their learners reside. The students in adult ESL programs span from the highly educated to those with no first language literacy, from those who arrived to the United States decades ago, to those who arrived last week. Often, all of these students can be found within the same classroom.

Teachers in adult ESL vary nearly as much as the students; some have graduate degrees in education or linguistics, some are licensed teachers, and others are well-meaning volunteers with minimal training. Some instructors are trained to work with children but find themselves teaching adults. Others have received excellent training, perhaps even certification in TESOL[1], but are now teaching reading to adults who have never learned to read, a topic that was never explored in their studies.

In our experience, in fact, such low–educated limited-literacy second language learners (we use the term 'LESLLA learners') are rarely discussed in the preparation of ESL teachers. Many reasons may explain this: a disconnect between graduate programs at universities and the immigrants and refugees who live a few blocks away, an assumption that those who pursue teaching ESL as a career are likely to work with educated students in secondary or college settings, the historical lack of research and investment on the part of applied linguistics scholars in immigrant and refugee learners, etc. As pointed out by Bigelow and Tarone, "Participants in SLA studies are often highly literate: undergraduates in foreign language programs, graduate students in intensive English programs, or international teaching assistants. We have reviewed all the leading journals that publish SLA research and found that researchers rarely study adult and adolescent immigrant learners with very low literacy in any language," (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004: 689-690).

Regardless of why it exists, the lack of adequate training for LESLLA instructors is both real and severe. Inadequate training brings clear and negative consequences for our LESLLA learners and a level of frustration for LESLLA teachers, teachers who are trying everything in their toolboxes but are still struggling to find classroom practices

[1] Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

that are effective. The research and best practices inquiry being done in this area needs to reach our teachers, and teacher educators need to be conscious of their responsibility to ALL learners. As Young-Scholten pointed out in the 2007 LESLLA proceedings, 'LESLLA participants noted that whenever feasible, research should be translated into implications for the training and professional development of practitioners…' (2007). It is this 'translation,' this connection between the fine work being done by LESLLA researchers and the actions teachers can take with that information, that we have tried to provide with our principled training workshop.

First of all, before we discuss the content of our training workshop, we must admit that it is insufficient. As much as we'd like to believe otherwise, a teacher cannot learn all she needs to serve LESLLA students well in a single afternoon. Ideally, we would teach an entire course on the topic, with a semester to explore, read, discuss, observe fellow teachers, debrief, try out new ideas, report back, form conclusions, etc. If only wishing made it so! But the reality is otherwise; teachers are eternally busy, their schools are under-funded and often cannot support extended professional development, and the academic institutions that could offer such courses remain unconvinced of their necessity, or perhaps they themselves are unprepared to address this important topic. What we *can* accomplish in a brief but carefully planned workshop is that the important questions begin to be formulated and posed, that the teacher begins to see her classroom differently, perhaps with a different view of how reading takes place for these learners as opposed to her more educated students. A teacher can, after a workshop such as this one, begin to create a network of like-minded colleagues, be inspired to read more on the topic and have a list of readings in hand, and give herself permission to try new approaches and activities in the coming days and weeks. It may be as small as realizing the importance of clear visual aids or building schema, or finding new ways to integrate useful repetition in her classroom. She may see a new way to utilize language experience stories into her prescribed curriculum, or perhaps she may feel empowered to try to teach phonics in a contextualized, meaningful way that her students will find more memorable and engaging. However small the outcome of this workshop for each individual participant, we hope it will lead to greater understanding of LESLLA learners, a greater interest in the current research, and a greater repertoire of strategies to serve these learners.

We created the workshop for LESLLA instructors with our colleague, Andrea Poulos, for a national audience of teachers and teacher-educators. It has been repeated for a number of local and regional professional development events as well. The original workshop is four hours in length and involves several key topics. We note that while many areas of the country have concentrated populations of speakers of one language, often Spanish, that is not the case in Minnesota. We take a moment in our workshop to review the diverse immigrant and refugee groups that are often placed in LESLLA classes in our area. Our learners come from many countries and speak many languages, including Somali, Hmong, Spanish, Burmese, Oromo, Amharic, Liberian English, Sudanese, Karen, Thai, and Lao. Following this introduction, we look at the knowledge base and skills required to effectively teach LESLLA learners.

2 *Knowledge base and skills involved in LESLLA teaching*

In our conversations with adult educators, we hear teachers who are frustrated with the progress of their low-literacy learners. We hear stories such as: '"ve been teaching ESL for 20 years, but I'm new to working with pre-literate learners. It seems like nothing I'm doing is working.' Others point out a common mismatch between oral and written skills: 'My pre-literate learners can converse just fine. Their speaking skills are very strong, but they barely recognize their names in print.' These comments are evidence of the fact that teaching LESLLA learners is strikingly different from teaching those with strong first language literacy. In our experience, even a minimal amount of school experience and some exposure to the printed word can make a world of difference in how quickly and efficiently a learner can acquire English.

Table 1: Knowledge base of effective LESLLA instructors

Topic	Specification
1. The refugee/immigrant experience	the journey of specific refugee/immigrant groups, trauma and its effect on learning, demands of resettlement.
2. Types of literacy-level learners	pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate, non Roman alphabet literate.[2]
3. Literacy in childhood vs. adulthood	the difference between a child acquiring literacy in L1 and an adult acquiring literacy in L2.
4. Emergent readers	empathy for the challenge LESLLA learners face
5. Second language acquisition	basic SLA theory including the role of comprehensible input, factors that affect language learning, etc.
6. Key research	the promising research that has been done by LESLLA LESLLA researchers.
7. Components of reading	the role of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
8. Balanced literacy	top-down and bottom-up approaches as well as balanced literacy practices.
9. Approaches to teaching literacy	importance of relevant and learner-centered instruction that might include project-based learning, language experience approach, etc.
10. Connections between first and second language literacies	role of home language, and transfer of first language literacy ability to second language literacy.

[2] Pre-literate learners come from an oral tradition with no written form. Non-literate learners come from a literate culture, but have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write. Semi-literate learners have had some schooling, but generally less than six years. Non-Roman-alphabet literate learners are literate in a language or languages that are either not alphabetic (i.e. Chinese,) or alphabetic non-Roman (i.e. Cyrillic) or alphabetic, non-Roman and consonantal (i.e. Arabic) (Haverson & Haynes, 1982).

So why is teaching LESLLA learners so different from teaching other learners? What particular knowledge and skills do effective LESLLA teachers have? Ten main areas are critical to the knowledge base of effective LESLLA teachers; they are described in the table below. We recognize that many of these areas of knowledge are important for all second language instructors; however, this list includes areas of unique importance to LESLLA instructors.

Beyond the knowledge base that effective teachers need to serve LESLLA students, they must also know how to apply this knowledge in the classroom. A unique set of skills is required to move teachers from theory to effective classroom practice. We've divided these skills into three areas: assessment, course design and classroom practice, and materials development. These skills are outlined in the chart below.

Table 2: Skills of effective LESLLA instructors

Topic	Specification
Assessment	- assess literacy and language skills in L1 and L2 - conduct needs assessments of learners
Course design	- contextualize literacy instruction within real-life, relevant themes - teach pre-literacy skills - build oral language and vocabulary - develop multi-level lessons - design and teach lessons that address the components of reading - design and teach lessons that develop balanced (bottom-up and top-down) reading strategies - teach learning strategies and study skills appropriate for LESLLA learners - lower the affective filter of the classroom, create welcoming, productive atmosphere in the class
Materials development	- choose and develop appropriate materials, adapt published materials - use authentic materials for instruction - understand value of student-generated texts

We have strived to address many of the knowledge and skills in Tables 1 and 2 in the training workshop outlined below.

3 One option: A LESLLA training workshop

Teaching LESLLA learners is no simple task. So much is involved: from reading theory to issues of refugee resettlement, from assessing first language literacy to adapting published materials. The teachers that we observe and train are eager to do a good job, but they are also pulled in many directions in their jobs, and their schools often lack resources to provide in-depth preparation in working with LESLLA learners. So, how can we, as teacher educators, help these instructors further excel in their craft and help their learners thrive in their new homes? The half-day teacher-training workshop we designed attempts to do just that. It is described in the chart below, and the next

section highlights several key elements from this training.

Table 3: Outline of LESLLA Teacher Training Workshop

Time	Topic	Activities
20 min	Introductions Agenda	Principles, skills, practices Two warm-up questions
15 min	Foreign language reading demo 'What do those squiggles mean?'	Learn to read a bit in a foreign, non-Roman alphabet language
15 min	Debrief foreign language reading experience	What's involved in reading?
10 min	Research	Key considerations Annotated bibliography
15 min	Principles in reading instruction 'So what's it all mean?'	Five guiding principles to guide successful instruction to adult emergent readers
25 min	Practices that reflect balanced, meaning-based instruction	Scenarios of a good teaching practice.
Break		
45 min	From theory to practice	Review and re-cap Overview of sample literacy-focused unit: *What's in my neighborhood?*
50 min	Workshop time	Workshop task with a text/topic Share two key ideas or activities from your discussion with another group
15 min	Pulling it all together	Resources Reading lab materials Networking Key learnings and next steps
10 min	Wrap up, close	Q and A

4 *Key pieces of a* **LESLLA** *training workshop*

The workshop outlined above was designed to be held in one 4-hour block in an interactive setting, where participants actively ask questions, discuss topics together, and seek input from the facilitators. The workshop includes many different components, and six of these areas require more in depth explanation*:* Foreign language demonstration, Annotated bibliography, Guiding principles, Scenarios of effective practice, Sample instructional unit, and Lesson planning.

4.1 Foreign language demonstration

We begin with a simulation of what our LESLLA students experience when they begin to read in a language that is 1) foreign to them and 2) uses an alphabet they are not familiar with. Of course, we realize that our workshop participants are *not* illiterate, and they bring to this brief simulation a wealth of literacy, formal education experience, and perhaps a heightened aptitude for language learning. We want to at least give them a taste of what their students may experience when learning to read for the first time in an unfamiliar tongue.

Our foreign language demonstration is done in Russian, a language which uses the Cyrillic alphabet. The presenter introduces vocabulary in a meaningful context (a family and their occupations) and immediately has participants actively involved in listening, speaking, and moving about with the lesson. Gradually, the participants are introduced to certain vocabulary items in print, and they learn to read by looking for clues in the letters (bottom-up strategies) and via the established context (top-down strategies). The 'Russian learners' participate in pair reading, match vocabulary words to pictures, fill in missing letters, and eventually (within 15 minutes) are able to read four sentences in Russian with no visual prompts. Figure 1 below illustrates some of the material from this foreign language lesson.

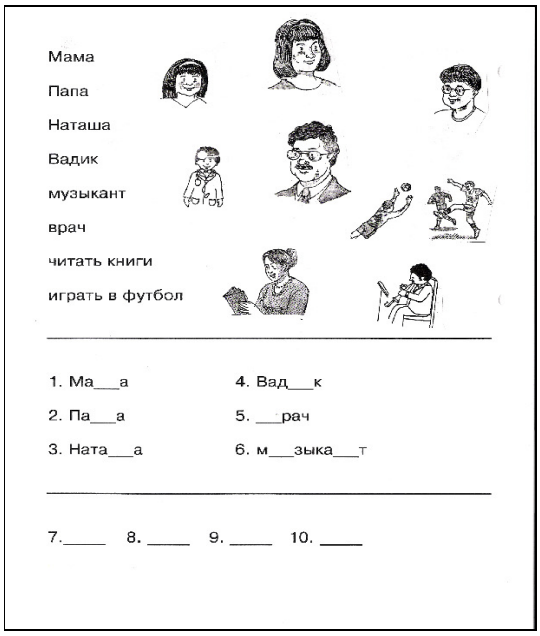

Figure 1: Material from foreign language demonstration

The foreign language demonstration, while a small portion of the workshop, plays a key role. Right away in the training workshop, participants empathize with their learners,

and they quickly identify the advantages of literacy and previous education. More purposes for this foreign language demonstration are outlined in Figure 2.

- To see or be reminded of what a huge undertaking literacy is in an unfamiliar language.
- To become aware of the strategies used for literacy, and to discuss and identify which of these strategies (and others) their students may have or lack when they begin to acquire literacy.
- To be reminded of the importance of instructional pace, repetition, comprehensible input, and encouragement.
- To begin thinking about how this experience runs parallel to their learners' experiences acquiring literacy in English.

Figure 2: Purposes of foreign language demonstration

Throughout the workshop, we refer back to the foreign language demonstration to provide examples of modeling activities, using realia and pictures, setting realistic objectives, and utilizing other sound classroom practices. Furthermore, this demonstration leads us to pose the question, 'What's involved in reading?' The discussion that follows allows us to explore the key components of reading, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

4.2 Annotated bibliography[3]

In our outline of the knowledge base that effective LESLLA instructors need (see Table 1), we mention key research. Some of this research may be from related fields such as first language reading development in children, adult second language acquisition, and adult first language reading development. There is less research available on how adults learn to read for the first time in an unfamiliar language. Fortunately, LESLLA teachers and researchers are making tremendous strides to create and disseminate this vital information. In our training workshop, we are not able to devote a lengthy amount of time to reviewing the relevant research, but we are able to share some resources and perhaps inspire further reading. We have chosen to do this in an annotated bibliography. Through our own reading and recommendations of our colleagues, we have collected citations for 18 key articles and books on the topic of LESLLA learners. For each citation, we have provided a brief written summary, and when possible, a way to access the reading online.

During our workshop, we distribute this annotated bibliography and ask participants to scan the entries for two minutes. Then they are asked to mark two articles that concern topics they are already familiar with, and two that they would like to know more about. This brief task allows our participants to see what research is

[3] The annotated bibliography is available in pdf format at *http://www.leslla.org/files/presentations/Annotatedbibliography_LESLLA%2008.pdf.*

available, what topics researchers are focusing on, and to encourage them to use this list to further their own knowledge. Participants are encouraged to share this list with others, and perhaps use it to begin a research-reading group with fellow LESLLA instructors.

4.3 Guiding principles

While research specifically focusing on LESLLA learners is still in its infancy, we are able to draw some important conclusions about effective instruction both from existing educational research and from professional wisdom in the field. For our training workshop, we extrapolated five guiding principles for teachers to follow. Participants note that these principles overlap a great deal with what we know about sound teaching (Vinogradov, 2008). They include the tenets outlined in Figure 3.

1. Keep it in context.	-	Engage learners in interesting, challenging, relevant topics/themes. Seek out and listen actively for what's important to your learners.
2. Go up and down the ladder.	-	Balance top-down and bottom-up instruction.
3. Provide a buffet of learning opportunities.	-	Engage learners in a variety of learning modes (including hands on, project based, visually supported lessons, etc.)
4. Tap into strengths.	-	Begin with what students already know, like, and do. Routinely use student-generated texts, build around their outside interests, etc.
5. Nurture learners' confidence.	-	Work to create successful, confident learners. Establish routines, post agendas and objectives, teach organizational skills and strategies that will serve learners in and beyond school.

Figure 3: When teaching literacy…

During this portion of the workshop, we describe each of the five guiding principles and offer several references from relevant research to support each choice for our list. We also welcome comments from participants, and they share examples from their own classrooms that demonstrate these principles in action.

4.4 Scenarios of effective practice

The guiding principles described in Figure 3 may appear easy on paper; they are general enough to avoid much argument. But how do we move from this tidy chart to the messy reality of an adult ESL classroom? How do we apply these principles, pulled from key research, and find ways to design better learning activities, nurture an even more productive classroom, and help our LESLLA learners become stronger readers, more confident learners, and more active participants in their communities?

To address the link between theory and practice, we created seven teaching scenarios. These scenarios illustrate how various key issues in LESLLA classrooms can be addressed skillfully. We offer these as scenarios of good practice, examples of sound,

principled classroom instruction. There is a scenario written for each of the following areas:

- *Multi-level (pre-literate and literate students in one class)*
- *L1 literacy instruction*
- *Meaningful assessment*
- *Learning beyond classroom*
- *Using authentic texts*
- *Choosing and creating materials, adapting for use*
- *Extensive reading*

Figure 4: Scenarios of effective practice

In our teacher-training workshop, we put participants in groups of three or four and assign each group one scenario. They read and discuss the scenario for ten to fifteen minutes, specifically seeking answers to these two questions:

- What evidence of the five guiding principles do you see in this scenario?
- How are the five reading skills (phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency) put into action in this scenario?

Working with these scenarios not only allows teachers to build their repertoire of strategies for the classroom, but it also gives them a chance to explore the connections between the research-based guiding principles, effective classroom activities, and the five components of reading. As time allows, groups are asked to explore another scenario or to share their findings with another group.

4.5 Sample instructional unit: Our neighborhood

The main portion of our teacher-training workshop is here: a demonstration of a sample unit of instruction. We have chosen a topic *(What's in your neighborhood?),* and we demonstrate a unit that would take approximately 15-20 hours of instruction. Why demonstrate an entire unit in such a teacher-training workshop? Our purpose is to move beyond theory and research and hypothetical classroom situations, to move into the reality of daily lessons. We want our participants to become familiar with classroom practices that reflect balanced, meaning-based instruction. By placing these best practices in one contextualized, engaging unit, participants are able to see how effective instruction might look in an actual classroom.

While we are not able to include the entire neighborhood unit in these proceedings, we include a few pieces to illustrate this portion of the workshop. Figure 5 shows a Language Experience Story (LEA) that students might dictate to their instructor following a short walk outside.[4] Figures 6, 7, and 8 show phonics activities derived from this LEA story.

[4] LEA capitalizes on students' oral skills and allows them to tell a story to their instructor, or a literate peer, who then puts the story into writing. This approach creates a reading text with

Following a walk near our school, students generate the following text:

We take a walk near our school.
We see many things.
Many cars, bus.
We see Cub Foods, a store for food.
Across the street, there is a big park.
Very beautiful.
On the corner, we see Holiday gas station.
Humboldt avenue.
On other side there is Caribou Coffee.
We walk back to school.
Next to school there are many houses.

Figure 5: Language experience story from neighborhood unit

S school, street, store	**C** Cub, caribou, coffee
A avenue, across, are	**H** houses, Humboldt, holiday

Figure 6: Phonics activities from sample unit: sound chain

Students are asked to begin with a familiar word from the LEA story, and to recognize the final sound and name a new word that begins with that sound, etc. For example:

house > school > like > cold > December > rabbit > time > my > ice

Figure 7: Phonics activities from sample unit: sort the letters

language that comes directly from the learners. The advantage of using LEA is that the reading text includes only language that is meaningful and familiar to the students.

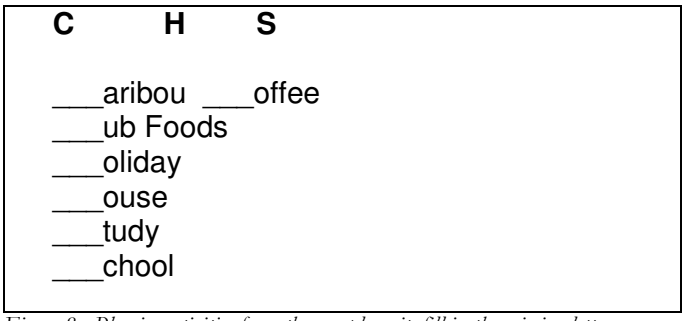

Figure 8: Phonics activities from the sample unit: fill in the missing letters

The sample unit about *What's in Your Neighborhood?* is quite large. In addition to the above LEA story and phonemic awareness and phonics activities, the unit includes journal writing, grammar exercises, extensive reading, and a great deal of repetition and recycling of material. This demonstration of the curricular unit provides a ready example for the next portion of the workshop, where participants work in teams to develop their own units. (The entire unit is described in detail in our documents at www.leslla.org.)

4.6 Lesson planning

Following the Neighborhood Unit, we give participants a chance to work together on developing their own curriculum units. In groups of three or four, they brainstorm around a topic, thinking of classroom activities that will give their learners a balanced, engaging literacy experience. To help them get started, we provide each group with a topic and a short reading to include in the unit. We also distribute a graphic aid that we developed to help them organize their ideas and as a reminder of some of the important areas of instruction. The categories of this visual aid are listed in Figure 9 below.

Functional literacy objectives	Literacy development objectives	Phonic and phonemic awareness tasks
Student-generated texts	Key vocabulary (about 10 words)	Project-based learning
Learning strategy instruction	Extensive reading	Writing mechanics practice
Authentic texts	Community connections	Incorporation of student cultures and past experiences

Figure 9: Graphic organizer: topics for participants' discussion of instructional unit

Our main purpose for this lesson-planning group time is for participants to create and share with each other practices that reflect balanced, meaning-based instruction. They are given quite a bit of time for this activity, about 30 minutes, as the workshop facilitators move from group to group monitoring their progress, helping as needed. This is a terrific opportunity for our participants to share their own successes and ideas with their group members. After each group has an outline of a unit to share, they are paired with another group to compare their units. Finally, we ask for any highlights from their discussions to be shared with the entire group.

5 LESLLA teacher preparation around the globe, resources and next steps

While this half-day professional development workshop is a fine beginning, it is certainly not the end of LESLLA teacher preparation. Promising ideas for expanding this training include moving beyond a one-day workshop, perhaps meeting several times over several weeks, with time in-between for teachers to observe and reflect on their teaching and their students' learning. Another idea is to create reading groups and mentor relationships among LESLLA instructors to encourage ongoing professional development at a local level.

Around the world, LESLLA instructors are struggling to create productive, balanced classrooms. In our work with teacher preparation, we have benefitted greatly from hearing other teacher-educators' experiences in preparing LESLLA teachers. Many projects are in process for improving and expanding current training in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, and also in other parts of the United States. Venues for preparing LESLLA teachers vary greatly. Some training is happening in workshops such as the one we have described here, some is taking place in established pre-service teacher coursework, and more and more attention is being given to online tutorials. We agree that more sharing of resources and professional development projects is needed for our teacher-educators, our practitioners in the field, and most of all, for the benefit of our LESLLA learners.

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STORIES FOR EXTENSIVE READING FOR LESLLA LEARNERS

Martha Young-Scholten and Donna Maguire, Newcastle University

1 Extensive reading in a second language

In an ideal world, a first-time reader would spend some time reading alone every day to reinforce the skills being developed in the classroom through explicit instruction. Becoming a proficient, independent reader involves engaging in the act of reading, and the benefits of reading beyond what is covered in the classroom or assigned for homework, i.e. reading for pleasure, have long been touted as the key to promoting full development of literacy. We learn to read by reading (e.g. Grabe, 1988; Krashen, 1988). This sort of reading is variably referred to as extensive reading, sustained silent reading or free voluntary reading, and in addition to being recognized as key to the development of literacy, Krashen has also argued that reading provides additional comprehensible input that promotes oral proficiency/linguistic competence (Krashen, 2004). If Krashen is right, this is no small matter, given recent studies looking at the oral proficiency of low-educated second language adults whose authors have concluded that they typically reach lower levels than those who acquire an L2 with the benefit of literacy (Juffs & Rodríguez, 2008; Kurvers & van de Craats, 2008; Tarone et al. 2007). While the nature of the relationship between unschooled adults' low levels of morpho-syntactic competence and of reading found by these authors as well as by Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) will remain unclear without further research, if such adults spend little or no time reading outside structured classroom lessons, a slow rate of progress in learning to read and in acquiring linguistic competence is unsurprising.

Day & Bamford (1998) outline three basic characteristics of what they refer to as extensive reading (henceforth ER): it assumes that reading is its own reward, that ER occurs both inside and outside the classroom, and that an ER programme makes available to students a variety of materials at the level of readers in a particular class or group. While Krashen's approach to ER allows the reader free choice or reading materials, others such as Pang & Kamil (2004) argue that access to real literature and culturally rich materials are important for L2 learners' reading development. The quality of materials available to readers may thus have important implications for the success of an ER programme. However, according to Rodrigo et al. (2007), little time is devoted to any sort of ER in L2 literacy classes whose focus is on workbook and/or software exercises. If the teacher assigns homework from workbooks or textbooks, there is evidence that difficulties associated with reading such written text without teacher support result in students not doing the homework. Whiteside (2008) for example discusses how students using a popular textbook were unable to keep track of characters in a story due to discourse conventions with which they were unfamiliar.

Before we consider discourse and other linguistic features of low-level books written for pleasure reading, let us consider whether such books exist in sufficient quantity to support an ER programme.

Driven by their conclusion that students in literacy classes lack exposure to authentic reading materials such as magazines, newspapers and books, Rodrigo et al. (2007) set out to test the feasibility of ER with a group of 43 adults in the USA, most of whom had never read an entire book in their lives. 16% of the group were second language learners from Hispanic and Asian backgrounds.[1] 249 books at reading levels comparable to that of children between the ages of eight and ten years old were made available to the 43 adults. The data reported on concerned how many times books were read by category. There was overwhelming preference for general fiction (such books were read 246 times by those in the group), followed by biography (books in this category were read 97 times). Non-fiction books read the most by the students fell into the category of health and education and were read 59 times by students in the group. Students also showed a strong preference for books with themes and characters relating to their lives.

Given the success of Rodrigo et al's programme in terms of uptake of books by category, it is reasonable to consider just how ER can serve those starting to read for the first time in a second language. Such learners' reading skills and phonological awareness will not be that of the eight-to-ten-year old reading level of the books in the Rodrigo et al. study, but are instead closer to that of a preschool or kindergarten child's (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006). Moreover, first-time second language readers' morpho-syntactic development may be comparable that of a two or three-year old's. When starting to set up an ER programme, the first task is collecting books at students' level. While there are books aplenty for young children just starting to read, and at least 249 books (on Rodrigo et al's programme) with adult appeal for the reader at the eight-to-ten year old's reading level, the lowest-level adult L2 readers are not comparably well served.

2 Books in English for LESLLA readers

2.1 Current availability

Non-fiction and fiction books written for adults with low levels of literacy (albeit usually slightly higher than the preschool level) and distributed by various publishers exist (e.g. *Sam and Pat* by Lowry, Hendron & Hartell; see also Condelli & Cronen, this volume; Oxford Bookworm Starters). Teachers also make use of short books which they have written themselves (see e.g. Kurvers, 2008; Williams & Chapman, 2008) and which students have written as classroom projects (Peyton, 1993). In the latter two cases, content and level are guaranteed to be appropriate given teachers' detailed knowledge of their students own abilities and interests, and students' writing at their own level and on topics of interest to them. Children's story books might also seem to

[1] The authors do not say whether the Asians were from South or East Asia, but common usage in the USA of 'Asian' to refer to those from East Asia suggests that those in this study would have been immigrants from regions in Southeast Asia where levels of education have been low.

be an obvious choice due to considerably less text density than adult books; however, use of such books with L2 adults with low literacy levels is controversial for a variety of reasons. Wallace (2008), for example, points out that characters (often animals) and story lines perplex adult students who lack childhood exposure to this genre.

A perusal by the first author of books available to students on one UK ESL literacy classroom revealed a closed cupboard full of multiple copies of seven books from the aforementioned Oxford series and sets of non-fiction readers written in 1997 for learners in that community. These 12-24 page books were illustrated, with an appropriately low amount of text per page (4-15 sentences). Despite their simple syntax (use of main verbs in the present tense and few auxiliary verbs), the sentences in these books were morpho-syntactically more complex than adults at this level can be expected to handle (see Table 1 below). These books were not in active use; rather, four-page books written by the teacher, with simpler morpho-syntax and photographs and on current topics, were being used for whole-class reading. These books were on display on a shelf at the back of the classroom, along with several books written by undergraduate university students, to be described in the next section.

2.2 Getting the level right: Organic grammar

Organic Grammar (OG) is a theory of language acquisition which entails the learner progressing through stages at which syntax and inflectional morphology become increasingly complex. OG is based on 1990s research on the L2 German of immigrant adults from Italy, Korea, Spain and Turkey who had received no instruction in their second language (see Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994). In addition to the four stages shown below, there is a preliminary phase during which most utterances contain no verbs; this stage is comparable to young children's one-word stage (see Myles, 2004). Stage 1 is characterized by the production of short, multiword sentences similar to the young child's two-word and telegraphic stages. In L2 acquisition, there is influence of the learner's native language word order as regards the non-finite verb and its complement (the VP). Data from Yamada-Yamamoto (1993) on her son's acquisition of English show an initial Japanese-based object-verb word order which eventually switches to the verb-object order of English. At both points in his development, he produces only non-finite verbs (including with –ing), and inflectional morphology is absent indicating that his grammar only consists of a VP, along the lines of what Vainikka & Young-Scholten have since 1994 claimed for the early stages of L2 acquisition.

(1) Stage 1a: *Japanese object-verb (OV) order*
bread eat
bananas eating

Stage 1b: *English verb-object (VO) order*
eating banana
wash your hand

One can also find memorized (unanalyzed) chunks at this stage such as *My name is*…. that can mislead the researcher into concluding the learner is at a more advanced stage (see Myles, 2004). Under this theory, after initial native language reliance, inflectional

morphology and syntax develop in tandem, following the common stages shown in Table 1 and illustrated in the examples in (2) from the low-educated Somali speakers in the Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) study; non-target forms other than those relevant for Organic Grammar[2] are not listed here.

(2) a *The initial functional syntax stage* (Stage 2)
The woman is cry. auxiliary form, but verb without *–ing*
Because too bad. subordinating conjunction but no verb

b *Elaborated functional syntax* (Stage 3)
Someone's die because he have accident.
-ed missing; use of non-past form
productive simple subordination
Car hit the kid that's lie down on the street.
progressive *-ing* missing
subject relative clause

c *Target-like functional syntax* (Stage 4)
The young boy was having fun with his bike.
correct use of past progressive
When you reverse, you have to see anybody behind. complex subordination

Table 1: Stages of Organic Grammar

Stage markers	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Main verb position	L1, then L2	L2	L2	L2
Pronominal subjects	none	some	obligatory	obligatory
Copula, modal and auxiliary forms	none	one copula form; some modals	common	obligatory
Agreement	none	some suppletive forms	acquired	acquired
Embedded clauses	none	conjoined clauses	simple	complex
Question formation	formulaic; intonation	uninverted	correctly inverted	correctly inverted

[2] Organic Grammar is comparable to many other theories of development in its reliance on oral production data, where the assumption is that an underlying grammar is the basis for utterances produced. It is the systematicity of learners' production that allows such assumptions to be made. However, what learners are able to comprehend has more important implications for their comprehension of written text, and thus a theory of development might in part be based on comprehension data. There are methodological reasons for this; it is difficult, for example, to determine whether uninstructed learners distinguish among inflectional morphemes in varying positions. Here data from unschooled L2 adults' attempts to read text above their OG stage could contribute valuable information about learners' comprehension.

2.3 Availability of books further considered

The multiple sources of story books in ESOL literacy classrooms makes it difficult to know with any level of precision how many books are available in a given context to enable the establishment of an extended reading programme for the lowest level of L2 learners. It seems safe to assume that the current supply of books would on most programmes not allow application of a ratio similar to that of Rodrigo et al. (249 books for 43 readers - roughly six books per reader). The Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) study of 17 adults with either no or some previous schooling found that the sub-group with no schooling were all still unable to decode words and were also at the lowest stage of Organic Grammar morpho-syntactic development. The available evidence (including discussion on user lists) indicates that books at the very lowest level are in very short supply indeed.

In addition, due to the need to make best use of often scarce resources provided for teaching learners at this level, ESOL literacy-level programmes are typically multi-level. This was the case for the learners on the above-mentioned study, and was also the case for the learners for whom stories were written in the present study (see also Condelli & Wrigley 2006). In a single class there can be learners who, on the one hand, represent different (usually lower, but not always) levels of morpho-syntactic competence, and on the other hand, learners who demonstrate varying levels of reading skills and rates of progress in acquiring new skills, usually connected to their amount of schooling in their native languages. In terms of writing stories for an entire class of such learners for an ER programme, this translates into writing stories at more than one morpho-syntactic stage and more than one reading level, which when the ratio of six books per reader is applied, will result in a collection of books that is large enough to provide reader's choice.

Stories will continue to be written by ESOL teachers and their students, and hopefully more titles relevant to learners will be produced. However, if the rough evidence presented here is any indication, the current supply of story books is insufficient to approach the 6:1 ratio employed in the Rodrigo et al. study. In order to begin to address the need for more books, a pilot project was conducted in 2008 to determine whether undergraduate students would be able to assist in adding to the supply of books for a local ESOL literacy-level class.

3 Writing Stories for readers at the lowest levels

3.1 The project and the assignment

The pilot project was embedded in a course ('module' in the United Kingdom) for undergraduate English language and linguistics, linguistics, and linguistics and literature students at a university in the UK. The course began with discussion of the 1970s-1990s studies of immigrant adults who were acquiring second languages naturalistically, i.e. without instruction; many of those studied had not been educated past primary school in their countries of origin. Although researchers on these studies rarely isolated level of education as a variable and none of them focused on literacy, a number of important ideas applicable to both unschooled and schooled L2 adults emerged from

these studies (see Van de Craats et al., 2006). Among these ideas was Organic Grammar (see Table 1). The course content was not unfamiliar to these undergraduate students, given their background knowledge of second language acquisition from having taken an introductory course the previous semester or year. The syllabus was designed to cover the areas in LESLLA's mission statement (http://www.leslla.org), namely research, policy and practice. This meant that a good part of the course was devoted to learning about children's and unschooled adults' first-time literacy as well as ESOL policy and practice in the UK and elsewhere. Course materials included the 2006 and 2007 LESLLA proceedings as well as journal articles and books such as Holme's (2004) *Literacy*.[3] Students were given the option to write a story book for low-literate adults as their course assignment. While the external aim of this assignment was to add to the supply of books available to readers at a local ESOL programme, a prime, internal objective of the assignment was to raise undergraduate students' awareness of the issues surrounding LESLLA learners and to consolidate their knowledge of research, policy and practice.

In describing the development of this project, the two questions to be answered are (1) whether undergraduates can write stories appropriate for adding to the supply of books available to be made available on an extensive reading programme and (2) whether this assignment fulfills the goals for assessment on the course students took.

3.2 Steps in writing the stories

In setting out to write stories for a particular group of readers, there were a number of linguistic considerations students needed to take into account. Where these involved features at or below the sentence level, students already had sufficient background to meet these requirements. However, it became clear by the end of the project that in some areas students were deficient; for example students knew little about written discourse because the department they were studying in only covered this in a course offered every other year, and none had taken it. Students also had no knowledge of stylistics and little of the conventions of writing fiction for adults or, more importantly, for beginning readers, including children.[4] Although the department does offer courses taught by literature specialists on children's literature, creative writing, poetry, because none of the students had taken any of these, it is not clear what their usefulness in writing stories for (see previous suggestion) adults might be.

Linguistic considerations included vocabulary, phonology and morpho-syntax. For vocabulary, it is claimed that 98% of words in a text should already be known by the reader (Hseuh-Chao & Nation, 2000). Level of morpho-syntax should be the same or slightly higher (Krashen's 1985 i + 1); here Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis was operationalized in the form of the stages of Organic Grammar.[5]

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[3] Students were aware through reading Holme's book (as well as some of the LESLLA proceedings chapters) of the socio-cultural aspects of reading. Discussion of the socio-cultural aspects of this project is outside the scope of the present chapter.

[4] This is not meant to imply that books for first-time second language readers and for children are comparable; see comments above in reference to Wallace (2008).

[5] Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis is also based on oral production, i.e. the many 1970s studies of L1 children, L2 children and adults.

In addition, words should ideally be monosyllabic with CVC syllable structure to aid decoding by beginners. Gourley (1984) is an author who discusses the discourse features of children's literature beyond the sentence level; these include cohesion, narrative voice, patterned repetition and relationship of picture to text. In writing fiction, one must also consider standard literary devices such as plot, character and setting. Finally, cultural sensitivity, level of sophistication and interest/appeal (see e.g. Palmer, 1972) are features that must be taken into consideration when writing for immigrant adults.

These requirements were simplified and broken down into manageable steps for undergraduates with no experience of writing fiction and also no familiarity with low-literate adult immigrants. Because these were undergraduate students who had never had any contact with such LESLLA learners and therefore had no awareness of their literacy needs, preparation for writing stories was broken down into the following steps, all of which were directed and/or monitored by the course leader: (1) a visit to one of the ESOL programmes at a local further education college with observation of students on a pre-entry level literacy class and in the resource centre, where the undergraduate students were able to chat with the ESOL students; (2) evaluation of books available at the LESLLA students' level in the college library/resource room; (3) consideration by the undergraduate students of what was read to them and what they had first read on their own as young children with the aim of raising their awareness of features of written discourse and conventions of children's fiction; (4) whole-class listing vocabulary likely to be known by the ESOL students and discussion of other factors, including cultural constraints on certain plot lines. For step 4, because there was no list available of words which pre-entry level ESOL learners are exposed to in their lessons, a list was instead created by brainstorming words learners were likely to know in the categories of numbers, money, colours, attributive adjectives, every day objects, clothing, places, animals, transport, family terms and people in the public eye. The undergraduate students then took these words, added verbs of their own choice and applied the stages of Organic Grammar shown in Table 1 to guide their writing of story text. The final step involved writing up this entire process as an essay for submission along with a copy of the story book, to be donated to the ESOL programme.

The titles of the resulting story books were: *David the Bus Driver*, *Laura and the Flowers, A Day in Newcastle*, *The Life of Victoria*, *Music for Money* and *A Day with Emma*. Authors based their plots on what they reasoned the ESOL students would be interested in from their observation and interaction with them during step 1 above. Two of the books, *A Day in Newcastle* (about a father and son attending a Newcastle United football match) and *Music for Money* (about a young man who busks to earn money to buy a camera) were written with two particular ESOL students in mind with whom the student authors had conversed about their leisure time activities and post-ESOL course aspirations when chatting with them in the resource centre. *A Day in Newcastle* was written by the only male undergraduate student to take up this course assessment option. The content and plots of the remaining four books evolved through classroom discussion of ESOL students' interests and needs, including citizenship, which was the theme of *The Life of Victoria*. Authors then used various techniques to support their written text visually. The first two books used line drawings, *A Day in Newcastle* used clip art and three books used photographs downloaded from the internet and/or taken by the authors or their friends.

Authors then field-tested their stories by reading them together with individual learners to whom they were directed by ESOL programme teachers. This step was taken primarily to ensure that the morpho-syntactic stage and vocabularly were appropriate for the intended readers. When the authors wrote about their field testing in the 3,000-word essays that constituted the assignment for the course, several problems emerged. First, it was difficult even for these metalinguistically knowledgeable undergraduates to write stories at Organic Grammar stages 1 and 2; stories were invariably written for learners at a higher stage. However, the main problem was not lack of adherence to OG criteria but rather the presence in their text of idioms which often involved abstract use of prepositions. An issue the authors raised when still writing their stories was use of deictic terms, particularly use of time adverbs when tense could not be used (at lower OG stages). The authors arrived at various creative solutions, including natural use of narrative present for relating a football match in *A Day in Newcastle* as well as use of illustration to depict the passage of time. Of course use of narrative present to avoid past tense turns out to implicate a late-acquired feature, namely subject-verb agreement. This did not seem to erect a barrier to ESOL students' decoding of such words, as they simply read the bare verb. In fact, when field testing their stories, the undergraduate authors were intrigued to discover that the ESOL students, who presumably had not acquired third person singular –s, also omitted it when reading. Since Lardiere (1998), the body of work in second language acquisition on what non-production of inflectional morphology indicates in regards to the underlying syntax has grown; such occurrences in the undergraduate students' data point to the continued importance of studying low-literate L2 learners, along the lines of what Van de Craats et al. (2006) and Kurvers et al. (2007) note in terms of their contributions to research.

To address the two questions posed above, (1) can undergraduates write stories appropriate for an eventual extensive reading programme, and (2) does this assignment fulfill course aims and objectives in terms of assessment, we turn to a summary of the assignment provided by Donna Maguire, one of the undergraduate students who took the course.

4 Writing and field testing a story for low-literate adults

The excerpt below appears in Donna's own words, and is representative of what all students choosing this assignment experienced.

4.1 A day with Emma

Producing a story book for low-literate learners wasn't a task I had ever tackled before, and I underestimated how much knowledge, including knowledge about ESOL, was needed to produce such a book. Visiting the ESOL programme made me and my fellow students realise that we had to take into account why these learners might have come to the UK and what their linguistic, cultural and social background was. The stories we were going to write had to be appropriate and we felt the best choice was to focus on day to day situations. During our visits to the programme and based on what we were learning on the course, we began to discuss how most of the immigrants on

the programme came from backgrounds very different to our own which meant that we would need to steer clear of the every day situations we were familiar with, for example male and female friends consuming alcohol together or a holiday situation where men, women and children are dressed in bathing costumes. Even though we thought that these kinds of contexts could help immigrants understand and therefore adjust to British culture, we decided to avoid them. Sticking to simple activities that all adults can relate to in their daily lives seemed like a better option. We came up with common urban activities such as transportation by bus, and in my case, going to the park. We knew by then that pre-entry ESOL students usually have low levels of oral proficiency and little or no ability to read in their native language or English, so we thought it would be best to start with the sight words applying to common objects which we assumed the students would be able to recognise by their shape, even if they could not yet sound out these words. If these sight words could be understood, it would then be possible that the rest of the sentence could be slowly comprehended. With all these points in mind, we then applied the criteria for morpho-syntax and phonology and consulted the list of vocabulary we brainstormed in class to start writing our books.

The first trip to the ESOL programme involved an observation of a literacy class, with around twelve pre-entry level second language learners. These students were involved in group work and an interactive whiteboard was being used by the teacher along with worksheets. We observed that although oral proficiency and reading ability among the learners varied, they all seemed to be interested in the class activities. During the same visit, we also went to the college library, where the librarian directed us to the section that held low-literacy and ESOL books. We spent a good deal of time there, but were unable to find many books at the level of the students we had just observed in class. The cultural inappropriacy and grammatical complexity of some of these books was striking, leading us to conclude that they were not aimed at the pre-entry ESOL reader. We were becoming aware that at the crucial stages of starting to learn to read, it would be better for the reader to tackle something with which they could identify. None of us had ever taken a course on children's literature, but we intuitively felt that the illustrations in books for beginning readers needed to relate directly to what the text was trying to convey. However, in one low-literacy book there was a drawing which was meant to demonstrate frustration with electronic equipment by showing a large disembodied foot stomping on a laptop PC. We felt that this was an inappropriate and probably misleading way to present frustration to this group of low-literate adults.

On the second visit to the ESOL programme, students tried to determine the morpho-syntactic level of the students for whom we were going to write a book. I was unable to participate in this trip, so I had to write my story without particular learners in mind. This meant that I probably had a less than accurate idea of what students were capable of in terms of reading. Taking the notion of simple syntax, phonology and vocabulary, the next steps for me were finding good pictures and writing my story, in keeping with everything I had observed. Putting the story together was difficult at first, and it was challenging to make it culturally appealing and relevant to the reader. I tried to create interest for adults and children, taking into account that the adult reader as a parent might want to give it to their children to read. So my story followed a little girl who had moved to a new country with her family and had one true friend, her dog, whom she loved to take to the park. On a very wet day she comes home from the park with her parents and the story then describes her home life, tea time and bath time as

daily family activities. My second visit to the ESOL programme was for field testing. I read my story together with two students from different cultural and educational backgrounds. I will describe the process with one of them, N. She was 24 and from Guinea and had immigrated without any literacy due to no schooling in her native language or the official language of Guinea, French. My book turned out to be too difficult for her; not only did she not seem to know words, but the syntax and the adverbs used in the story seemed too complicated for her. Consonant clusters required her to think about her decoding, although final affricates did not seem to pose a problem. However, word length and sentence length were impediments: N. struggled with words longer than a syllable and sentences longer than three words. These difficulties resulted in her becoming bored and slightly distressed at her lack of ability to read the story, so we did not continue reading together past the third page of the book. She struck me as not being further along than a reception-age child in her reading, but I realised that I had written a book for a reader at a higher level.

5 Discussion: Effectiveness of the course assignment and success of the stories

One of the two aims of this pilot project was creation of an assignment that would measure undergraduate students' understanding of LESLLA research, policy and practice. Both the course syllabus and the assignment prioritized research, but in carrying out the assignment, students become aware to some extent of policy and to a greater extent practice.[6] If the value students attach to how they are assessed can be measured by enthusiasm, Donna's testimonial, which is representative of the behaviour displayed by all those students choosing this option, points to a high such level. An interesting by-product of the assignment turned out to be student commitment, at least with respect to Donna.[7] After field testing her story and submitting her essay, she wanted to be able to donate to the ESOL programme a more accessible story book so she decided to make a second attempt at writing her story. She laid out a simpler plot, took her own photographs and then considerably simplified the morpho-syntax, shortened the sentences and reduced their number per illustration to one or two. Donna's post-course story writing further shows that while undergraduate students may not have all the knowledge required to write a successful story on their first attempt, they continue post-course to think about the various issues to which the course introduced them. Of course undergraduates lack certain crucial knowledge – that of the skills of the ESOL students themselves. Information obtained from a single observation of students during a class session and one-off assessment of one or two students' morpho-syntactic stages cannot approach the amount of knowledge ESOL teachers have of their own students. On the other hand, by their penultimate and final years of study, undergraduate language and linguistics students have amassed considerable knowledge about language. An assignment such as the one discussed here stretches them in unaccustomed ways by

[6] Because this was not a creative writing course, no marks were given for the actual story; rather students were assessed on how they applied the linguistic criteria to writing the story and on their field testing of the story.

[7] The assignment seemed to boost investment in LESLLA issues for another student, who carried out an independent study on the literacy of employees at a factory in Gujarat during a vacation internship in the middle of the semester he took the course.

challenging them to apply such knowledge to real life problems. However, even this knowledge is insufficient. To write a successful story, students need to know more about written discourse and the conventions of narrative fiction, particularly for beginning readers; when the course is offered again, it will include such topics.

In seeking to add to the supply of books available to low-literate immigrant adults, the assignment was heavily dependent on the good will of ESOL teachers and programme directors. When first approached, their protectiveness towards vulnerable adults inclined them to resist cooperation; those students who chose to pursue as an alternative assignment the assessment of literacy skills and linguistic competence met with more resistance. However, once teachers and directors realized the value of the final product – new story books for their low-literate learners – their initial wariness changed to acceptance. On-going cooperation can be expected to be closely linked to the appeal of these stories for their learners.

This paper began with a discussion of extensive reading, calling for the implementation of such programmes for very low-literate immigrant adults to boost their chances of eventually become independent readers. ER cannot be considered without a much better supply of fiction than currently exists for LESLLA readers. The evidence presented here shows that undergraduate language and linguistics students can make a contribution towards reaching the goal of six books per reader. At the start, establishment of an ER programme would favour Krashen's approach of not restricting readers' choice. Addressing Pang & Kamil's (2004) contention that quality (real literature and cultural richness) is key to development of literacy must await the time when the quantity of books reaches the critical mass necessary for extensive reading to become common practice on programmes for low-literate L2 adults.

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POLICY ON LESLLA LEARNERS IN FLANDERS

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1 Introduction

As an advisor to the Flemish Minister for Education I am involved in all aspects of lifelong learning; therefore, second language acquisition in low-educated non-native speakers of Dutch is only one of the many issues I advise on. However, language acquisition in non-native speakers of Dutch holds a very important position within adult education as a whole. In the past six to seven years the interest in the target group of low-educated non-native speakers of Dutch and illiterates has rapidly increased.

This increasing interest was addressed by a number of new policy initiatives that are based on a well-considered view of second language acquisition in low-educated non-native speakers of Dutch. These developments required investment from the government both in terms of budget and support. The government has tried to convert the most recent scientific developments regarding second language acquisition into a realistic and concrete policy which has political and social support and takes budgetary restrictions and the capacity of those who are to implement it into account.

These policy lines were built up following extensive consultation with the parties involved in the provision of Dutch as a second language (DSL). I will discuss this in greater detail later on. The consensus on which this policy was based to a large extent explains the success of the implemented measures.

From this perspective I wish to take you through the way that second language policy in Flanders was developed, a process which very much fits in with a broader migration and integration policy. I will give you a brief outline of the rapid changes that are taking place in Flemish second language policy, and in particular of the attention this policy devotes to low-educated and illiterate non-Dutch speakers. My aim is to offer you a greater insight into the overall vision of this policy. Naturally, I will also elaborate on the policy's successes and mention the aspects of it we still need to work on. I will also discuss the important challenges we believe we will be facing with regards to second language policy in the near and distant future.

2 *Flanders as an immigration country*

Antwerp is a melting pot of different nationalities and cultures. There are many reasons why Antwerp has become the benchmark for measuring the success or failure of integration policy in Flanders.

Belgium has had a high level of immigration country since the early fifties.[1] At the time, labour was actively recruited from countries such as Italy, Morocco and Turkey. Since the seventies, this type of immigration has ceased. To this day, dozens of new immigrants enter Flanders every day through asylum and family reunification procedures, as a result of illegal immigration, the free movement of citizens within the EU, labour migration or international student programmes.

This immigration has no doubt yielded economic, cultural and social benefits. A lot of immigrants have built a life and future here and contribute to this country's prosperity. However, increasing immigration also has a downside. Some newcomers find it hard to participate in society as fully-fledged citizens, and to be accepted or to make themselves accepted. The reasons for this are diverse and complex. They are mainly due to socio-economic factors, reinforced by socio-cultural and sometimes even religious factors.

Until the late nineties, people believed that this new group of immigrants would be swiftly and smoothly integrated into our society. By attending school and working they would acquire knowledge of the Dutch language and find themselves a place within our society. These expectations were not met. The disadvantages faced by the immigrant communities have insufficiently decreased. Moreover, as a result of the constant discrimination and deprivation, access to the labour market, higher education and housing also continue to be difficult. Because of these issues immigrant communities do not equally participate in society, they mostly compensate for this by falling back on their own socio-cultural groups. This results in increasing social and cultural segregation and the emergence of a growing subclass

The consequences of this soon made themselves felt. The segregation of certain groups within the population led to increasing polarisation in our society and growing mutual intolerance, discrimination and racism. We find that the political and social climate is hardening.

It is within this context that in the mid-nineties we came to believe that we needed to adopt a more structured approach if we were to put an end to these negative social developments. This resulted in an adjustment of policy in many areas, mainly in the field of education and employment. I will not elaborate too much on this subject; however, it is important to mention that these developments also brought about a change in the Flemish policy on second language education, which I will now discuss in greater detail.

2 Developments pertaining to Dutch as a second language

Although there has been a formal educational provision of Dutch as a second language (DSL) in Flanders since 1970, until the mid-nineties this was mostly limited to local volunteer initiatives within non-formal socio-cultural education. Little attention was paid in this to common orientation, quality management and professionalising teachers.

[1] The following paragraphs are largely inspired by Paul Scheffer's (2007) book *Land van aankomst* (Country of arrival).

In many cases the training objectives were often not clearly defined, there was no evaluation or certification and the different providers did not recognise each other's courses. No differentiation was made between the level of education and the prior knowledge of non-native speakers of Dutch and, as a result, many class groups contained both university-educated L2 learners with high cognitive skills and course participants who had had little or no education. This policy had many negative consequences, in particular the lowest educated did not get any opportunity to learn Dutch and as a result, their chances in society were dramatically reduced.

In 1993, the Flemish authorities organised the first round table conference on Dutch as a second language with all key stakeholders. This conference can be considered a historic milestone. During the next ten years the provision of Dutch as a second language was uniformised along the lines of the policy recommendations formed during this round table conference. To this end, the Common European Framework of Reference for modern-foreign languages was adopted by all public provision providers as a common framework of reference. This framework enabled these institutions to recognise each other's courses and certificates, which greatly improved chances for L2 learners of Dutch.

Another important development was the fact that more attention was given to the prior knowledge and learning skills of L2 learners of Dutch. In 1997, the first model entrance examination was developed; it was designed to ensure that participants were placed in a second language provision appropriate to their capabilities. This resulted in a split between course providers, Adult Education centres focussed more on high-educated participants while Adult Basic Education centres dealt mainly with low-educated or illiterate second language learners. However, as a result of the competition between these institutions, a lot of course participants still ended up in a provision which was unsuitable for them. Most of these participants became discouraged, dropped out of their course and lost the opportunity to learn Dutch in a way that was suited to their needs.

In 2002, a second round table conference took place; this can again be seen as a milestone. The policy which was formed during this conference built on the existing policies. Eight Dutch Language Houses were established with the aim of referring non-Dutch speakers in a neutral and objective manner to the most suitable provision. A cognitive skills test was developed to this end which gives an indication of course participants' learning potential. To this day, thanks to the Dutch Language Houses, lower educated and illiterate non-native speakers of Dutch are offered a suitable provision of Dutch as a second language.

Another important element is that strong emphasis was placed on the professionalisation of the training provision of Dutch as a second language. Encouraged by the Support Centre for Dutch as L2, now renamed 'Centre for Language and Education', test databases and model material were developed, an in-service training policy for teachers was developed which helped all institutions to improve the quality of second language provision. This encouraged a growing number of non-native speakers of Dutch to opt for a formal training in Dutch as a second language and to make less use of voluntary initiatives.

One important development since 2003 is that the courses themselves have become more uniform across the different institutions. The Centres for Adult Basic Education and the Centres for Adult Education, for instance, provide DSL courses that differ in terms of training duration and teaching method, but that pursue the same goals and have a similar structure. This makes it easier for lower educated course participants who have completed an adult basic education course to follow in-service training at a Centre for Adult Education. I will discuss these similar courses later on.

The professionalisation of the training provision of DSL goes hand in hand with a reinforced striving to let the non-native speakers of Dutch actively participate in the society, for instance by being an (active) member of sport club, being a volunteer or feeling oneself responsible for problems between the native and non-native population in mixed quarters in the big cities. In 2003, the Flemish civic integration policy was adopted. Dutch language knowledge has been established as a prerequisite for successful integration. Anyone who seeks to participate in society, who wants to be part of the community, who wishes to help his or her children at school or is looking for a job can only do so if he or she speaks Dutch.

For this reason, newcomers are obliged to attend a reception programme. This includes a basic course in Dutch as a second language. If someone refuses to follow this course he or she may be fined. More recently, the activation policy has extended to employment and housing policies. People who wish to retain their right to unemployment benefit and do not speak Dutch must follow a course in Dutch as a second language. People who wish to apply for rented social housing must show a willingness to learn Dutch.

These policy measures were not without effect. Between 2002 and 2008 the participation in Dutch as a second language courses rose by 32% at the Centres for Adult Education and by 38% at the Centres for Adult Basic Education. Each year, some 62,000 course participants follow a course in Dutch as a second language. The obligation of non-Dutch speakers to learn Dutch also entails an obligation for the government, which has to make available a sufficient provision of Dutch language courses to meet the demand. Additional investments were made to reduce the waiting lists for the courses of Dutch as a second language. Currently, the Flemish government provides an annual budget of over 80 million euros for this purpose. About 2,500 teachers are occupied on a daily basis in giving Dutch as a second language classes.

4 *Development of separate programme for literacy course participants*

I have given you a very brief overview of the changes in Dutch as a second language provision that occurred in Flanders during the past two decades. The position of very slow-learning or illiterate non-native speakers of Dutch is of vital importance in these developments. This target group has been catered for by the Centres for Adult Basic Education since 1990. The social task of these institutions is to increase the general literacy level in adult Flemings. This also includes the organisation of courses in Dutch as a second language that are exclusively geared towards the least-educated.

The professionalisation and reforms in the Dutch as a second language field had a far-reaching impact on adult basic education. Until 2003, this sector worked with an open curriculum with vague, general objectives. The emphasis was on the social aspects of group learning and equal attention was given to the social aspects and to the knowledge and skills to be acquired. Teachers mostly concentrated on the development and optimisation of already available knowledge and skills. Here and now experiences were used as important subject matter. However, as the things that course participants wish to learn, rarely run parallel to the structure of a course, teachers had a great deal of freedom to organise their own tasks. The centres for adult basic education used their own methods to define targets and levels and to evaluate learning progress. Due to the lack of a systematic evaluation system it was impossible to properly assess the extent to which learning objectives had been met. In that respect this provision was very much in line with the volunteer initiatives of the eighties and nineties.

In 2003, this way of running second language courses was completely changed. Firstly, it was determined which courses could be organised by the centres for adult basic education. A structure and targets were defined for each course. These targets were minimum objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes which the government considered appropriate for course participants.

This reform took place in two phases. In a first phase the Dutch as a second language course was reorganised. In adult basic education only one basic course could be organised at level 1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for modern foreign languages. The Breakthrough level consisted of 4 modules of 60 periods. The Waystage level was made up of 3 modules of 80 periods. It soon turned out that although this course was suitable for most low educated course participants with more limited cognitive skills, it did not bring any help very slow-learning course participants or illiterates.

That is why a separate course was introduced for this specific target group. In 2005, the modular DSL literacy training was introduced in adult basic education at the Breakthrough level.[2] This training consists of 10 modules of 60 periods each. One module, module 5, focuses specifically on writing skills. In 2006, this course was complemented with 6 additional modules at the Waystage level. The entire training programme at level 1 thus encompasses 960 periods.

Two aspects of literacy, namely prose literacy and document literacy are developed in this course. In terms of learning objectives and contexts this course fits in with the traditional DSL trajectory.

The development of this course was founded on a number of important basic principles, for example from a vision of second language instruction as a means to achieve more equal opportunities and a better integration into our society. That is why teaching Dutch can never be a goal in itself, but must be as functional as possible. Slow-learning or illiterate non-Dutch speakers who have followed a basic DSL course must be able to communicate in a Dutch language environment with very limited linguistic means. There is for instance no point in teaching these course participants the correct name for all the parts of the human body. Rather, we should make sure that

[2] See the proceedings of the LESLLA symposium in Newcastle (Literacy and Second Language in the Low Countries) for more details of the modular DSL training.

non-Dutch speakers are able to explain to a doctor how they feel and which part of their body hurts.

The emphasis is not so much on the knowledge itself, but rather on the practical use of the correct spelling, vocabularies and parsing. There is much emphasis on the level of skills that can be used functionally in the context of the society into which non-Dutch speakers are to integrate. Naturally, this does not mean that no knowledge elements are imparted. However, this knowledge should provide maximum support to achieve the ultimate goal, which is a minimum basis for being able to function in a social or societal context.

This applies to non-Dutch speakers who want to find a job and therefore have a professional perspective and to course participants who learn Dutch for personal reasons, namely to be able to go shopping, to follow their child's progress at school, etc. This emancipatory vision of second language training thus suggests that something more than language objectives should be addressed in the training. It should also impart a number of general skills objectives and attitudes, such as courage to speak, willingness to communicate or perseverance.

By following this training very slow-learning course participants should at least have minimal ability to manage in our society. We must of course remain realistic. The language level, no matter how functionally we try to teach this, will continue to be limited. It provides an insufficient basis, for instance, to successfully attend a vocational course without following an additional intensive language course. This is precisely why it is essential to have the learning efforts of low-educated course participants be as beneficial as possible by making the taught matter highly functional. Once again, lower-educated non-Dutch speakers gain more benefits from being able and having the courage to use the Dutch language in everyday communication with Flemings than they would from scoring maximum points on a parsing exercise.

5 Preconditions

In order to enable the Centres for Adult Basic Education to organise these courses in a proper manner, the government has provided the necessary human and financial resources. Full financing is offered for each group of eight course participants. The centre is also allowed to organise courses for smaller groups, but this must be compensated for by working with larger groups in other courses.

In addition to the regular teaching hours we provide an additional support of 10% for the organisation of individual pathway guidance for course participants, for the organisation of an open learning centre or for the coordination of the training. This individual guidance in particular is of vital importance. In the past, adult course participants were too often expected to have acquired certain 'automatisms' such as the ability to make independent decisions about the courses they were taking. However, we are convinced that in adult education, just as in compulsory or higher education there is a need for learning pathway guidance.

Individual learning pathway guidance means that the centre helps to guide the course participant through his or her learning process, taking his or her individual needs into account. This guidance begins with the application, intake and placement of the course participant in the most suitable training provision. During the training the pathway guidance consists of the individual monitoring of the course participant's

progress and of remediation when the course participant fails to meet the set objectives. At the end of the training the course participant has a right to receive feedback about their results and advice about any possible further education courses. Since 2007, in exchange for these additional resources, however, the centres for adult basic education have been obliged to provide this individual guidance.

Another important thing is that the training must be made as attractive as possible for course participants. We try to achieve this by adopting the most flexible working method and by keeping the training cost to an absolute minimum. The training provision of the centres for adult basic education is a decentralised provision. There are 13 centres for adult basic education in Flanders, but they have many different teaching locations, spread throughout the Flemish Region. This allows course participants to find a suitable provision close to home.

We also try to encourage the centres to offer a differentiated provision by organising both day and evening courses, sometimes with a different intensity. The number of training hours can vary between 6 and 15 per week. Our goal is to reach all the different target groups as effectively as possible. Working people should also be given the opportunity to learn Dutch.

Moreover, this is a modular training programme. Each module is a well-defined learning package that encompasses language competences combined with the support knowledge, key skills and attitudes. The modular system allows for a flexible organisation of these courses. Course participants have more freedom to choose the modules they wish to attend. Thanks to interim certification, course participants can more easily take a break from school to subsequently re-enter the course at a more appropriate level.

Courses can now also be given in a combined learning format. This means that part of the course is taken at home through distance learning. To this end course participants are given access to an electronic learning platform where they can do exercises or submit assignments. The number of combined learning courses is rapidly growing. However, at the moment no provision has been developed for low educated or illiterate non-Dutch speakers. The specific ICT and learning skills that are required to be able to participate in combined learning often cause problems for low educated or illiterate learners. However, the Karel De Grote Hogeschool has plans to develop materials and methodologies for this target group and, as of next year, they can submit a project application to this end and may receive funding to carry out their plans.

Unlike most other adult education courses, the DSL course for low-educated or illiterate L2 learners is free. Some centres do ask to pay a small contribution towards the purchase of course materials, but in most centres course participants do not have to pay anything. In other words, there is no financial barrier to prevent people from participating in this course.

People who follow the training through the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training in order to find a job even receive a small allowance and are reimbursed for the costs of transport and child care.

6 Results

The introduction of a separate training programme for illiterate and slow-learning L2 learners has had a huge impact. In 2002, 22 out of the 29 Centres for Adult Basic Education organised a separate training programme for this target group. However, this provision was more concentrated in urban areas. In the rural regions no specific provision was available for illiterate non-Dutch speakers. Today, in 2008, all centres organise this course for literacy learners.

The most striking thing, however, is the increase in the number of course participants. Between 2002 and 2008, the number of illiterate course participants grew by no less than 28% on average each year. Within a period of five years, the number of training hours performed has tripled. Because of the modular nature of the training system, it is difficult to count the number of individuals following this course; however, their number is estimated at just below 3,000 in Flanders and Brussels.

Last year, the adult education inspectorate conducted a study into the results of this training. Because the complete training programme only dates back to 2006, it is still a bit too early to draw any definitive conclusions. However, the first results already give a clear indication of the training programme's strengths and weaknesses.

What really interests us as policymakers, is the social return of this training, in other words whether or not a larger number of illiterate non-Dutch speakers are learning Dutch. Important elements to consider in this context are the interim dropout rates and the pass rates. The study shows us that throughout all the modules 77% of the registered course participants actually participate in the evaluation. 69% of this group passes the evaluation. A similar study into the regular Dutch as a second language training trajectory reveals that here 75% of the course participants participate in the evaluation, of whom 81% pass. This teaches us that the early dropout rates are the same, but that the pass rates are much lower.

There are very large differences between the centres that organise this training, which is remarkable. The participation in the evaluation varies between 40% and 100%. The pass rates range from 39% to 95%. It is not clear what causes these differences. It definitely requires further examination. Currently, the adult education inspectorate is carrying out an audit in all Centres for Adult Basic Education and is performing further research into the benefits of this training. Hopefully, this research will produce some explanation of these findings.

Another conclusion is that not all centres have the capacity to organise a literacy training provision that fully meets the demand. In some regions the intake of course participants is too limited to be able to organise each of the 16 modules of the training programme with a varying intensity and at different teaching locations. The waiting times for illiterate non-Dutch speakers to enter a DSL module can be very long. This also means that course participants, who do not pass a particular module and must therefore re-sit it, must often wait for a long time before they can re-enter the module. Sometimes course participants have to travel a long distance to a different teaching location. However, this problem cannot be solved as this is due to the target group's geographical spread. They can mostly be found in urban centres, as a result of which there are too few course participants in the countryside to be able to set up a training programme for them in their local area.

As previously discussed, the training programme has been developed on the basis of a functional view on second language acquisition. Still, we find that the classroom practice of teachers often does not reflect this vision. In practice this means that in many cases too little attention is devoted to the acquisition of key competences and attitudes and that the support knowledge is taught without the application of functional language acquisition. In other words, teachers give separate spelling or parsing exercises despite the fact that it may not actually help the course participant to use the language in a functional manner. High educated people often have explicit requests to this end. However, for low-educated people this unnecessarily slows down the learning process. In order to remedy this, the government invests more heavily in in-service training and support for teachers, among other things through a newly established Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education.

A fourth important issue concerns whether learning objectives can be met in proposed duration of the training programme. Many teachers find that the duration of the programme is too short for the weakest learners. That is why the adult basic education sector has been advocating an extension of the length of training programmes for some time now. The government acknowledges the fact that the current training is not always practicable for the slowest-learning course participants however; there is no consensus on the view that an extension of the training duration would solve this problem.

We find that, despite the obligation to provide individual pathway guidance, too few centres are actually putting a lot of work in remediation. This remediation is mostly limited to providing extra exercises during the lessons. Yet, the centres have other options open to them. They can, for instance, organise open learning centres where course participants can do exercise or catch up on their learning on an individual basis.

The extension of the training duration does not really solve the problem of stagnating course participants. We find more and more that a particular group of course participants gets stuck at a point in the learning programme and cannot make any more progress. For the moment it is not clear how we can best cater for this group. Today a number of centres are organising refresher courses, using the extra resources they receive to help course participants maintain the language level they have achieved. The question is whether formal adult education should play a role in this or this should be the task of social clubs and societies.

The request of adult basic education to extend the training pathway in fact contrasts with the expectations many course participants with a professional perspective. A lot of newcomers want to find a job a soon as possible. They want to build a new life here and the best way to do this is to provide themselves with an income. However, illiterate or slow-learning course participants who wish to learn Dutch face a training programme of 960 periods just to reach the Waystage level. Even if the course participant passes each of the modules, he or she will be in training for at least three years. The employment service often even expects him or her to also follow a vocational course afterwards. As a result, this is a too distant a goal for many non-Dutch speakers. They become discouraged and consequently drop out much sooner. As a consequence, these people often end up in structural unemployment or in the illegal labour market.

This is precisely why the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training as well as many other external partners are asking to reduce the duration of training programmes. The Equal project 'illiterates at work' which Els Matton of the Karel de

Grote Hogeschool talked about can be put to use in this debate. By providing vocational training, social orientation and language training in an integrated manner, combined with a work placement and an active employment policy we seek to shorten the pathway for low-educated non-native speakers of Dutch to employment. The project that was organised in Mechelen clearly showed that it is possible to give these people sufficient training over a period of one year to allow them to be employed as cleaning personnel, for instance.

As you notice this debate is still in full swing. While the government is by no means in favour of further extending the duration of the training pathway; the Minister for Education does see a great future in continuing work on the integrated provision of language and vocational courses in order to greatly reduce the duration of training. To do this, we must build on the results of the Equal project 'illiterates integrated at work' and the Minister for Civic Integration must make an effort to establish an alternative integration route for this target group.

This links in with another challenge we have established today regarding performed evaluation of the language and integration trajectories. The uniformisation of the Dutch as a second language training has led to the standardisation of the curricula at the level of the centres and even of the learning materials. Unlike to most adult education courses, well-developed handbooks, exercise sheets and digital teaching materials are available for DSL training. Naturally, this is an important service to the teachers. This development has also resulted in a much better quality and more equal orientation between the different providers of DSL courses.

The downside is that we now find that too little room is left to respond to the functional learning needs of course participants. L2 speakers of Dutch who want to learn Dutch to find a job in the hotel and catering business, for instance, will have quite different learning needs than a mother who wants to learn Dutch in order to be able to communicate with the teacher of her school age child. The Inspectorate tells us that there is currently too little differentiation in the classroom. The handbook has become the only guideline for DSL training and it is often followed too strictly.

As a result of these findings, the government is currently supporting experiments that focus on translating the existing training into more specific contexts. One important project in this field is the 'School and Parents' project, developed by the Centre for Language and Education. In this project, parents of school age children attend a Dutch course at their child's school. They learn a series of functional language objectives in the context of their child's school. The aim it pursued is twofold; on the one hand it seeks to improve the general functional language skills in non-Dutch speaking parents, so as to allow them to integrate more easily into our society and on the other hand, it improves and increases the contact between parents and the school. This enables parents to monitor their child's progress more closely and allows the school to inform parents more easily about any problems that may occur. This is a problem with many children of non-Dutch speaking parents. Due to a lack of language knowledge, there is little contact with the school, the child's progress is scarcely monitored and their school results are often below par. This turns into a vicious circle because this educational disadvantage is in its turn a barrier to better integration. The School and Parents project is currently running in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Mechelen and a number of municipalities around Brussels and will definitely be extended to the rest of Flanders.

7 Conclusion

I would like to conclude my discussion of the Flemish policy regarding L2 acquisition in lower educated and illiterate non-Dutch speakers here. Although it was a long discussion, I have tried to give as brief an outline as possible about the ongoing evolutions and policy developments in this field. As you notice, there are a lot of changes taking place.

As a government we are very pleased with this. My minister has made increasing equal opportunities a priority throughout his policy. This also applies to adult education, which means that even the weakest learners must receive maximum opportunities. Together with the experts, centres and teachers we are working to create the best possible framework for this. To this end we will organise a new round table conference on Dutch as a second language in December. The purpose of this round table conference is to put a number of new movements in the field of Dutch as a second language into practice, these initiatives will hopefully eliminate a number of issues that we have identified.

We thus still have a lot of work ahead of us for the coming years. I hope that my discourse has made clear that Flanders has really invested a great deal already in trying to achieve a better second language acquisition for low-educated and illiterate non-native speakers of Dutch.

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FROM SURVIVAL TO THRIVING: TOWARD A MORE ARTICULATED SYSTEM FOR ADULT ESL LITERACY

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1 The context

The United States is a long way from having a coherent system of immigrant education and workforce training. There is no national language policy that offers a vision for immigrant integration that addresses the language and literacy needs of immigrants and refugees as well as their job training and family support needs. There is no one federal office in charge of coordinating the multiple departments that fund services for immigrants. Rather the system consists of a patchwork of departments and services, each with its own regulations and requirements. As a result the system is highly fragmented. Finding ways to offer services for immigrant and refugee families with multiple needs is a complex and often frustrating endeavor. Similarly, effecting change across the many departments whose mission includes serving immigrants becomes a major undertaking. Involved in providing services to immigrants and refugees are the Department of Education (general adult ESL and El Civics[1] as well as vocational and technical education), the Department of Labor (training and workforce development), the Department of Homeland Security (citizenship), the Department of Health and Human Services (refugee resettlement and temporary assistance to needy families - welfare). Since the federal monies for education and training flow from the national government to the states, most state bureaucracies mirror this patchwork, although a few states (11 or so) have combined adult education (which includes adult ESL) and workforce development.

In an ideal world any immigrant or refugee should be able to walk into a service agency and receive services and information that address multiple needs common to many poor families including the need for job training, English language development, and social support. Most strongly (and negatively) affected by this lack of a coherent and comprehensive system are those who need both training and English as a second language services in order to get jobs that pay a living wage. With a few exceptions, low literate immigrants who are new to English but need work in order to support

[1] EL Civics stands for English Language and Civics. This strand is a subcategory of adult immigrant education focusing on English language acquisition and civic education with the goal of helping the foreign-born become full participants in civic life. For a discussion of civic education as part of ESL, see also Powrie (2007) *Civic education and adult biliteracy*.

themselves and their families do not have access to services that meet their needs for employment-focused language and literacy services that are linked to jobs.

2 The importance of literacy

Literacy is important to all aspects of life, from handling personal affairs, to working with others, and participation in a democratic society. It is an essential skill that helps people thrive individually, socially, and economically. It is critical for both individual functioning and for a well functioning society. Literacy gaps and mismatches between the skills of citizens and the need of the economy have serious repercussions.

For immigrant adults, literacy of any kind – literacy in the native language and literacy in the language of the new country – matter a great deal since social and economic benefits are directly related to prior education, literacy and language proficiency (Wrigley, et al., 2009; Batalova & Fix, 2008). As immigration from poorer countries that offer less education for its citizens increases, so does the need to improve the literacy skills of immigrants and refugees. In the U.S., as in other English speaking countries, English proficiency in general and English literacy in particular facilitate integration into the fabric of society and allow for broader participation in the mainstream of civic life and in the economy.

For millions of immigrants, in the U.S. and elsewhere, participation in adult education is the primary tool for acquiring the language of a new country, developing cultural competence, and gaining the knowledge and skills necessary for ongoing education. Gaining access to job training is the goal of many adults with limited language proficiency who see such training as a way to self-sufficiency. Social, political, and economic concerns warrant a system for adult immigrant education and training that promises to move individuals toward language proficiency and civic integration in a time-efficient and cost-effective way. Humanitarian concerns call for a system that moves refugees and immigrants with few resources to a place in society where they do not merely survive but thrive and build a better future for themselves and their children. But, such aims can only be attained if we have a system with services that are focused, well-articulated, and differentiated enough to respond to the specific language and literacy needs of different groups of newcomers. This system must take into account the goals and aspirations that motivate individuals and help them to persist. In the United States the system falls far short of this ideal.

The US system of adult education serves both native speakers with literacy needs and immigrants and refugees with limited proficiency in English. The latter group is highly diverse, including immigrants who have never gone to school or have only a few years of formal education as well as individuals who have high school diplomas or academic credentials. In spite of this wide range, the system uses a 'one size fits all' approach built under the assumption that all foreign-born adult learners, regardless of degree of proficiency or prior education need English to meet the language demands of daily life. While teachers are expected to take the goals of individual learners into account, in reality, more or less the same general life skills curriculum is taught to all of the students in ESL classes. By and large teachers are not trained to meet the special needs of students with minimal schooling and limited literacy in the native language. Nor are they trained to effectively teach students who may have high levels of education from the home country but are still lacking English communication skills.

The US adult education system consists of six levels of instruction starting with 'Beginning Literacy' and ending with 'High Intermediate ESL.' While individual teachers and programs are able to adapt the life skills approach to their classes, for the most part, there is little differentiation in content or approach across levels. As an informal review of the most popular text book series shows, instruction tends to be driven by an emphasis on life skill topics (family, community, health, holidays, work) and personal story telling. Although activities and tasks become somewhat more sophisticated over time, they simply provide variations on a common set of themes. While the language to be taught increases in complexity over time (past perfect instead of present tense), reading passages are longer and more writing is included, there is little acknowledgement that many of the students at the higher levels have strong educational backgrounds and have goals and interests related to academic topics rather than life skills. Nor is there an acknowledgement that many of the beginning level students lack fundamental literacy and have gaps in schooling that need to be addressed if they are to be prepared for job skills training and for work beyond entry level, dead-end jobs.

The US adult education system is built to parallel a public school system where students start in grade 1 and continue through to grade 12. However, this continuum of classes does not match the reality of the learning journey that adult second language learners undertake: Adults stay little more than 100 hours in a program on average; they may leave and never come back; or they may stop out and return for more ESL at a later time. (Since programs do not follow students longitudinally, exact data on who leaves and why and who returns to what effect are not available). Progress tends to be modest: On average, ESL students progress perhaps one or two levels of proficiency before dropping out. In the final analysis we see that those students who start at the beginning levels of ESL instruction don't stay in programs long enough to achieve the proficiency levels necessary to succeed in job training, obtain or advance to jobs that pay a living wage, or transition to vocational or academic classes at a college.

Even for students who enter at the higher levels of the system, there is a mismatch between the design of the system and students' reality and vision. The system assumes a progression from ESL to adult basic education for native speakers and those who are English proficient and then to the GED[2], a high school equivalency certificate. The system does not take into account that many if not most of the more proficient ESL students come to programs already with a high school education in hand from the home country[3]. Adult basic education classes designed for native speakers (many of whom have learning challenges) don't meet their needs and don't prepare them for the academic English necessary to move to higher education. These literacy classes, primarily for native speakers who were unsuccessful in public school, merely detract better educated ESL students from transitioning to academic studies in a college or university.

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[2] GED stands for General High school Development. It is a test of five subjects that certifies that adults who pass have Canadian or US American high school level academic skills.

[3] The National Reporting System, the primary data collection system for U.S. adult education, does not track the educational backgrounds of ESL students, so no data is available on the years of schooling completed in the home country or elsewhere.

3 The failure to consider literacy sufficiently

In the current adult ESL system, educational levels in the home country are not taken into account; nor are literacy levels in the native language officially considered or recorded. The fact that some students cannot read in any language and therefore are likely to face major challenges in acquiring English literacy, while often acknowledged, has not yet translated into programs designed especially for this group. Quite to the contrary: teaching literacy in the native language is a highly controversial topic in spite of evidence that literacy skills in the native language facilitate the development of English literacy.

As things stand, the system operates under the assumption that 'English literacy is the only literacy that counts' (Caro & Wiley, 2008). In placing students in adult ESL classes and in designing educational plans for them, only English proficiency is considered, and teachers are expected to accommodate significant differences among learner groups whose only commonality is lack of English fluency. As a result, we may see a farm worker from Mexico with only an elementary education and needing basic literacy skills studying side by side with a dentist from Russia who is hoping to acquire enough academic English to enter college and practice his profession in the US.

In failing to consider educational backgrounds and degrees of literacy in the native language, the current system limits the effectiveness of services and 'cheats' groups at either end of the educational spectrum. Most affected and most in need are those with few years of schooling and low levels of literacy in the native language who have the most need and the fewest options for developing literacy on their own. When placed in classes where lack of native language literacy is not taken into account, they often drop out early. Many in this group will not return to school, convinced that they cannot learn. The failure of the system to meet the needs of the non-literate students is far reaching: individuals may internalize their lack of success as a personal shortcoming rather than seeing it as a failure of the system; they will be shut out from work, training, and other opportunities that require literacy; and they will be inhibited in their ability to help children with their homework and support their academic success.

Despite growing evidence of the importance and efficacy of offering literacy in the native language (Lukes, 2009); the system is slow to consider, discuss, and fund the various options that show promise: Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL); bilingual vocational training, or English language instruction with bilingual support (Condelli & Wrigley, 2008).

Research indicates that people need to learn literacy but once - and that the skills then transfer to other languages. For learners with limited or no literacy in their native language, effective approaches fall into three main categories: basic education in the native language (BENL), bilingual instruction (often with literacy development in the native language and an emphasis on development of oral skills in English), and ESL instruction with native language supports (Lukes, 2009; Condelli & Wrigley, 2003).

But failing to take into account educational backgrounds of immigrants is only part of the problem. The current system also fails to take into account the varying goals that motivate adults to learn English and persist and in this effort for months and years. While the system acknowledges that learners come with different goals related to work, civics, parenting, or academics, it is a rare program that is able to accommodate these goals in meaningful ways. As it is right now, individual teachers are asked to document learner goals and report when goals have been achieved as part of the National

Reporting System. Yet the system only counts short term goals (e.g., get a job) and not longer term goals where adult ESL could act as a transition point (e.g., get into a training program that could lead to a job with a family sustaining wage).

4 Matching educational responses to learner goals

Just as adult immigrants and refugees differ in their educational backgrounds, they differ in their goals. Clearly, adults whose primary concern is to learn English to get a job, keep a job, or get a better job have different learning needs than those who come to classes for social reasons or for personal enrichment. Similarly, an individual who needs academic or professional English skills in order to transition to college requires a different educational pathway than someone whose goal for learning English is to help her children with their homework and use English to get things done in the community.

While ESL students do come to classes with a variety of purposes and goals, both short term (learn English) and long term (make significant changes in their social or economic circumstances), when primary and secondary goals are analyzed, goals related to employment predominate. Yet, currently, there is little guidance from the federal government or from the states on how to work collaboratively to create pathways for adult learners who want and need to work and come to classes to increase their economic opportunities.

While the US system does collect information on student goals as part of its National Reporting System, there are few organized efforts to create educational interventions designed to move students who share specific reasons for coming to classes (employment, say or transition to higher education) toward those goals. On the contrary, most ESL programs try to be all things to all students, and 'turf issues'[4] keep communities from developing plans that delineate who offers what kind of educational service for what kind of student (Wrigley, 2007). Currently, no such articulation exists in spite of research that suggests that students who can see progress toward their goals tend to persist longer than those who don't see a clear connection between their purposes for attending classes and the curriculum being offered to them (Comings, 2007).

By overreaching and underperforming in particular areas, programs end up not serving any one group particularly well (with the possible exception of those who come to programs for social reasons). In teaching a curriculum that is designed to appeal to everyone regardless of reason or purpose for learning, programs run the danger of losing the very students who come to programs motivated to work hard to reach specific goals.

To remedy this situation, we need a system that links students whose goals are clear and specific with programs that are purposefully designed to meet these goals. Such a system will require community-wide planning as well as collaboratively outreach and referral strategies. It might also need state incentives so that programs which serve

[4] Programs are partially paid by the number of students attending classes and programs try to fill all open slots even if another program in the community might be more appropriate. Exceptions exist in areas where there are long waiting lists. In these cases, programs might refer a student for whom there is no slot to a 'competitor'.

fewer students but move them toward their goals in an accelerated fashion, will not be penalized.

5 Responding to the needs of literacy learners

If we were to imagine a more responsive and therefore more effective and efficient system of literacy education and employment training, what might it look like?

Such a system must first of all recognize that literacy, the ability to read and write in any language, is a crucial factor in second language acquisition. An individual, who has no or little understanding of print, faces enormous challenges in trying to interpret and use literacy in a yet unfamiliar system.

As part of an overall system of immigrant education, there must be programs specifically designed to address the needs of those who have never learned to write or who have only basic literacy skills in the native language. Such programs must not only teach literacy but most also seek to teach the cognitive academic skills associated with schooling. It must provide the kind of background knowledge normally acquired in school, particularly knowledge in civics, math, and science that is necessary for success in training and in academic work and is often required to help children with their homework (even in elementary school). Merely teaching English literacy, functional life skills, and English conversational skills may not be enough to help lift undereducated immigrants who are new to English out of poverty and into the economic mainstream.

In areas where immigrant learners share a common language (and where trained teachers speak the language of the students), a model that combines basic literacy and content-based instruction of relevance to adults can provide a sound educational basis for those who have not had the opportunity to go to school in the home country. Content-based literacy of this kind provides a basis upon which English language education can build, reinforces family literacy, and acts as the first step toward success in adult education, academics, and training. It can also provide the subject matter knowledge necessary to pass the history and government components by the US citizenship test.

In cases where the sending country has an adult literacy program, partnerships can be developed that allow adult immigrants to close the educational gaps they have experienced and achieve school completion certificates (Mexico has such a program), while learning the language of the new country. Increased cognitive-academic skills, more education, and higher literacy skills in any language are likely to yield benefits not only for individuals but for families and communities as well. It will also facilitate English acquisition (the more you know in one language, the easier it is to learn in another) and facilitate transition to job skills training and academic or vocational education.

6 Foundation classes in adult ESL

Currently, the US system offers free English language instruction to anyone who has no or limited proficiency in English. It makes sense to maintain a system designed to teach ESL as a foundation so that students can either continue learning on their own or transition to a special focus program that meets their need. Three levels of general ESL however, seems sufficient to lay a foundation before students get the opportunity to

select an ESL strand that promises to move them toward their special goal for learning English more quickly.

Program quality is uneven and teachers are often not trained in effective ways to foster second language acquisition at beginning levels. Other shortcomings need be addressed as well.

- Greater emphasis should be placed on connecting classrooms to community so that the English learned in class is used in real situations outside of the classroom so that English learning can be accelerated.
- The amount students at beginning levels spend in class is not enough to gain proficiency in English. More time must be spent on 'learning how to learn' beyond the classroom and on taking advantage of self-access opportunity for language learning.
- Hybrid classes must be established that combine teacher led classes with computer mediated instruction so that students can continue practicing English on their own. Students should be shown how to use technology for communication (e-mail, chats, texting) and to engage in high interest activities that promote language acquisition and use (on-line news from the home country, pod casts, quizzes).
- Differentiated instruction needs to be instituted so that more educated students with low English skills can be challenged by ideas that build on their background knowledge while the teacher works with students who need additional support.
- The standard life skills curriculum will need to be supplemented with content knowledge (geography, history) and strategies for negotiating systems (health, money, work) for less educated students. Even at beginning levels of ESL, adults should have the opportunity to engage in meaningful language interactions that require problem solving of various kinds using approaches such as task-based instruction, project-based learning, and scenarios for problem posing and problem solving.

7 English for special purposes (English Plus)

Once basic functional literacy and English conversational skills have been acquired, the system can be expected to take the different goals for learning English into consideration and offer special focus classes. While there may be a great many individual goals, broader aims for learning the language of a new country can be clustered into a few broad categories: English for work and training, life skills English, community ESL and citizenship, and English for transition to higher education.

English for Work or occupation-specific English classes need to integrate language and literacy skills with job training or offer work-related communication and employability skills for those individual whose interests are focused on work but who have not yet selected a specific job to train for. These classes can be targeted for youth and adults preparing for work or for incumbent workers. Classes can be taught as part of the adult ESL system or can be jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Labor. Free classes should be informed by the job prospects in

particular industries and reflect the knowledge, skills, and strategies required for demand occupations such as health care, construction, transportation, high tech manufacturing, and 'green jobs.' Close relationships with employers need to be sought and pro-active job development and placement need to be instituted if adults who are not yet proficient in English are to compete with others who have stronger language and literacy skills. The emphasis should be on developing integrated programs that offer certificates recognized by industry to help ensure that the jobs the system is training offer wages that can sustain a family.

Case in point
In the US, the State of Washington, as part of its I-BEST model offers pre-employment training that combines English language and literacy development with job skills training in the trades and in health care. In each course, an ESL teacher and a vocational skills instructor work side by side to ensure that students understand lectures and gain essential technical skill. All training leads to a real certificate recognized by local employers in a demand field that pays a living wage (Prince and Jenkins, 2005). In Australia and the UK, similar approaches are being implemented under the rubric 'embedded learning' (Casey, 2006). Other programs in the U.S., such as the Center for Employment Training in San Jose, California, and the MET Program in El Paso Texas (Motivation, Education and Training) combine family support services with language and literacy development and hands-on training so that lack of literacy skills does not become a barrier to acquiring the vocational skills associated with better jobs (Wrigley et al., 2003).

8 Incumbent worker training

A system of quality education and responsive training for immigrants should also support classes for incumbent workers who need to upgrade their skills. These classes can be funded through collaborations between adult education providers and employers or unions. A focus on communication skills and problem solving strategies can help workers in dead-end jobs develop the competencies necessary to find more fulfilling or better paying work. These classes can be offered on-site with companies providing at least partial release time or as an intensive class meeting weekends or evenings or other times convenient to working adults. While solely employer funded classes often focus on the skills workers need to be productive at their current jobs, courses funded with public monies should focus in part on the job skills that workers not yet fully competent in English might need to change employment.

Case in point
McDonald's Corporation has put into place a bilingual worker training program that teaches basic job knowledge in both Spanish and English. The company currently offers a national ESL program designed for assistant managers who plan to move into management. The program serves immigrants (mostly women) with limited education (close to half lack a high school education). The program uses a hybrid model of

instruction that combines distance learning with on-site practice and individually based e-learning to reinforce skills. Workers participate in pairs (buddies) and take part in synchronous (real time) interactive lessons delivered on the computer and via telephone conferencing. Workers from different regions of the US meet once a month at a local community college to get to know the instructors as well as other participating workers and to build community as a class. During these meetings, workers also gain hands-on practice with the technology they will use to participate in the lessons. The program was developed through collaboration between the corporation, ESL experts, local instructors, and owner-operators of local McDonald restaurants. The national office funded the development of the program and brought together experts in second language acquisition, teaching English as a Second Language and technology-mediated instruction, and then hired an ESL professor and others to create the curriculum, teach the pilot, and train subsequent. Participating community colleges use state and federal funds to provide teachers and local franchise operators pay additional program costs as well as release time for their workers. The program has had impressive results reporting learning gains much higher than those made by the average ESL student attending a conventional ESL class, focused on general life skills (for more information, see http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/05/27/esl).

9 Entrepreneurship training

One opportunity for incumbent workers or others wishing to work independently is entrepreneurship training. Such training can support the dream of many immigrants to own a small business that can help support a family. In the United States, both documented and undocumented workers can apply for business licenses, although the paper work required tends to be daunting. While workshops showing would-be entrepreneurs how to develop business plans and access loans are available for free in the U.S., for the most part the language used in lectures and in print require fairly high levels of English proficiency. Needed are courses for non-native English speakers that address the linguistic, financial, and cultural issues that often act as barriers to establishing micro-enterprises.

Case in point

CEO Women (Creating Economic Opportunities for Women), an Oakland, California- based non-governmental agency offers training, intensive mentoring, and coaching and helps immigrant women access the capital needed to start a small business. Currently, the agency is producing a video series that follows four women entrepreneurs. The series documents the challenges the women face and the successes they experience as they strike out on their own. The video series is designed to teach entrepreneurship skills and create a pathway to independence for women. Women who sign up for the series also receive workbooks and invitations to meet with like-minded individuals to share ideas in regional workshops.

10 Education and recertification of foreign-born professionals

A high quality system for immigrant education and workforce training needs to take into account the populations at either end of the educational continuum. At the low end, as mentioned above, are the educational needs of those with less than a high school education (the LESLLA population) and at the higher end of the spectrum are the needs of the more highly educated immigrants whose English still needs development. Both in Canada and in the United States, a significant percentage of foreign-born professionals are underemployed, working as dishwashers, security guards, or taxi drivers. In 2005, more than 1.3 million college-educated immigrants (or one out of every five) in the United States were unemployed or significantly underemployed. Almost half (44 percent) of recent Latin American immigrants with a college degree or higher worked in unskilled jobs in the US (Batalova & Fix, 2008). Foreign-born professionals often face significant barriers in trying to pursue the occupations for which they have been trained in the home country. For example, the majorities of immigrant professionals who have worked in the health care field are now working outside their professions but would like to find career paths that use their skills. Highly skilled immigrants need specialized services that allow them to bridge the gap between the abilities they have and the competencies sought in the new country so that their talents can be tapped and their potential realized.

Case in point
The United States now has several centers, called Welcome Back Centers, designed to help foreign-born health care providers (particularly physicians and nurses) achieve the recertification needed to work in the US. Participants receive advice on how to navigate systems and have foreign credentials recognized, are made aware of available resources, and are offered classes focused on English for the medical profession and the development of cross-cultural competence. The San Francisco Welcome Back Center, for example, offers case management, career counseling, and resource coordination along with a curriculum for English for Special Purposes to help create viable career paths for internationally trained health care professionals.

11 Community ESL and civic participation

While a great many immigrants have specific goals for wanting to learn English, some have more general reasons. These include wanting to improve one's English to communicate better, gain meaning from newspapers or enjoy novels, or simply to become more educated, a purpose expressed by many who have limited opportunities to participate in formal schooling. Students at the intermediate level can benefit from classes that explore how communities work in terms of the services they provide and the opportunities for civic participation they present.

Community ESL classes are well served by approaches that are less structured than those used in courses designed for students who need to move quickly toward specific goals. Project-based learning allows students to research issues in their communities

and explore remedies through action learning. Writing projects allow students to find their voice and contribute to our knowledge of the immigrant experience.

These courses are well situated to allow students to grapple with issues of social justice and examine their role as community members and citizens in a democratic society. They can teach immigrants not only how to participate in the system as is, but also educate newcomers as to the opportunities that exist to challenge and change the system, through examples of civic participation (and civic disobedience) explained from both a historical perspective (the Civil Rights Movement) and through examples of personal and community involvement (participating in food drives; women working together to get a Stop Sign[5] installed in a neighborhood).

Community ESL can also easily encompass a focus on family literacy. Such classes for parents of pre-school and school age children not in the workforce can provide English language skills in the context of communicating with the school system and can help parents develop the skills needed to access information (print or electronic) and develop strategies for advocating for their children (Wrigley, 2004). For parents who have less than a high school education, family literacy programs can play an important role in providing the kind of background knowledge that children are acquiring in school – knowledge important if parents are to help with home work or discuss topics beyond the here and now with their children. Such knowledge, offered as part of content-based ESL, also helps to create an intellectual curiosity that is an important factor in lifelong learning and facilitates transition to higher levels of education for parents as well as their children (Office of English Language Learning and Migrant Education, no date).

Case in point

A community ESL and Family Literacy Program in Socorro, Texas on the US-Mexico border has for many years instituted Project-Based Learning as a means to connect adult learners to the community (see also Guo (2007); Wrigley, 1998; 2004b). The ESL program serves parents and others as well as displaced workers from Mexico - most of whom have only limited formal schooling and are new to English. As part of these classes, students work collaboratively to investigate topics of their choice and create presentations that are presented to the larger community as part of a showcase. Students have developed bilingual presentations on diabetes (a significant health concern in the local community), investigated what it takes to get lights for a park where children play soccer at night, and created "how to videos" designed to show others how to change the oil in a car, prepare a spaghetti dinner for a special day, or roast your own coffee. Students learn to use PowerPoint to present their findings and take videos to document both the process and the end result of their work.

In one instance, a class decided to spruce up and repair a small school in the Mexico side of the border because it had fallen into disrepair after most of the residents

[5] Stop Signs are traffic signs used in Canada and the US that are similar to flashing red lights in other countries. A Stop Sign requires that a vehicle come to a full stop at an intersection and only proceed when cross-traffic is clear. Stop Signs are sometimes installed after petitions from members of a community that make a case that unregulated traffic flow puts other drivers and pedestrians, especially children, at risk.

in the village had left for the U.S. Students went across the border to take pictures of the debilitated building and they created storyboards that showed what needed to be done and how they might do it (repair wiring, paint walls, tear down and replace the backboard on the basketball court). In class students learned the language they needed to explain the various problems they saw at the school, to explain the tools they needed to fix things, and describe the end results. The students went to the local Do-It-Yourself store, to explain the project and ask for donations of paint and building materials (they used their own tools), then drove across the border and went to work. One group prepared a BBQ lunch (they had also spent time mapping out supplies and learned the English needed to explain the process). The group had notified the local mayor who came to thank them and hold a speech, and the local press covered the event. The students created a video and presented the project to a group of students, teachers and district staff.

It is easy to see how this type of civic project results in multiple outcomes: Students choose a task close to their hearts, develop the language and literacy necessary to describe their work, and make a significant contribution to the community. In the process, they acquire the technology skills that allow even beginning level learners to present information in a way that impresses 'real people,' not just ESL literacy teachers who are easily impressed. PowerPoints and videos allow students to tell the story visually with minimal language support. They can prepare their presentation ahead of time and get the chance to think about language, use resources such as graphics and dictionaries to help them, do a 'dry run' with a friendly audience and revise their work. (See also Wrigley, 2004b.)

12 Conclusion

More than any other factor, educational background influences the rate of progress an adult immigrant is able to make in learning English and developing the literacy skills necessary to succeed and thrive in a print-rich culture. Educational background tends to be more important than culture, age, or learning style when it comes to acquisition of English literacy, although for individual students these factors may still play a prominent role.

Given the important role that educational background plays in both speed and length of acquisition, it makes sense to develop one set of programs that accelerate learning for those who come to us with strong literacy skills and create another set of programmatic responses for those who are non-readers or beginning readers in their own language. Programs are likely to be counterproductive when they use the same model of instruction for adults who are already literate and for those who are new to literacy and have yet to learn how to read and write.

The current model used in the United States that places students by level of English proficiency and puts all students new to English in the same beginning class regardless of whether they know how to read and write has not been effective. This practice tends to disadvantage one group or the other. In most cases the students who lose are those who need education the most (those who struggle to make sense of even

simple texts) because they never had the chance to develop the foundation skills necessary to gain information from print or express their ideas in written English.

Developing different kinds of educational responses for each group and differentiating the system so it speaks to literacy backgrounds and needs can be the first step in developing instructional services that move different groups toward success more quickly and more effectively.

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ENGLAND: POLICY DEVELOPMENT IMPACTING ON ESOL BASIC LITERACY

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1 Introduction

This paper will argue that 'LESLLA learners' (ESOL learners with very low literacy skills in any language) are invisible in the English education system. It will describe current policy drivers in education and show how these lead to policies that exclude LESLLA learners. It will consider policy regarding provision, curriculum and quality assurance and whether this supports the needs of LESLLA learners. The paper will go on to reflect on issues of status and naming practices in ESOL and will relate these to theory concerning the nature of literacy. Finally, it will bring these two themes together in calling for a policy for ESOL basic literacy and for LESLLA to support work towards such policy.

2 Background

The policy background to post-compulsory education, known as the 'learning and skills' or 'lifelong learning' sector, in England is extremely complex. A group of researchers, reporting on a recent four year study on 'The impact of policy on learning and inclusion in the learning and skills sector' (Edwards, 2007), came to the following conclusions:

> 'two factors stand out in (the sector's) recent history: unprecedented and welcome levels of funding; and unrelenting, and generally less welcome, waves of change and turbulence.'

One of the researchers has described the sector thus:

> 'inchoate, over-centralised, democratically unaccountable, unequal, woefully under-researched and without robust data for decision-making' (Coffield, 2007).

If possible, the policy background to ESOL is even more complex than for learners in the rest of post-compulsory education. Policies that impact on ESOL learners, but not necessarily (or as directly) on other learners include immigration, and those concerning community cohesion and citizenship.

Altogether, five government departments input into ESOL policy. Until the cabinet reshuffle in early June 2009, The *Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)* (now amalgamated into a new *Department for Business, Initiatives and Skills)* had most responsibility for funding and quality assuring ESOL. It was responsible for direct policy, such as the recent 'refreshed' policy: 'Skills for Life: changing lives' (DIUS, 2009a). This policy document announces yet more funds and new targets. It focuses much more than the original policy document (DfES, 2001) on employability skills and on reaching groups 'at risk of social inclusion' which it defines as including unemployed, adults with low skills in employment, offenders, some ethnic minorities and those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country (pp. 7-8). However, the following departments also have input into policies that affect ESOL learners:

- the *Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS)* is responsible for school provision, and also inputs into family learning; see, for example, the website 'parentscentre' run by the department: http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/.
- the *Home Office* polices immigration and regulates citizenship requirements, including an English language requirement; for information on how to become a British citizen, see the Home Office.
  See http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship/
- the *Department for Communities and Local Government* (DCLG) is concerned with social cohesion and the prevention of terrorism, and ESOL is currently closely linked to this agenda (see below).
- the *Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)* has responsibility for the unemployed, and its regulations impact on learners who are out of work, for example they are not allowed to study more than 16 hours per week and still claim benefit.[1]

To further complicate matters, education policy only applies to England; Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland make their own education policies. Immigration policies, however, apply to all of the United Kingdom.

Currently, three key policy agendas are driving ESOL policy in post-compulsory education. Firstly and most importantly is the 'World Class Skills' agenda. Reacting to Britain's position as an international competitor, the Treasury set up an inquiry chaired by Lord Leitch. His report (2006) and the subsequent government response (DfES, 2007) have had a huge influence on current educational policy and practice. Together they have ambitions for 95% of adults to reach level 2 (this is the level of English and maths school leavers are expected to achieve at 16, and is approximately equivalent to C1 in the Council of Europe's (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) [2]) in literacy and numeracy by 2020. Funding is prioritising provision that will enable learners to achieve Leitch targets (i.e. level 2), and, as a result, lower level provision is being cut. In addition, employers are to have a much bigger say in what is taught and funding is shifting towards employer-led requirements. This is leading to much more work-specific skills being targeted - for example how to understand instructions in operating equipment, or how to take bookings over the phone. This means that the needs of LESLLA learners, many of whom are not in employment and

[1] See http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Employedorlookingforwork/DG_10018757.

[2] See http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_ pages/levels.html.

are unlikely to reach level 2, are not considered priorities.

The second key policy area is the community cohesion agenda. This is very strongly linked to the prevention of terrorism and to ESOL in the government's mind set. Starting with riots in the north of England in 2001, closely followed by the attacks on New York on September 11th 2001, and later the London underground on July 7th 2007, the government has linked these events to an idea of communities, separated by language and culture, who, the government claims, don't feel British and don't speak English. The two agendas, community cohesion and speaking English, are inextricably linked in the government's mind as is shown by the following quote by John Denham (DIUS, 2009b), then Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills

> 'the ability to speak a common language is a key factor in securing understanding and integration between communities. It is also a critical step on the path for those seeking citizenship. More than any other factor, learning and using English demonstrates to the wider community an individual's commitment to adapting to life in the UK and enables them to make a productive contribution to the nation's economy.'

The quote above comes from the Foreword to a new policy on ESOL launched by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills in May 2009 and linking ESOL firmly to community cohesion (see above). It proposes a complete change in the way that ESOL is organised, in which local areas will decide priority to what they consider to be 'excluded'[3] groups for their areas and direct funds towards them. Originally, it was suggested that some groups could be put forward as priorities by DIUS, and that learners with low levels of literacy could be one such a group, but this now appears to have been dropped in favour of local authorities making all such decisions. Each local authority is charged with getting together local agencies to identify priority areas for their locality. To compare two of the 'test areas' that having been trying out this approach: in one LESLLA learners, specifically Yemeni women with low literacy skills and childcare needs, have been given provision with childcare near to their home. In another, the local authority has prioritised young, male refugees, who have a need for advice and guidance on getting work. This means that LESLLA learners may be winners, but that equally they may be losers, and any lobby for better provision for LESLLA learners will have to make the case to hundreds of local authorities rather than to one central government department.

Finally, immigration is a key policy driver affecting LESLLA learners. New regulations introduced in 2008 make it almost impossible for unskilled workers to enter the United Kingdom, unless they are from the European Union. So it is possible that, in the future, LESLLA learners will be restricted to some spouses of existing British citizens and a few EU residents who still have very low levels of literacy. However, at the moment, LESLLA learners are still coming forward for help – though because of no research in this subject (see below) we do not know how many there are.

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[3] This term is not defined in the relevant policy document, the nearest to a definition comes in this quote is 'the key characteristics of priority individuals should be that they: ….are isolated/excluded from, and not connecting with communities outside of their own' (DIUS 2009b: 10).

3 Policies and provisions for ESOL basic literacy learners

ESOL learners with basic literacy needs are invisible in our system. If we consider either the policies or the practices for supporting them, we find very little.

3.1 Provision

There is very little specific provision for learners who have basic literacy needs. Some organisations do put on classes specifically for learners wanting to study basic literacy; others try to integrate them into graded ESOL classes and, not surprisingly, find they make very slow progress in that environment. Some of the vocationally oriented further education colleges send basic literacy learners away to be catered for in adult and community education where they typically receive fewer hours per week than they would in a college. In provision aimed at the unemployed it is quite common for ESOL learners to be put together with literacy learners, very few of whom are at such a low level. For example, it would be common for ESOL learners to have had very little schooling because of poverty, war or displacement. ESOL learners may need to learn very basic word recognition, sound/symbol relationship or how to write the Latin script, and will also be learning the English language at the same time. It is very uncommon for literacy learners to have any, let alone all, of these needs.

3.2 Funding

The current funding regime prioritises higher levels which lead to targets (targets exist for E3, L1 and L2, approximately equivalent to B1, B2 and C1 in the CEF[4] and encourages reduction in provision that does not lead to accredited outcomes. However, though accreditation starts at E1 (approximately equivalent to A1 and, where learners are required to, for example, read a simple text, write a short greeting card, or fill in a simple form), it takes a long time to go from never having written before to the level required to write at E1. The funding regime does not allow for the amount of time needed. Most learners are expected to progress by a level per year, some are allowed 2 years, very few, if any, are allowed more. This funding rule applies no matter how many hours per week the learners can attend classes, and this can vary from 2 hours to 30 per week. Once the funding runs out, learners can be sent away from classes. Sometimes there is a small amount of community provision, often mixed level, that they are able to attend. In other cases, learners are left with nothing.

3.3 Teacher education

There is no requirement to train to teach basic literacy to ESOL learners. The current standards for ESOL teachers (LLUK, 2007) have nothing specific to teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners. New guidance, from LLUK, just released (2009) does have a few mentions of basic literacy, including '..ESOL teachers recognise that specialist knowledge of literacy learning and development is required in order to teach beginner readers and writers' (p.47) but this does not appear in the national Assessment Criteria

[4] As an example, the standards at E3 would expect, among other things, a learner to read and write continuous explanatory or descriptive texts consisting of paragraphs, skim and scan texts to understand gist and detail, recognise and reproduce generic features of common texts. L 1 and L2 are higher than E3.

for the qualifications, so many training courses do not assess it, and therefore do not cover it.

3.4 Curriculum

Support for basic literacy was highlighted as an issue by many of the respondents to the review of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001): '*Need more addressed to complete beginner students for the literacy part. Some students remain a long time in first entry and skills to acquire at this stage are not taken into account in the curriculum*' (from on-line questionnaire). Teachers fed back to the review that the curriculum for this group of learners was not visible. The new, revised e-version of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (available on the Learning and Skills Improvement Service website http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/sflcurriculum) has attempted to address this issue; the reading and writing curricula for E1 is now divided into two parts, for learners who can read and write another language and one for learners who cannot. Teachers have said that they find this distinction helpful, as they can focus on how to support LESLLA learners and do not have to spend time working out what will suit them and what is more appropriate for learners who can already read the Latin script.

3.5 Research

In 2005, a group of researchers interested in second literacy acquisition got together to form a new organisation, LESLLA. The researchers questioned why, though there is plenty of research in second language acquisition, hardly any work is being done on second literacy acquisition. The organisation is an international one, and has just held its fourth annual symposium in Belgium. Out of approximately 100 participants from Europe and North America, only 7 attended from the UK. At the time of writing this article, there are no statistics of the number of LESLLA learners studying in English organizations, let alone any measure of unmet need. With little research on need or methodology, it is hard to make the case for special provision, teacher training or specific resources.

3.6 Quality assurance

The English inspectorate, Ofsted, recently carried out a survey on good practice in adult ESOL provision (2008). This looked at colleges which had received good grades for ESOL in recent inspections and identified good practice in the field. However, it makes no mention of work on ESOL basic literacy. We can speculate on whether this was because the inspectors did not look for good practice in basic literacy classes or because providers did not consider they had good practice in this area to show to inspectors. Either way, it shows that this area of work was not considered to exemplify good practice, and this is not good news for those learners who were involved in it.

4 Searching for reasons

As teachers of LESLLA learners over very many years, and, as teacher trainers, seeing the dedication of other teachers, we started to ask ourselves questions about why LESLLA learners find themselves in the situation described above. The answers appear to lie in

issues of status and power and in this part of the article, we want to further unpack the status of ESOL basic literacy in England. This might be regarded by some as a luxury, when there are the possibly more pressing matters of provision and pedagogy to grapple with. However, since there is an interrelationship between provision itself and its context, and the shape of provision is heavily influenced by its status, we feel that the issue of its status deserves our attention. In an attempt to illuminate the very low status of ESOL basic literacy, and gain some insight into the nature of this status, we offer some thoughts arising from a comparison between two extremely different types of learning programmes that include literacy, in England.

One is an example of a high status programme – the other is a low status one. And the ways they are described and conceptualised seem very different. For the high status learning programmes, we will consider Ancient Greek courses at Oxford and Cambridge Universities and we note that some of these are for learners who do not read and write in Ancient Greek. For low status learning programmes, we will consider ESOL courses in the post-schooling sector for learners who do not read and write in English or in another language. There is no suggestion that these learning programmes are actually similar, but the significant parallel that we want to focus on is that they all include literacy learning for learners who do not read and write in the language in question. However, while learning Ancient Greek is likely to be perceived as an achievement, by contrast, learning English is likely to be perceived as reducing a deficit. This stark contrast will be explored with reference to three issues: the names of the courses, how the courses are described, and linguistic competence in the learning cohort.

In terms of the names of the courses, the Ancient Greek courses are sometimes called 'Classics' and 'Greats'. The ESOL courses, by contrast, are often called basic literacy courses. This name is used widely, it is used at LLU+. We do not see it as unproblematic, but like many people in the field, have focused on pedagogy more than the 'name'. But the names seem to signal the gulf that is also evident in the way the courses are described. In prospectuses, the ESOL courses are often described in the way many courses in the sector are currently described, i.e. in terms of skills; by comparison, the ancient Greek courses are described in terms of knowledge.

In relation to linguistic competence, many ESOL learners are multilingual, using more than two languages on a day to day basis. Most ESOL teachers have met learners for whom English takes the number of languages they speak up to three, four, five etc. and whose everyday reality is a multilingual one; these multilingual realities are embedded in the multilingual realities lived by a significant proportion of people in Britain today. This has been documented and discussed by various authors including Saxena (1994) and Harris (2006). By contrast, a typical everyday language reality of many learners on the Ancient Greek learning programmes (though of course not all) is a monolingual one (albeit a very literate one), though they may use several varieties of English.

Though many ESOL learners have linguistic competence in several languages, and though their teachers may recognise these skills, their multilinguality is not generally considered important in England. In fact, it is frequently perceived as a lack of something (English), and learning to speak, read and write English is perceived as a way of becoming 'ordinary'. Heide Spruck Wrigley, at the 2008 LESLLA conference, quoted a learner who told her that he used to be a skilled person in his country of origin, but 'here' (the USA) he is just someone who can't speak English. In the current policy

context, in which notions such as 'community cohesion' are prominent, learning English is seen as a way of walking through the 'way in' door to an idealised integrated world; and not learning English (despite reasons for this, including lack of suitable classes) is becoming associated with disruptive behaviour in relation to this idealised world. Thus, while learning Ancient Greek is likely to be perceived as an achievement, by contrast learning English is perceived as reducing a deficit.

As already noted, there are of course many differences between both these two types of learning programmes and the learners themselves (as well as differences within them). However, these differences alone do not account for the differences in how the learners and the learning programmes are conceptualised. There is a wealth of theory which can be drawn on for explanations. Labov (for example, 2006) and Trudgill (for example, 1975), as early pioneers of sociolinguistics in US and UK carried out groundbreaking work around varieties of English, and showed how status and prestige in relation to language is socially constructed and related to the status of the speakers in the society. In the case of learners in English literacy classes, they are already marginalised in many ways in England and, as discussed above, the policy context is marginalising them further. Theorists such as Foucault (2002) and Gramsci (1971) analysed how views emerge, are constructed, circulated and contested in society, using concepts such as discourse and hegemony – and in this case, with the result that learning Ancient Greek becomes conceptualised as an achievement, and learning English in England conceptualised as a way of becoming ordinary.

Returning to the naming practices around English literacy courses and learners, there is an interrelationship between the name, status and message because the names do not signal an extension of existing multilingual achievement: 'pre-entry', 'basic skills', 'basic literacy'; 'beginner literacy'. In the wider society these learners are frequently described as 'illiterate'. The word 'can't' looms large in the title of a recent UK TV programme about a literacy class, 'Can't read, can't write', and this title manages to obscure the knowledge and experience of the learners in spectacular style. While it might be argued that the funding, provision and pedagogy for ESOL basic literacy are more urgent and pressing concerns than the names of courses, the issue of naming practices reflects the wider social context, in which they are embedded. In terms of identity, what do the learners think about naming practices?

In the situation where the status of the learners and their courses is low and their conceptualisation is a deficit one, it is critical to keep in mind what learners do know about literacy, and what they bring to their learning. Hall (1987) quoted in Spiegel & Sunderland (2006) reminds us that you do not need to be able to read and write to know about literacy.

> '…two little four year old girls, one Arabic and the other American doing 'scribble' writing. When asked what it said, the Arabic child replied 'you can't read it – it's in Arabic'.

The vital importance of finding out about people's practices, that is, what they know, and do and bring to learning, is a message signalled by literacy research conducted by Barton (2007), Street (1984), Brice-Heath (1983), to name just a few. They show how literacy is socially and culturally constructed and is about involvement - it is often not a solitary activity. Critically, this means that you do not have to do the actual decoding and the actual scribing to be involved in literacy practices. Literacy is

about meaning; decoding and scribing are part of the story, some of the time, but not the whole story. People in the UK who cannot decode an English language newspaper often know what its purpose is, and know about purposes of letters, emails etc., and are involved in interpreting their meanings when others read them aloud. People ask others to write what they dictate; they may not be scribing but they are determining the message they want to send. It means that there are learners in ESOL basic literacy classes who bring a wealth of knowledge about literacy practices to their classes, and they are there to learn more.

So while some learners of English and Ancient Greek share some aspects of the experience of learning to read and write in that language for the first time, any similarity ends here; the huge gulf in the ways in which these learners are conceptualised is a real lesson in the interrelationship between language and status in society.

5 Towards a policy for ESL Basic Literacy

Our case is that English educational policies disadvantage LESLLA learners. Naming practices and other issues both illuminate and exacerbate the low status of these learners. LESLLA is gathering evidence of policies and provision in different countries and publishing this on its website: www.leslla.com. We would like to propose a campaign that promotes positive policies that support LESLLA learners. In England we are campaigning for:

- basic literacy to be highlighted as a priority when talking about 'excluded groups',
- funding that supports specific provision for ESOL basic literacy, so that learners can receive the tuition they need to progress,
- research into appropriate pedagogy and resources,
- training for teachers of ESOL basic literacy,
- training for inspectors in assessing ESOL basic literacy provision.

We are also asking providers to tell us about their provision and the number of learners they are working with. See our website: www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus for updates.

But we would like to suggest that this campaign become an international one and is taken on by LESLLA. By sharing information from different countries, we can learn from each other and put together policy proposals that will result in benefit for all LESLLA learners.

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INTRODUCING AFRICAN LITERACIES

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1 Rationale

Throughout the world more than 900 million adults are illiterate, and 1.3 billion people are living in extreme poverty. Those who are not literate are, for the most part, the same people who are living in poverty (Williams & Cooke, 2002). The majority of illiterate individuals in the world are from multilingual non-western countries where the language of literacy is in most cases not the native language of the speakers. While much research has been conducted combating the causes of illiteracy, the majority of the research has taken place in literate monolingual contexts in western countries (Van de Craats, Kurvers & Young-Scholten, 2006). In these contexts, where it might have most to contribute, research about literacy is fairly scarce (see also Paran & Williams, 2007). There is, therefore, great need for further research into issues relating to language and literacy in developing countries.[2]

The 2008 LESLLA workshop in Antwerp featured a special panel on African Literacies that was dedicated to the uses of English language and literacy in African contexts. Although the contributions in this panel did not in the most direct way address LESLLA learners, they were scheduled in the workshop because they were believed to add to knowledge building about the language and literacy roots LESLLA learners bring to their second language classes in Europe and North America from their home countries. For an overwhelming majority of Africans, education at all levels, including its most basic levels, prominently takes place in a second or third language. Literacy instruction is often only offered in an ex-imperial language, which brings about a lot of learning difficulties for many students. Together with often poor material conditions for schooling in Africa, many Africans are indeed low-educated, have learned (to read and write) in school only through a second or third language.

We believe that a thorough understanding of the linguistic ecology and the sociolinguistic situation surrounding literacy and illiteracy in their learners' countries of origin, may help inform LESLLA practitioners about the social and linguistic constraints

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[1] The papers following this introduction were presented in a panel on African Literacies at the Fourth LESLLA Symposium in Antwerp, 23-25 October 2008. We would like to thank the organisers for giving us this opportunity to come together as a group of Africa focused researchers, and Sandra Barasa as well as our discussant Abder El Aissati for sustaining an interesting dialogue during and after that panel.

[2] This paragraph is based on the introduction of Danielle Beckman's masters thesis (Beckman, 2008) on language and literacy in Namibia.

their learners face in and outside of the classroom. We also believe that it is important to bridge classroom practices with practices of literacy in people's everyday lives (Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996; Prinsloo, 2004; Cook, 2009). Similarly, we argue that knowing how low-educated, low-literate migrants were involved in literacy practices prior to their migration, has a lot to contribute to our understanding of their functioning in the LESLLA classroom.

2 Towards a sociolinguistics of literacy and illiteracy in Africa

Linguists have since long remarked that the African continent is characterised by a tremendous language diversity. Ethnologue (2005) reports 2,029 living languages for a population of 675 million people. This means that 30% of the world's languages are spoken by only 12% of the world's population. African individuals are indeed often praised for their multingualism. In most African countries, tri- or quadrilingual individuals are more common than monolingual persons. In short, in Africa, multilingualism is the norm. This makes the entire African continent beyond doubt among the richest areas on earth for language studies of all kinds.

However, much like its natural resources, Africa's linguistic diversity is rarely only a blessing, but very often also perceived as a burden for organising accessible, high quality education. The number one Google hit on 'literacy' and 'Africa' (October 2008 through July 2009), the UNESCO portal of education, introduces the theme of literacy in Africa as follows:

> Literacy remains a major barrier to the development of African countries. […] In 2000, the average literacy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa was 52 per cent for women and 68.9 per cent for men […]. These figures often hide complex social, cultural and economical realities.

In this short introduction to literacy in Africa, we very briefly want to outline the sociolinguistic situation of the African continent in relation to literacy. For a more comprehensive treatment of the language situation in Africa, we can direct the reader to Blommaert (2007), Vigouroux & Mufwene (2008) or Kleifgen & Bond (2009). At risk of overgeneralisation, we would like to suggest that African communities are sociolinguistically characterised by at least the following four key characteristics.

First of all, there is a high degree of multingualism at both the individual and the community level. Typically there are three categories of languages simultaneously present: (i) the languages of the (minority and majority) ethnic groups, (ii) a local lingua franca, which is either the language of one of the major ethnic groups (e.g., Wolof, Manding, Akan, Hausa, Lingala, Bemba, Xhosa) or of a minority group (e.g., Swahili in East Africa), or an English or Portuguese-based Creole (e.g., Krio in Sierra Leone, Crioulo in Guinea Bissau) and (iii) the ex-colonial language (English, French, Portuguese) which is often the only language with official status. In Islamic African communities, as in most of West Africa, this situation is further complicated with the special position of Arabic as language for religion-related purposes (sermons, praying, greeting, swearing). It is important to note that this high degree of multilingualism does not readily translate into multiliteracies (see Juffermans, this volume). Whereas the

majority of African individuals are multilingual in one or more local languages and often also the former colonial language, only few individuals in Africa are literate in more than one language and script.

Secondly, the education systems are in many cases based on external standards and have given former imperial languages an official, dominant and sometimes even exclusive role. The high drop out-rates and low educational achievements that exists in Africa today are in part caused by these imported foreign standards (cf. Beckman & Kurvers, this volume). A large body of literature exists that critiques the continued use of the ex-colonial languages for formal educational purposes (e.g., Phillipson, 1992; Brock-Utne & Hopson, 2005; Williams, 2006). By neglecting the language of the masses, this educational system (re)produces exclusive social and linguistic identities and inequality.

This gives rise to a heteroglossic situation with a low 'state of literacy' (Spolsky, 2009) for most indigenous languages and a high state of literacy for the ex-colonial languages (English, French, Portuguese) and Arabic. The instrumental and symbolic values attached to reading and writing in exogenous languages are often many times higher than reading and writing in indigenous languages (Coulmas, 1984; see also Beckman & Kurvers, this volume; and Asfaha, this volume). In most African local languages, there is no tradition of reading and writing, nor a body of literature or a community of readers and writers to engage with. (Notable exceptions here are local languages such as Amharic, Hausa and Swahili that do have a tradition of literary or literacy production and circulation of texts – often in religious contexts.) When investments are made in developing literacy in African local languages (by government agencies, development, or missionary organisations) these efforts often remain limited to adult literacy programmes, and are not readily incorporated in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the formal education system.

Finally, as a result of this heteroglossia, as well as of the poor material conditions of African states,[3] the majority of African languages are in terms of resources in fact unequal to world languages (Blommaert, 2008; see also Juffermans, this volume). Although the internet and other electronic communication media such as mobile phones have opened a world of new opportunities (de Schryver, 2002; Barasa & Mous, this volume), many of the material infrastructure taken for granted in writing Western languages – i.e., reference works, (electronic) dictionaries, spell checkers, exemplary texts) simply do not exist or are not readily available for users of African languages. It is often only through acquiring a regional lingua franca and a world language that people can gain access to, and actively participate in the modern nation state. Literacy (in the European languages) plays a crucial role in the social make-up of African societies as it operates as a very effective gatekeeper, separating the *haves* from the *have-nots*.

3 Overview

Following this introduction, four papers present different perspectives on literacy from four different corners of the continent. First, Danielle Beckman and Jeanne Kurvers'

[3] All but three of the fifty African countries for which figures are available, are ranked in the 100 least developed countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2007).

contribution offers a case study of English literacy in school and in the community in a regional capital in Eastern Namibia (Southern Africa). Secondly, Yonas Asfaha deals with a Horn of Africa country, Eritrea, and describes the use of English literacy in public places against the background of Eritrea's multilingual language policy. Third, Kasper Juffermans discusses the collaborative and heterographic nature of an everyday literacy product in a Gambian village (West Africa). Sandra Barasa and Maarten Mous finally broaden our understanding of English language and literacy use in the 21st century with a study from Kenya (East Africa) of literacy practices mediated by new communication technologies.

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GROWING ROOTS AND WINGS: A CASE STUDY ON ENGLISH LITERACY IN NAMIBIA

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1 Background

Namibia, a country in Southern Africa, has had a long history of being dominated by outside forces, as do nearly all African countries. Namibia was first colonized under Germany from 1884 until 1915, a period that was followed by the long reign of South African rule and apartheid from 1915 until 1990. The new educational policies developed by independent Namibia were based on Western curricula (Nekwheva, 1999). English is the language of education beginning in grade 4, though this is a second or third language for nearly all learners.

This study will seek to understand the relationship between social literacy and language practices of a Namibian community on the one hand, and the schooled literacy and language practices and standards that are required of the learners (and the teachers) in the school setting on the other (see also Papen, 2001; 2005). Discussing the importance of strengthening the bond between community and school practices, Robb (1995:22) writes that 'strategies need to be devised and implemented to ensure that each child is enabled to develop both roots and wings'. The *roots* are what learners gain from their culture at home and in the community, and the *wings* are skills and opportunities gained through education. The goal of this study, then, is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between language and literacy uses and attitudes in both community (roots) and school (wings).

In this contribution, the following *research questions* will be highlighted: (1) what are the specific guidelines and policies for the English curriculum in Namibian schools and how are these policies implemented in the classroom? (2) To what extent is English, compared to other languages, used in out of school contexts (home, free time, church)? (3) What literacy practices or events do the students have experience with? (4) What are the students' attitudes with regard to reading and writing and the languages that are in use in the community and school context?

[1] This article is part of a larger case study carried out by Danielle Beckman, who had been working as an English language teacher in Namibia some years before.

2 Context and design of the study

In 1990 independence from South-African rule was won by the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO), which then became the ruling party of Namibia. Being that language policies were very influential in the domination of apartheid, the language policy chosen by SWAPO was a reaction to the oppression enshrined in the language policies of apartheid (Fourie 1997; Haacke 1994). Thus English quickly replaced Afrikaans as the official language of Namibia. The role of indigenous languages in education was greatly minimized also in favor of English after Grade 3, believing that English was the 'language of liberation' (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001: 306).

In the Namibian language policy for education (MBESC, 1993) it was decided that grade 1-3 (lower primary) is taught through one of the languages recognized by the Ministry of Education: nine indigenous languages such as Ojitherero or Khoekhoegowab, and English, Afrikaans and German. In this phase English will be offered as a subject for all learners. In Grades 4-7 (upper primary) English will be used as the medium of instruction for all promotional subjects, i.e. subjects relevant in order to be promoted to the next level.. In grades 8-10, English will be the sole language of instruction.

Against the background of this policy for language and education, a case study was carried out in Gobabis, the regional capital of the Omaheke region, located 200 kilometers east of Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. Gobabis can be divided into two main sections, the 'town' and the 'location'[2] known as Epako. This structure of town and location is left over from apartheid when the town was reserved for residency of the whites and the location was reserved for the residences of the black population. While this is no longer officially the case, the location is still exclusively black. The location is where this research took place. Gobabis also has quite a large Afrikaner community, though they are not very visible as they spend most of their time on farms outside of the city. The living conditions in Gobabis differ greatly. In town there are primarily modern Western houses and apartments. In the location, there are a number of permanent homes, but also a large number of shacks made of various materials, primarily zinc sheets.

The school studied, Epako Junior Secondary School, is a school for grade 8 – 10 students in Epako. The school has approximately 550 learners. Learners come various primary schools throughout the Omaheke region, 200 of them staying in the school-hostel throughout the year. There are 6 class sections of grade 8, five of grade 9 and four of grade 10. While English is the medium of instruction throughout the school, language courses are offered in Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab and Afrikaans. The promotional subjects for all students are English, History, Maths, Physical Science, Life Science, Geography, Language (Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab or Afrikaans), Entrepreneurship and two of the following group: Agriculture, Accounting, and Home Science. The non-promotional subjects are Religious and Moral Education, Life Skills, Arts, and Physical Education. All students must pay school fees and are responsible for providing their own writing implements (pens, pencils, erasers) and the appropriate school uniform. Each classroom has a chalkboard at the front and a bulletin board at

[2] Comparable to what is called 'township' in South Africa.

the back. All of the rooms have electricity. There is also a toilet block with running water.

To address the specific research questions of this study, a socio-linguistic ethnographic case study[3] was carried out in which document-analysis (research question 1) was combined with interviews and observations (research questions 2-4). The case study was carried out in 2007.

Interviews were conducted in both the school and community context. In the school contexts, interviews were held with 24 students. For these interviews an interview guideline (Wright, 2002) was constructed to cover four main areas: language uses, language attitudes, literacy uses, and literacy attitudes. All of these interviews were held on the school premises after school or during free periods. All interviews were conducted individually in English and recorded with a digital voice recorder. Two of the intended interviews had to be cancelled because the students could not understand any English. Six community members were interviewed individually as well. Nine teachers answered a written questionnaire about languages and literacy in education.

Observations took place during a three-week period at the school and in the community. Eighth-grade classroom observations took place with the consent of the subject teacher. Three different lessons were observed, English, Math and Entrepreneurship, in which relevant occurrences relating to language and literacy, either in the activities or in the written materials that were present in the classroom were noted and occasionally recorded. Observations were also made of the learners in more informal contexts during break periods, study time and in between classes. Also noted was the use of written language outside of the classrooms and in the administrative buildings.

3 Current English curriculum

Each subject in Namibian schools is given a specific syllabus, which spells out the specific skills and information that must be taught, how one should teach these skills, and the standards by which this work should be evaluated.

The syllabus notes the important role that language and literacy play in education: 'Language, literacy, and communication are regarded as inherent facets of human development and forms the basis of lifelong learning' (NIED 2006: 1). The syllabus also makes clear that English is an important language for these learners to master in interest of the 'multi-lingual and multicultural' society that they live in. The syllabus recognizes that English is not the mother tongue of these learners, but points out that even though English is their second language 'it has the same potential as any other language to act as a catalyst for personal growth and to assist in the development of broad general knowledge, positive attitudes, critical thinking abilities, moral values and aesthetic sensibilities' (NIED 2006: 1).

The syllabus encourages teachers, then, to have lessons over topics such as culture and diversity, equality and HIV/AIDS, fostering a connection between the cultural

[3] The term case study refers to the type of naturalistic research in which a specific real-life situation is investigated – in this case the community around the grade 8 pupils in Epako junior secondary school.

identities and the English classroom (NIED, 2006). Teachers are encouraged to practice learner-centered education, to use various teaching methods in order to cater to the needs of individual learners and to involve the learners in all aspects of their education, from planning to evaluation.

In addition to being a learner-centered environment, the syllabus notes that the classroom must be a language-rich environment, particularly in terms of print, saying that every classroom should have a reading corner with a variety of texts, including examples of students own creative writing. Teachers are also encouraged to make learners aware of current information technology (i.e. computers). In order to assure that the English classes are centered on the learners and their experiences, there is no longer an English textbook assigned by the syllabus. Rather teachers are encouraged to create their own lesson modules based on topics relevant to their learners. The teachers then must go seek out relevant texts and make these available to the learners, as well designing assignments and activities for this specific topic.

The development of language skills in the junior primary phase is divided by the syllabus into three separate sections: listening and responding in speech and writing, reading and responding in speech and writing and grammar and usage. For the reading and writing skills, learners are expected to learn to read silently and to read out loud. Learners must also learn to read for information and enjoyment and to use reference materials. Learners must be able to read and write a variety of different genres and text types. In the grammar and usage category, the learners are expected to learn to write using proper spelling, structures and punctuation, as well as show a command of idioms and vocabulary.

For example, Table 1 demonstrates the skills learners are supposed to master in each grade regarding spelling and punctuation. The grade 8 learners must exercise 'reasonable accuracy', the grade 9 learners 'increasing accuracy' and the grade 10 learners 'accuracy'. These terms are not further elaborated upon, so the definition of what could be considered reasonably accurate, increasingly accurate or mostly accurate is left up to the individual teacher. This pattern of defining the required competency can be seen in the other expected competencies as well.

Table 1: Objectives for spelling in the syllabus

	at the end of …, learners should be able to:		
	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
1. Use spelling and punctuation correctly and properly	- Exercise reasonable accuracy in phonics and spelling - Use generalizations to spell difficult and unfamiliar words - Use a variety of resources to confirm spelling - Use basic punctuation marks effectively and correctly	- Exercise increasing accuracy in phonics, spelling and punctuation - Use generalizations to spell difficult and unfamiliar words - Use a variety of resources to confirm spelling - Use a wider variety of punctuation marks effectively and correctly	- Exercise accuracy in phonics, spelling and punctuation - Demonstrate an established confidence in using different resources to confirm spelling of difficult and less frequently used words - Use most punctuation marks effectively and correctly

The syllabus also provides teachers with tools to use in order to provide a shared standard in marking among the various schools. There are guidelines for teachers in marking, as well as specific rubrics to assist the teachers in their marking of the writing assignments of the learners. The syllabus also provides the grading scale that is to be used and explains what each grade should represent in terms of students competency. The grade scale uses the letters A-G and U(ungraded) as possible marks for the learners, A (90-100% correct scores on the tests used) being the highest grade, G (30-40% correct) and U (0-29% correct) the lowest two. In the final grade for the year, a learner can be considered to pass English with any mark over a G. That means, that a learner only needs to master 30% of the basic competencies in order to be promoted to the next level.

A very interesting feature of this syllabus is the inclusion of a glossary for the teacher to explain terms used throughout the syllabus. The terms described in this glossary are not only to explain terminology specific to the structures of the curriculum, but also to give definitions to English words that are, presumably, unknown or unfamiliar to the teachers. Examples of the words included in this glossary are: *categorizing, communicative, debate, extensively, humorous, imaginary, scan, skim,* and *syntax*.

4 Languages in the school and the community

As the observations showed, the main area in which English was spoken was the school. Inside the formal classroom setting nearly all the communication teacher and learners was in English. The entire lesson period was carried out in English. In the classroom, the teacher did most of the speaking. Often the teachers either had a summary on the board, which they would introduce at length, or they would read through a text or textbook with the learners, stopping to explain important sections as they went along. All of the texts and written work of the learners was also completed in English. Apart from occasional whispers amongst two students, in the classroom setting not any regular interactions in either mother tongue (or Afrikaans) between the learners and the teachers were heard.

The teachers seemed to recognize that the vocabulary of the learners is often low. Two different methods were observed in which the teachers tried to explain a new English word or concept to the learners: translation and elaboration on students' reactions. In one class the teacher wanted the learners to build a tower out of materials that she had provided them with. As she was explaining the rules of the activity to them, the learners told her that they didn't know what a tower was. After trying to explain the concept further in English, to no avail, she said *toring*, the Afrikaans word for tower, which seemed to give a better understanding to most of the students. In another class a teacher was trying to get her learners to understand the concept of expanding. She asked if the learners knew what expanding was. They said that they didn't know. She asked them to make some guesses as to what it might be. The answers continued to be more precise until the teacher was more or less satisfied with their answer, at which time she gave them the official definition of the word.

In *informal* settings and outside of the classroom, English was hardly used. During break time or in between classes, for example, it would be very rare to hear learners

conversing together in English. For the teachers this also holds true. It seemed that if English was spoken informally between the teachers it was for the most part due to the fact that they did not share a mother tongue or did not speak Afrikaans. In this way for both teachers and learners, exclusive English use was for the most part limited to the formal classroom.

Contrary to what was observed in the classrooms, in the community mainly other languages such as Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab or Afrikaans were used in conversations, in shops or at the radio. All students reported they spoke another language than English at home. On the radios, that could be heard everywhere on the streets and through the walls of the buildings: mainly languages other than English were used. The only exception outside of school is the television with mainly English programs such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The Namibian news is broadcast in English and in various Namibian languages (a different language every day). In government offices English is the official language, but people may and do use their mother tongue or Afrikaans if they are unable to communicate well in English.

Table 2 presents the main outcomes of the questions about how the students and the community members valued the use of English.

Table 2: Language attitudes of learners and community members

	Yes	No	Total
Like to speak English?	27	1	28
English important to speak?	28	0	28
English preferred language of education?	27	1	28

Nearly all participants felt a very strong and positive attitude toward English. All but one of the respondents liked to speak English, and all felt that it was important to speak it. The responses can be grouped into three main reasons why the speakers see English as being an important or valuable resource: local communication, international access, and success (compare Juffermans, this volume).

Many expressed English is important for communication with people from different language groups. One participant said, *'When you are at some place people are not speaking your language, you must speak English'*. Others were looking at the international context instead of the local: *'If you not speak English you can't communicate with the people out of the country.'* Another respondent argued *'It is important because I can go even to America. I can get water and accommodation there.'* The third group of respondents was more interested in the success that English would give them accesses to: *'If you do not speak English, you will not get some work.'* Another participant had more lofty ambitions, stating, *'One day if I grow up I want to be a president and I have to know how to speak English.'*

When asked if they liked the idea of having in their mother tongue, or perhaps in Afrikaans, the student and community members feelings toward this topic was overwhelmingly in favor of keeping English as the language of education. One learner even identified learning English as the main reason for going to school: '*You are coming to school to learn English*'.

The teachers also, for the most part, believed that education should be carried out in English, while many also could see the benefits that could come from additional

education in mother tongue. Six of the teachers acknowledge, however, that while they felt that English should remain the language of education, they can see how learning in the mother tongue could have benefits for the learners. One teacher wrote '*English is an international language they need to be taught in English to be able to one day use English wherever they might find themselves*' but she also admitted that if school was in the mother tongue it would be easier for the learners, '*since there is no barriers of a second language to overcome before they can understand the context of a certain subject.*' There was only one teacher who felt that it was not at all beneficial to receive an education in English. He wrote, '*It is better if they [the learners] receive their education in their mother tongue. They will understand the work easier than in English.*' He thought it to be very difficult to learn in one language, but think and reason in another. No teachers thought that education should be offered in Afrikaans, although the older generation is fluent in it and it is still, also, used as a lingua franca between speakers of different language groups. One student sums up quite nicely the sentiments towards Afrikaans: '*It was the language of the people, and now it's out.*'

5 Literacy in the community and at school

5.1 Literacy practices in the community

While the instances of visible literacy were quite limited in Epako, there were a few notable occurrences, namely a large mural, signs on shops and buildings and billboards. The mural is located in a very prominent position in the community, on the main street by the entrance of Epako. On the other side of the wall, there are a series of shorter murals. Some of these paintings are simply images relating to HIV/AIDS, others also include text (see Figure1).

Another use of visible literacy is in the signs painted on local shops, bars clubs, churches and schools, mainly names of the shops and advertisements. And there are the billboards on the highway. All visible literacy in Epako was in English. While written language may not be overly visible in the community, it does still play a role in community practices, albeit to a limited extent.

Figure 1: 'Counceling (counseling) can help you to except (accept) your status'

The most common text in the homes and community of Gobabis was the bible. Gobabis, and Namibia as a whole, is very religious, with most people calling themselves Christians. On Sunday mornings many people in Gobabis go to one of the churches, of which there are many. Also, many people also attend bible studies throughout the week. In fact, the bible is really the only actual book to be found for sale in all of Gobabis, being sold in many different shops, even in the supermarkets.

In a Catholic Church service, representative for the church environment in Gobabis, many people brought their own bibles with them. The church service was in Afrikaans; most of the bibles were as well. For the singing there were songbooks provided, also in Afrikaans. The service in a Jehovah's Witness church was run, and in large part attended by white Western Jehovah's Witness missionaries. This service was carried out in both Afrikaans and English. There was no translation going on. The songbooks were also available in both English and Afrikaans and people sang the song in whatever language they felt more comfortable with. In the second part of the service, they went over the weekly lesson in the study guide. This lesson consisted of a text, which was read aloud, paragraph by paragraph, with questions being answered by the attendants.

While the bible seemed to be the text that was read most popularly, the most common use of writing seemed to be to write notes or letters to family, acquaintances or friends. With telephone communication still being a luxury, writing a letter can be the quickest and most efficient way of getting a message to someone you do not have time to visit in person. One learner said to me *'When you want to tell him or her something you must write, if they are staying on the farm'*. Some of the letters are indeed written to parents or siblings or friends who stay in another town. Many people, particularly the learners, said that they liked to write letters to tell how they were doing, but also to ask for money in order to buy food or supplies for themselves. These letters are sent most of the time not by post, but rather they send it along with someone who they know that is heading to that area or from the location to Gobabis.

A number of the learners (n: 15) reported that they had storybooks at home and that they loved to read these books in their free time. This did not seem to match up with the observations, however, as in all observations throughout the community no book but the bible had be seen. The teachers confirmed this. One teacher supposed the kids wished they had storybooks at home, but it was not the case. She had asked all of the learners to bring a storybook from home or from the library in town. Barely any learners actually came to class with any kind of book at all. They told her that they didn't have any books at home and did not have time to go to the library. Most of the learners, who did come with reading materials, came with either old textbooks or some kind of technical manuals. Only a few learners actually came with some kind of storybook.

Several learners (n: 13) also said that they had magazines at home. Many mentioned either '*Huisgenoo*t', a ladies magazine in Afrikaans, celebrity magazines like '*Star*' or sport magazines about football. Parts of these magazines could be seen at the posters the students had to make at school. These magazines are not often the most recent edition. In some cases they can be a number of years old, being passed around throughout the community. The word 'magazine' had a broad meaning for the participants. Community members would also call a brochure on HIV/AIDS or a booklet with advertisements a magazine.

The percentage of children who actually have appropriate reading materials at home is probably very small, indicating that the reading that occurs outside of the school context is greatly limited by the lack of reading texts accessible to these learners.

5.2 Literacy practices at school

A number of different written signs and posters can be seen throughout the school environment. On the walls of the school there are three separate murals painted. One is their school slogan, saying Epako JSS 'Success our pride'. Inside the classroom there are also a number of visible texts. The most notable comes in the form of posters, some printed, about for example education or HIV/AIDS prevention, some made by students themselves. These posters mostly involve images cut out of magazines, which are pasted to poster board with some writing at the top (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Poster in the front of a class about 'exesice' (exercise)

Inside the classroom there can also be seen various lists such as class lists or timetables, and posters meant to serve as educational aids, for example where they point out specific grammar rules. There are little to no others texts in the classroom. There are no books available to the learners outside of the textbooks and writing books that they have been provided with at school.

Literacy is a major component of what occurs within the classroom. The textbooks and workbooks are the main literacy tools used by the learners in the classroom. Textbooks are for the most part in good supply at the school. Each subject has its own textbook, approved by the Ministry of Basic Education. However, as mentioned earlier, per the new English syllabus issued in 2007 there is no official textbook for English.

In the Maths class, the teacher wrote a number of questions on the chalkboard that the students were instructed to copy down in their workbooks. Since there was not

enough room on the board, the teacher erased the first questions, telling the students who had not yet finished these, to copy from their neighbors. After all the copying was finished, learners who felt they knew the right answer were invited to the board in order to work out the answer. The other learners were expected to solve the problem in their workbooks. Before the end of class, the teacher reminded the learners that their poster projects (about topics such as lowest common denominator, or prime numbers) were due the next day.

In the English lesson the subject was writing a summary. The teacher first gave a brief explanation of what summaries are before giving the class a definition and writing it on the board, 'A short version of a long text.' She then went on to write some of the key components of summary writing on the board, giving examples of how one could write a summary using the key components of HIV/AIDS as an example. Some of the learners were writing this information in their exercise books while others were not. She then went handing out and reading aloud a sample text (an African folktale) and a summary of the tale. The teacher next passed out another text about the dangers of smoking. The teacher told the learners to write a one-paragraph summary of no more than 100 words about the dangerous effects of smoking. The teacher then read the entire text out loud for the learners. She encouraged the students to first use a rough piece of paper before starting to write in their exercise books. This was homework to be completed for the next class.

In the Entrepreneurship class, the teacher had already written a 'summary' on the board. At the end of the summary, there were a number of questions relating to the topic. The students were told to copy the summary and questions into their exercise books and then answer the questions for the next day. The rest of the period the learners were copying the work off of the board and trying to answer the questions. The majority of the learners finished this work well before the end of the period.

6 Conclusions: Bridging the gap

In Gobabis English is, for the most part, restricted to being used within the classroom walls. While English does have status in the country, and this status trickles down into the favorable attitudes toward English, it does not affect the language use within the homes and social settings of these learners. The mastery of English for these learners is also seemingly hindered in some ways by the current curriculum and policies concerning language in education. The current English syllabus, while promoting good and progressive educational practices, seems in many ways to be oblivious to the actual English situation in most Namibian schools.

While English is one skill that learners need to master in education, literacy is perhaps even more crucial for these learners to develop in order to succeed. As has also been discovered by earlier research (Heath, 1983; Prinloo and Breier, 1996; Street, 1998; 1996; 1984) the literacy views and practices employed by communities are different from the standard literacy, which is taught in the schools. A large part of this problem can be attributed to the large rift between the literacy practices used and employed in the classroom and those of the community (Liebowitz, 2005). A main cause for this seems to be the emphasis on Western literacy standards in the curriculum. As demanded by the syllabus, the focus at school is placed on Western literacy standards:

reading formal texts, and producing and understanding how to structure texts, essays, formal letters, and the like. These are literacies that these learners do not encounter outside of the classroom. In grade 8 for example, where many of these learners are still obviously struggling with the ability to understand and interpret the texts they read, more emphasis could be given to teaching how to read a text, or what the function of a text is. Reading for understanding is a literacy skill that these learners do not employ in their literacy practices at home, as there is barely any reading or access to texts outside of the classroom at all. The common letter writing, to give another example, is completely different from the 'proper' letter format these learners are asked to write at school. Instruction in letter writing might start with encouraging learners to write a letter like they would write if they were at home, gradually introducing alternatives and explaining the situations in which such a letter might be used.

Another issue in school literacy is again related to the current English curriculum. The syllabus does not provide any textbooks for the language classes at the junior secondary level. The very classes that are supposed to be improving the literacy skills of the learners are now devoid of the main literacy resource available to the students: textbooks. While the intentions of the syllabus were good, attempting to get the teachers to seek out texts that would be of interest and relevant to their learners, there are major practical shortcomings. First of all, there is a great lack of any text in the community, let alone texts that will be of interest and relevance to teenage learners. Secondly, given the relatively large class sizes at the school, the high cost and unreliable supply of resources like paper and ink, and the limited access to a functioning copy machine, this places an unreasonable demand on the teacher.

As Western discourse norms continue to pervade the rapidly globalizing world, the ability to achieve success is measured by and large by the ability to adapt to these Western standards. Research into understanding local discourses (like in this Namibian case) is important not only for preserving local culture, but also for making these foreign standards accessible, attainable and relevant to the local community and to allow students to strengthen their roots while growing their wings.

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ENGLISH LITERACY IN SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC PLACES IN MULTILINGUAL ERITREA

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1 Introduction

As in many countries of Africa, the English language plays an important role in Eritrea. English is the language of educational instruction in junior, secondary and higher levels of education. English is also in use in governmental offices, international businesses and in service rendering institutions (e.g., restaurants, hotels, groceries) in major urban centres in the country. However, unlike many countries in Africa, Eritrea does not accord official language status to English or any of its national languages. With the aim of highlighting the role of the English language and literacy in Eritrea, this contribution describes the general language policy in the country, the use of English in schools and the display of English signs and messages in public places.

Eritrea is a small country in the Horn of Africa on the Red Sea. Eritrea was colonized for over a century by Italy, Great Britain and Ethiopia respectively, before gaining independence in 1993. Eritrea is a linguistically diverse country with 3.6 million inhabitants belonging to nine different language groups, representing three language families and three different scripts. The Semitic languages Tigrinya and Tigre use a syllabic script called Ge'ez (alternatively known as *Fidel* or Ethiopic script), the Nilo-Saharan languages Kunama and Nara, as well as the Cushitic languages Afar, Saho, Bilen and Bidhaawyeet, use alphabetic Latin script, and Arabic is written in a consonantal alphabetic Arabic script.

Concerning the provisions of the language policy in education, all nine Eritrean languages and the three scripts are used in elementary education throughout the country (Department of Education, 1991). The education policy allows children to attend elementary schools that use their mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Parents can also choose to send their children to schools where one of the languages of wider communication (Tigrinya and Arabic) is the medium of instruction. English is taught as a subject starting from second grade in elementary schools and is the language of instruction in secondary schools and higher education.

Language and literacy use studies in Eritrea reveal a complex multilingual scenario in urban and rural contexts. In one of the few studies on language use in Eritrea, Cooper & Carpenter found that Arabic, Bilen, Tigre and Tigrinya 'compete' in the market place in Keren, a small town in north central Eritrea (as cited in Hailemariam, 2002). Many towns in Eritrea are multilingual urban centres where a number of the languages co-exist with the languages of wider communication. Hailemariam (2002) compared language use at home and schools in four towns (Keren, Ghindae, Senafe,

and Barentu) and four villages (Melebso, Sheab, Igila, and Ogana). He observed greater mismatch between school and home language use in towns than in villages. For example, many of the Tigre, Bilen, and Tigrinya students (n: 47) attending Arabic medium school in the town of Keren reported using their first languages with family members and friends only occasionally, while most of the students (n: 23) from the village of Melebso nearby reported frequent use of their home language (Tigre), which was also the language of the school.

Tigrinya, Arabic and English are the working languages in the country, in spite of the fact that the language policy does not recognize official languages (Asfaha, Kurvers, & Kroon, 2008). Therefore, Tigrinya, Arabic and English, as the working languages, and Tigre, as the language of the second largest group in the population, cover most of the linguistic landscape in the country. Tigrinya, as one of the languages of wider communication, is commonly used in public, commercial and inter-group communication. The more formal functions in public offices are also mainly carried out in the Tigrinya language. The English language enjoys the status of working language of higher public offices (i.e., ministries, authorities, and agencies) and institutions of higher education and commerce, such as banks and corporations. Despite its popularity among Eritreans, the frequent use of standard Arabic is only limited to Eritrea's political, business and religious elite. The use of Arabic in the general public is restricted to the more colloquial use of the language in market places and other less formal contexts.

2 English in Eritrean schools

English was widely introduced in Eritrea during the British military administration (1941-1952). Although it has remained an important language in the country ever since, after Eritrea's independence in 1991 English was made the language of instruction in secondary and higher levels of education. Outside of the educational context, the role of English, described by Woldemikael (2003: 123) as 'a neutral language without a strong social or political base in Eritrea', was assessed as limited (Walter & Davis, 2005).

The decision to give English such a powerful role in education in Eritrea might have been influenced more by the official status of the language in other African countries rather than by its position in Eritrea where Tigrinya and Arabic are sufficient in order for the social and political domains to flourish (Hailemariam, 2002: 77). Walter & Davis called the decision to promote English in education 'bold but not revolutionary' (2005: 337). A revolutionary step might have involved devising a curriculum based on the existing national languages replacing the role of English as a medium of instruction in schools.

Although English remains the language of instruction in middle, secondary and college level education, the level of English proficiency has stayed very low throughout the educational system. The 2002 *Eritrea National Reading Survey*, for example, found that the English proficiency of elementary students was so low that only less than 15 percent of fifth grade Eritrean students demonstrated good enough control of English to allow them to handle the demands of middle school that started in sixth grade (Walter & Davis, 2005). There are many factors contributing to the low levels of

English proficiency. One challenge for students trying to learn English in the elementary schools is the low amount of time (450 contact hours) spent on the task. According to Walter and Davis (2005), at least four times this amount of time (1800 hours) is needed in order for the average child to be able to reach the level of English proficiency demanded in middle school. The other factor could be the low English proficiency of the elementary school teachers. Elementary teachers receive one year of teacher training after they have completed high school. Having teachers whose English is weak creates a major obstacle in building English skills in the students. In addition, the English curriculum does not allow teachers to use traditional teaching methods (e.g. chanting after the teacher) that they might be very familiar with (Wright, 2002).

3 English literacy in public places

The use of written language in public places in Eritrea reflects the diversity in languages and scripts in the country. Compared to rural settings, the major urban centres show a better public print atmosphere with street signs, names of businesses and public offices written in three languages (Tigrinya, Arabic and English) and three scripts (Ge'ez, Arabic and Latin). A similar mix of languages and scripts is usually applied to produce handwritten signs, announcements and graffiti on notice boards and walls. For example, the ubiquitous 'smoking is not allowed' sign commonly appears in the three languages (Tigrinya, Arabic and English) and three scripts (Ge'ez, Arabic and Latin). A computer print out of this sign has even become a standard item available at stationary shops for sale.

Linguistic landscape studies (e.g., Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009) have shown that the visibility of languages in the mix of multilingual street signs, billboards, place names, etc. might be informative in at least two ways. The prevalence of a particular language in public places gives an indication about the power position or status and vitality of that language compared to other languages. It could also serve as a geographical marker indicating that a particular language is spoken or allowed or accepted for use in a specific urban area (as a result of the predominance of the speakers in that area). Linguistic landscape studies may help us understand the prevalence of English language in public places in Eritrea. As we have already seen the country's policy gives English a prominent role in the educational and official settings. In this section, we examine if English is given similar importance or visibility in the linguistic landscape in the city centre in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea.

Based on data (i.e., pictures, interviews, etc.) collected in March 2009,[1] this section describes the use of English written texts in the streets, cafés, restaurants and other public places in the city centre of Asmara.

The majority of the signs of names on government offices and big businesses in the centre of Asmara are written in three languages – Tigrinya, Arabic and English (see Figure 1). The names of the institutions in Figure 1 (the 'Ministry of Tourism' in the sign on the left and 'Petroleum Corporation of Eritrea' on the right) appear in a typical ordering of the languages – Tigrinya, Arabic, and English – in name signs of public offices. It is worth noting that some of the information provided in these signs

[1] Part of the data in this section were collected by Debbie de Poorter and Marijke Vormeer for their master theses in Intercultural Communication at Tilburg University.

sometimes appears only in one or the other language. In Figure 1, while the information indicating the location of the offices ('2nd. and 3rd. FLOOR') in the sign on the left appears in three languages, similar information is provided only in English in the sign on the right.

Figure 1: Names of public offices written in three languages

According to Saleh Idris, head of the elementary education curriculum at the Ministry of Education, there is no rule or law that requires private citizens, private businesses and public offices to use (only) these three languages in publicly displaying the names of offices and business. As mentioned earlier, the government policy acknowledges the equality of the nine national languages and promotes their use in education and media. However, government offices routinely employ these three languages – Tigrinya, Arabic, and English – in their day to day activities. Saleh said that people usually assume that, as these are the working languages of the government, they have to use them in writing names (personal communication, March 2009). Some of the business owners interviewed said they use these languages because they thought these languages are the official languages in Eritrea.

Linguistic landscape studies show that the prominence given to a particular language in a multilingual name or street sign might indicate the relative importance of that language in comparison to the rest of the languages in the sign (Collins & Slembrouck, 2007). Using bigger font size for one of the languages in a multilingual street sign may, for example, indicate the relatively higher status of that particular language. The order of appearance of the languages – Tigrinya, Arabic and English – in the signs in Figure 1 might, at first glance, be considered an indication of the levels of importance assigned to each of these languages, with Tigrinya enjoying the highest status and English the lowest among the three working languages in the country. However, a closer look at public places outside these government offices and big businesses shows a much more prominent visibility of English. Increasingly, we see

more and more use of English in and around businesses and in the streets of Asmara (Saleh Idris, personal communication, March 2009).

These English signs and messages are usually shown alone (Figure 3) or alongside Tigrinya (Figure 2). Figure 3 shows a handwritten 'NO PARKING' sign displayed on an iron gate of a private property in the centre of Asmara. The owners of the property probably chose to use English language as many of the formal traffic signs (e.g., 'Stop', 'Give way', etc.) in the streets of Asmara are in English. However, the handwritten 'NO PARKING' sign is lacking the colourful embellishment the formal traffic signs usually have. It can be said that while the formal traffic symbols mostly rely on the visual aspect of the signs, the handwritten signs may require greater knowledge of the English language.

Figure 2 shows English and Tigrinya languages used to produce a list of drinks and pastries at a café. Many restaurants and cafes freely use both languages to write their menus. Sometimes the information given in one language is not entirely reproduced in the other language. For example, in Figure 2, the 'City cake Cafeteria' menu has the title 'PRICE & LISTS' in English which is also reproduced in Tigrinya in the next line. However, each entry of drinks and pastries and the accompanying price is given in Tigrinya only. The name of the café is finally given in English only. The use of English words (city, modern, sweet, fun, etc.) as names or parts of names of restaurants and cafes has become common in Asmara.

There are many instances of exclusive use of English language in producing different texts. Many restaurants chose to produce their menus in English. One example is the menu from the Pizza and Spaghetti House (see Figure 4) in the centre of Asmara. In this passage, an introductory page to the thick menu, customers are invited to discover 'the rustic flavours' of dishes 'prepared with the finest ingredients specially selected and imported' from countries like Italy, Spain, and China. In Pizza and Spaghetti House, which serves many customers from the Italian school nearby, names and descriptions of entries in the menu are given in both Italian and English, although the introductory page is written in English. In an interview on their choice of languages, the manager said as the restaurant specializes in Italian food (pizzas and pasta dishes) and there are no corresponding Tigrinya names for the entries, they saw no reason to use Tigrinya. In addition, the manager said 'English makes us look good' (personal communication, March 2009).

There are also government institutions that work exclusively in English. This is because, as one of the working languages of the government, English is the language of business in ministries, agencies (e.g., inland revenue office, civil aviation), corporations, banks, higher education institutions and civil and sport associations.

Formal communication, documentation, correspondences with local and international partners, reports etc. in these institutions are done mainly in the English language. For example, formal correspondences among these institutions or between them and other international organizations are mostly done in English. Figure 5 shows a formal letter from one of the colleges, College of Arts and Social Sciences, addressed to the local office of the World Bank. Although both Tigrinya and English appear in the letter headings, the content of the letter is all in English.

Figure 2: 'City cake Cafeteria'

Figure 3: 'NO PARKING'

Figure 4: 'Spaghetti and Pizza House'

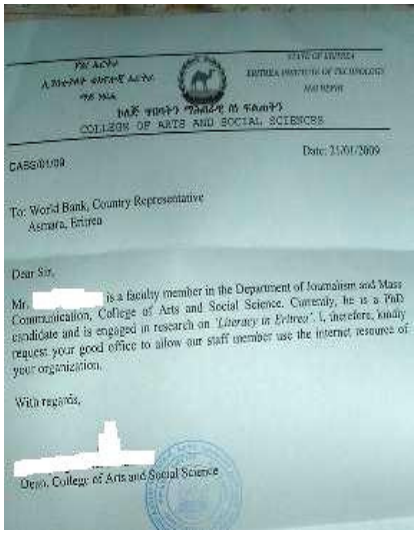

Figure 5: Official letter

The prevalence of English literacy in both formal and informal contexts is something many people said is to be expected as English is 'an international language' and one of the three working languages of the government in Eritrea. According to Saleh Idris, although the language policy in Eritrea does not accord official status to any language(s), many people assume these languages are the 'official languages' of the

government. Saleh said that the common use of written English (as well as written Tigrinya and Arabic) in public places might be a reflection of this perception of the language policy (personal communication, March 2009).

The English literacy represented here by samples of pictures from the city centre in Asmara show some of the characteristics of what Blommaert (2008) calls 'grassroots literacy'. These characteristics of grassroots literacy include unstable orthography, non-standard use of written language, unconventional genre, and poor print production (Juffermans, 2008). In an example of non-standard use of language, Figure 7 shows the 'LOOK AND KNOW OUR WORLD'S DIFFERENT MONEY' sign displayed in an antique shop window inviting passersby to have a look at different currencies from around the world. Another example of non-standard spelling is the 'Riffil ink' ('we refill ink') message displayed in a computer shop in the centre of Asmara (see Figure 6). Although the production qualities of these two examples clearly show differences, it is common to find printed signs with very low production qualities.

Figure 6: 'Riffil ink'

Figure 7: 'Look and know our world's different money'

4 Linking classroom and public uses of English

There are some important points to be made about the role of English in education and the public sphere. The prominent role given to the English language in the country's education policy is reflected in equally prominent visibility of English in the streets of Asmara. The global language of English has crept into every major domain of the day to day life of at least the urban citizens. Although the country does not recognize English (or any other language) as an official language, the use of English in formal (e.g., education, ministries, etc.) and informal settings (e.g., street signs) attests to its wide role and influence in the country.

Another link that needs further attention is the English curriculum. Research has shown that English proficiency in schools is very low (Walter & Davis, 2005). Officials at the Ministry of Education said that 'poor English' in the streets of Asmara is the result of the weak curriculum (Saleh Idris, personal communication, March 2009). To address this, the Ministry is currently revising the curriculum of elementary education. In the revised curriculum, English lessons will be offered from the very start of elementary schooling (starting in grade 1 instead of grade 2). The teaching materials and methods have been revised to incorporated learner-centred approaches.

The curriculum revisions may also benefit from a further examination of the social uses of English written language outside the school context. Research has shown that some students learn written language on their own independent of schools by reading signs, labels, names of streets and other print materials in their surrounding (Heath, 1986). The informal acquisition and use of literacy has to be acknowledged and further investigation has to be made on how it relates to the formal, school based acquisition of literacy. English language and literacy acquisition outside the schools might also be influenced by the ubiquitous presence of global cultural products conveyed through satellite television, the Internet, magazines, books, videos and DVDs. Educators and policy makers may need to make more explicit links between school and community-based literacy practices in order to raise the current low levels of learning achievement.

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HOW TO WRITE IF YOU CANNOT WRITE: COLLABORATIVE LITERACY IN A GAMBIAN VILLAGE[1]

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1 Literacy as a social phenomenon in rural Gambia

According to the Department of State for Education of Africa's smallest mainland country, 'The Gambia has a low literacy rate, estimated at 46% overall and only 28% for women' (DoSE 2006: 44). In this paper, I attempt to reveal certain aspects of the social, cultural and economic complexity behind these numbers by presenting an ethnographic analysis of a small telephone booklet in use by a low-literate rural young man, named L. I want to problematise the binary distinction between literates and illiterates, and argue that 'illiterates' like L often meaningfully engage in literacy practices in their daily lives.

In The Gambia, there is a strong equation of literacy with English and Arabic, as local languages are officially bypassed as languages of literacy and media of instruction (Juffermans & McGlynn, forthcoming). The national education policy indeed provides the objective to

> Introduce the teaching of the five most commonly used languages – Wollof, Pulaar, Mandinka, Jola and Sarahule to be taught at the basic, senior secondary, tertiary and higher education levels as subjects (DoSE, 2004: 4.2.xiii),

and stipulates that

> During the first three years of basic education (grades 1-3), the medium of instruction will be in the predominant Gambian language of the area in which the child lives. English will be taught as a subject from grade one and will be used as a medium of instruction from grade 4. Gambian

[1] Fieldwork for this paper was conducted in June–July 2008 with a travel grant from the Graduate School for Humanities at Tilburg University. I am grateful to Abder El Aissati and Mohammedi Laghzaoui for their expert opinions and help with deciphering and transcribing the entries in Arabic (see 4.1 and 4.2), and to Jeanne Kurvers, Yonas Asfaha, Ineke van de Craats and an anonymous reviewer for their careful reading of, and insightful suggestions to improve an earlier draft of this paper.

languages will be taught as subjects from grade 4 (DoSE, 2004: 11.1.6).[2]

In practice, however, Gambian schools use English as the medium of instruction throughout, especially when it concerns literacy. McGlynn & Martin observe that 'two of the indigenous languages (referred to as vernaculars in The Gambia), Mandinka and Wolof, are also used on occasions alongside English during lessons' (2009: 137). This 'flexible bilingualism' in the classroom, as Creese (2008) would call it, rarely if ever involves written language. When speaking, teachers and students smoothly switch in and out of languages and display great creativity mixing them, both in and outside the classroom. There is no sign of this fluidity and permeability between languages, in school literacy practices, e.g., on the blackboard, in exercise books, in text books, etc., nor is there in the linguistic landscape surrounding schools (cf. Beckman & Kurvers, this volume). On the level of written language, multilingualism is fixed and compartmentalised with English and Arabic occupying strong hegemonic positions in the linguistic market as preferred languages of literacy.

Notwithstanding these constraints and societal 'guidelines' on the use of language and literacy, people make use of this resource in various ways and for various reasons, and manage to 'do literacy' even if they self-declare being illiterate.

2 Theoretical foundations: ethnographies of literacy

My comments here on the use of literacy in one modern, multi-ethnic village in southwest Gambia, are done from an ethnographic perspective. Following Blommaert, I consider ethnography a method-cum-theory of enquiry into social reality, that 'tries to describe and analyze the complexity of social events comprehensively' (2007: 682). In Lillis' (2008) terms, I use ethnography in studying language and literacy not merely as 'method', but rather as 'methodology' and 'deep theorising'.

Drawing on a rich body of literature under the label of *new literacy studies* (e.g., Street, 1995; Gee, 1996; Barton & Hamilton, 1998), I assume that literacy is a situated practice that derives its social significance from the locality in which it is practiced. I further assume that reading and writing occupy rather diverse functions in various communities and that literacy stands in a unique relation to local ideologies and power relations. I also assume that in any society literacy is an unequally distributed resource that people can access through a more or less formal and institutionalised learning process. Unlike language(s), that is/are generally acquired spontaneously and naturally in interaction with one's parents, siblings, neighbours and peers, literacy normally requires prolonged exposure to deliberate instruction in some kind of educational institution. Significantly, literacy is always tied to a particular language. There is no such thing as *languageless* reading and writing, even though different scripts instantiate different relations between the visual, meaning, and sound components of a language.

In his seminal paper, Basso (1974) argues in favour of an ethnographic study of literacy that 'focuses upon writing as a form of communicative activity' and pays attention to 'the social patterning of this activity or the contributions it makes to the

[2] Note that Arabic is not mentioned in the education policy. Islamic education (*daara* and *madrassah*) is largely beyond control of the state and its policy apparatus.

maintenance of social systems' (1974: 426, 431). Questions deemed important for such an enterprise are the following: 'What kinds of information are considered appropriate for transmission through written channels, and how, if at all, does this information differ from that which is passed through alternate channels such as speech?', or more generally, 'What position does writing occupy in the total communicative economy of the society under study and what is the range of its cultural meanings?' (Basso, 1974: 431, 432).

In another seminal publication concerned with literacy and schooling in the United States, Szwed recognises that 'we do not fully know what literacy is' and that

> We need to look at reading and writing as activities having consequences in (and being affected by) family life, work patterns, economic conditions, patterns of leisure, and a complex of other factors. Unlike those who often attempt to understand a class of people by a content analysis of the literature written for them by outsiders, we must take account of the readers' activities in transvaluing and reinterpreting such material (Szwed, 1981: 21).

In an introduction to a special journal issue on ethnographies of literacy, Baynham (2004) looks back at two decades of ethnographic studies of literacy and identifies the developments in American linguistic anthropology in the 1960s and 70s known as the ethnography of speaking (Bauman & Sherzer, 1975; Hymes, 1986) as a 'clear intellectual antecedent of the ethnography of literacy approach [even though this] has not been an explicit influence in the New Literacy Studies more generally' (Baynham, 2004: 286). He goes on to argue that Hymes' focus on the communicative event, reframed in the ethnographic studies as the literacy event is, however, crucial in a reconsideration of the relationship between speech and writing as two interacting modalities' (2004: 286).

Tributary to the ethnography of speaking, work in linguistic ethnography and New Literacy Studies has never been removed from the concerns of discourse analysis (e.g., Gee, 1996; Blommaert, 2005). The obvious division of labour between discourse analysis and ethnography is that discourse analysts occupy themselves with the *products* of communication (spoken or written texts) and ethnographers with the process or *practice* of speaking (speech acts, encounters). Ethnographers of literacy then can be expected to deal with moments of speaking or writing, with literacy events and practices, while discourse analysts are more concerned with artefacts of communication, with literacy products, with the things we usually call texts. However, there are fruitful ways of blurring these distinctions, of analysing discourse ethnographically and of engaging with texts within a broader ethnographic project (Blommaert, 2008; Mbodj-Pouye, 2008). In this paper I attempt to offer such an 'ethnography of text' by analysing a literacy document I encountered during my fieldwork.

3 Context: L and his village

The text I analyse in this paper is a small booklet that was used and maintained by L, a young man who lives in a modern multi-ethnic village in southwest Gambia. I call his

village a modern village because people have lived there for only three to four generations and because it is built around the structures of the modern state, i.e. the village stretches out on each side of a T-junction that is formed by the main road on the south bank and a secondary road going to a riverine village further north. To the south there is only farmland and bush before the border with the Casamance region of southern Senegal. The east-west axis is an important orientation, as people face east when they pray and head west when they travel to the city.

The village is a multi-ethnic and multilingual village because no ethnic group forms an absolute majority here even though it is situated in historically Jola dominated area and 'owned' by Jolas, i.e. the *alkaloship* of the village is inherited by male descendants in the Jola lineage who founded the village.[3] Yet, Jola is not the most widely spoken language here. In an ethnolinguistic survey a colleague and I carried out among 248 villagers of all ages, including long-term guests, 33% responded to be Jola, 31.5% Mandinka, 17.5% Fula, 9% Manjago and 6.5% Wolof. Further, 10.5% of interviewees declared to be born out of an ethnically mixed marriage and 8.5% of married respondents reported to be married to someone from a different ethnic group. With regard to the language resources available to this rural population, there are the languages of these five and other ethnic groups, but also international languages such as English, French, Arabic and Portuguese Creole. The lingua franca in this village clearly is Mandinka, witness the 95% of respondents who declared to be speakers of Mandinka. Multilingualism is the rule here, however, as Jola and Wolof are also spoken by more than half of the questioned population (59 and 57% respectively), and Fula by over a third of the villagers (35%) (see Juffermans, 2006, chapter 4).

So far the wider sociolinguistic and sociocultural context of L's village that was acquainted in the process of several ethnographic fieldwork trips by observations, informal interviews and the survey considered above. In order for the analysis to be ethnographic, however, we need to move beyond this mere 'backgrounding of context' and consider 'three forgotten contexts' of the document under scrutiny: the material and communicative resources at L's disposal, the text trajectory or discursive history of the booklet, and the history of the discourse as *data* (Blommaert, 2005, chapter 3).

To start with the first context, L is a young man in his late twenties, is a Mandinka and a Muslim, has paternal family in Jarra further east but grew up with his mother in Foni. L did not attend English medium public schooling but Arabic medium *madrassah* instead, however for a few years only. L is described as a 'farmer' under profession on his ID card, but also works as baker (of *tapalapa* 'bread') when there is flour and when the oven in the village is not broken. In his leisure time, L likes to listen to *R&B*, *raggae* and *mbalax*[4] records. Each of these categories of identity – being of a particular age, being of a certain ethnicity, practicing a particular religion, having gone through a certain type of schooling, etc. – have consequences for L's *language repertoire*, which is the lapidary composition of linguistic and semiotic-communicative resources at his disposal. Verbally, L is very articulate and highly multilingual. Although it is difficult, not to say irrelevant, to assess L's language proficiency in such terms of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, it would seem that L is 'effectively

[3] *Alkalo* (pl. -lu) is a Mandinka term also used in other local languages and Gambian English, and can be translated as 'village chief' or 'mayor'.

[4] *Mbalax*: dance (or simply background) music with Wolof lyrics that is immensely popular in Senegal and Gambia, and made world-famous by the Senegalese musician Youssou N'Dour.

proficient' in, or in fact 'masters' several languages (Mandinka, Fula, Wolof) and can draw on resources from a variety of other languages in which he has a 'basic-level' or 'threshold' competence (Jola, English, Arabic) as well as from languages he would not recognise any proficiency in (Manjago, Portuguese Creole). The problem with the European Framework is its heavy reliance on literate proficiency and its assumption of multilingualism as multiple monolingualisms (see also Janssen-van Dieten, 2006). L's language repertoire consists of bits and pieces of all the languages in his immediate surroundings, and is a typical example of what Dyers (2008), following Blommaert *et al.* (2005: 199), calls 'truncated multilingualism': topic and domain specific competence in multiple language varieties. Although L is highly multilingual in speaking, interacting and listening, as a result of his short-lived educational career, he is low-literate in Arabic and practically illiterate in all other languages of his repertoire. L has acquired only the very basic bottom-up alphabetic decoding skills in Arabic that are necessary to recognise and copy Koranic verses and other religious formulae. Arabic is hardly the language of his literacy, rather just the script of his literacy.

Materially, L lives a poor and simple life. He occupies a room and parlour in his uncle's house which he shares with me when I am around. L has decorated his room with empty packs of the cigarettes he smokes, a poster of hiphop artists like 50 Cents, and pages from a UK magazine on the wall showing the marriage of Welsh rugby star, a reportage of celebrities with their mums, the Beckhams before David's transfer to Real Madrid, sexy film stars in tiny swimsuits, and more glitter and glamour. He further possesses two or three pieces of furniture, a box with clothes and a two deck radio cassette player powered by a car battery.

Figure 1: L's Nescafé telephone booklet, back and front cover

4 L's Nescafé telephone booklet

There are two approaches to analyse a chunk of discourse like L's Nescafé telephone booklet ethnographically. The first is to attend to form and content of textual detail, whereby the design as well as the use of the booklet should be analysed. A second approach is to observe, interrogate, and describe the use of the booklet in action (cf. Norris & Jones, 2005; Scollon & Scollon, 2007). The former allows us to reconstruct a part of the discursive history of the booklet (the second 'forgotten context', Blommaert, 2005) and the latter invites us to reflect on the textual material as data, as well as the relation between researcher and researched (the third ethnographic context). In this section, I first discuss the booklet's design and attempt to reconstruct its trajectory from the designer (Nescafé) to the user (L), I then attempt to reconstruct how the booklet was used by L (and his collaborators) on the basis of the existing entries, and I will finally offer some insights on how the booklet is (collaboratively) inscribed on the basis of observations in which I participated myself.

4.1 The booklet's design and trajectory

The booklet was a free gift with a family pack of Nescafé and was designed by Nescafé Senegal, witnessing the slogan in French *Goûte la vie côté café* 'Taste the coffee side of life' which still features on the Senegalese Nescafé website (www.nescafe senegal.com), and only there. Thus, the booklet has travelled from neighbouring Senegal to The Gambia, most likely together with the pack of Nescafé which was offered for whole-sale on the Gambian market in the urban centre in the west of the country. It was subsequently given to L by a friend, as he recalled. L left the booklet on the cupboard in his room when he went out to work, but often carried it with him when hanging around with friends in the afternoon and at night. He also took it with him on a recent trip to his relatives in Jarra.

When I inspected and photographed the booklet in July 2008, it had twenty pages and was in the same old, cracked and used condition as most other written material I had seen in this part of the world. The images on the cover pages were considerably bleached by the sun and faded by the many times moist hands had opened and folded it (see Figure 1). The images were still visible and showed a good-looking and well-dressed young urban couple talking on the telephone (front) and four equally fashionable young men and women in conversation while eating bread and drinking hot drinks from four different cups (back). These persons represent the urban elite youth lifestyle that I suspect L aspires to live himself, like many young men in his village. However, many of the activities pictured on the cover, like talking on the phone, eating bread and drinking Nescafé, are luxuries L has not been able to enjoy on a daily basis.

Besides these images, the front and back cover have the bold white NESCAFÉ logo with the final leg of the initial 'N' bending and reaching towards the *accent aigu* of the final 'É' printed vertically from bottom to top. On the bottom of the front page, there is the slogan *Goûte la vie côté café*, and on the top there is the genre indication *Répertoire Téléphonique* 'telephone index'. The verso sides of the front and back cover (pages 2 and 19 of the booklet as shown in the overview in Table 1) provide a calendar of 2003 with the names of the months and the first letter of the days of the week in French. January to June can be found on page 2, and July to December on page 19. The logical ordering of the booklet suggests a reading path from left to right, i.e. from page 1 to page 20 in

Table 1, although booklets like this are of course not meant to be read from cover to cover, but to store and retrieve information.

The inner pages of the booklet, which are made of a lighter material than the cover, are organised alphabetically following the Roman alphabet (from a, b, c to x, y, z) to enable storing and retrieving information. Some of the letters have been grouped together to win space, e.g. 'GH' and 'IJK'. Several letters in the alphabet are missing, however, which is an indication that entire pages have been torn out and thrown away or used for other purposes. It is thus possible to reconstruct that four double-sided pages have been removed, plausibly 'AB', 'EF', 'TUV', and 'WXYZ', bringing the original number of pages to 28. Further, also parts of pages 3/4 ('C') and 7/8 ('GH') were torn out. Every inner page of the booklet provides five entry points with four lines to fill in surname and first name, address, and three telephone numbers: a house line (DOM: *domicile*), an office line (BUR: *bureau*) and a mobile phone number (*GSM*) (see Figure 2).

In the alphabetical ordering and the lay-out of the pages in five four-line entries, the booklet's designers have provided several textual resources for users to organise their contacts in a structured way, but it is left to actual users to make use of these resources in the suggested way. This structuring and implicit directions for use assume a certain level of literacy and a particular personal profile from the booklet's users. The booklet is designed for people that are literate, for people that have friends with addresses and colleagues with an office, house *and* mobile telephone number.

Table 1: Overview of the booklet (columns represent pages; Xs represent entries)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
front	calendar	C	C	D	D	GH	GH	IJK	IJK	LM	LM	N	N	OPQ	OPQ	RS	RS	calendar	back
Répertoire **Téléphonique** **Goûte la vie côté café**	JANVIER – JUIN	X		X X X X X X			X X				X X X X	X X X X	X X X X X	X X X X X X	X X X X X	X X X X	X X X X	X X X	JUILLET – DECEMBRE	

NOM-PRENOM : _____

ADRESSE : _____

_____

TEL. DOM : _____ BUR : _____ GSM : _____

Figure 2: Designed entry space

In its design, the booklet is not meant in the first place for people like L. L's literacy skills are below the level that is needed to handle this booklet. L also lives in an environment where people do not have two-line addresses[5] and it is unlikely that L knows many persons with anything else than a mobile telephone number. Inevitably, L uses the booklet in an alternative, appropriated way.

4.2 The booklet as used by L

In terms of the Common European Framework, L's demonstrated proficiency in writing is below the A1-level (in any language). As he lacks these basic skills, L has to resort to his friends and other members of his community to help him keep this telephone booklet. The point of this paper is that illiterate or low-literate people like L can still do literate things when they make use of human resources in their community. The booklet reflects a trajectory of collaboratively established entries. There is no consistent use of colour (alternately blue, black, grey, green), nor of writing materials (sometimes pen, sometimes pencil, sometimes fibre-tip) or handwriting styles (different letter sizes, different styles of writing between the lines). On the 16 pages and 41 entries, approximately 13 different handwritings can be distinguished, which indicates that many different persons on different occasions were involved in filling out L's booklet. Nonetheless, I would like to argue that L remains in charge as the main user of the book, and that there are traces of his own personal history of learning in the way the booklet was inscribed.

L ignores the alphabetical order possibilities and presents the book to his helpers from right to left, thus opening page 18 first, thereby following an Arabographic logic. Pages 18 to 13 are filled out most systematically, with isolated entries on pages 8, 5 and 3 (see Table 1). In general, pages have been filled out from top to bottom, which is a convention that is shared by both Roman and Arabic script traditions. Except for one or two, all entries (both names and numbers) appear in Roman script. On page 5 ('D'), there is an entry that is entered upside down as well as a name without phone number in Arabic (عاشة كمر, *ajami* for perhaps Isatou Camara). Also on page 5, the beginning of a name has been struck through, and on page 13 ('N'), an entire entry has been crossed out, to be replaced by the same name with a different number a few lines below. Largely beyond L's control are the use of the lines and the suggested organisation of personal details. There are no addresses in the entire booklet. Also the suggestion to enter names with the surname first (*nom-prénom*) has been ignored. Of the 32 names, 28 are first names conventionally followed with a surname; the remaining four are first names only or initials. Of the 48 entered telephone numbers, 47 are mobile numbers, recognisable by the first digit (6, 7 or 9). The phone numbers are not entered on the positions where they are designed to be entered, i.e. on every fourth line between 'TEL. DOM :', 'BUR :' and 'GSM :'. In contrary, this line is generally avoided as the 'BUR :' and 'GSM :' are indeed awkward obstacles standing in the way of a blank line.

[5] In rural Gambia, like many other parts of Africa, streets are unnamed and houses unnumbered and there is no postal code system. When used at all, mailing addresses are often given under care of (c/o) a nearby institution or an urban relative with a post office box.

4.3 The booklet's use observed

When I showed interest in L's booklet and asked him if I could photograph the pages with my digital camera, L laughed as he usually did when I asked weird questions on the most banal things of his sociolinguistic life, but kindly gave me the booklet, and waited until I was done inspecting it. Then he asked me if I could enter my number in his book. I replied asking him whether he would be able to do that himself and handed the booklet back to him. I dictated my number to him, 6222606 (first in Mandinka, then in English), which he wrote down in a shaky, unstable handwriting, from right to left and with the twos in mirror-image (line 2 in Figure 3). He was all but done when his younger sister,[6] Jaineba, interrupted him laughingly and took over. L also laughed, uncomfortably as I interpreted it, while Jaineba asked me to repeat my number. 'Six triple two,' I said, which she entered (from left to right) as 633. She soon realised she had written *double-three* instead of *triple-two*, and started over, writing my name first.[7] She then wrote the correct number in the double space between the fourth line of the third entry and the first line of the fourth entry. When she was done, she was pleased with the result and gave the book back to me. I looked at it, and turned to L again. I reminded him about telling me that he had attended *madrassah* and knew some Arabic, and I asked him if he would be able to write my name and phone number in Arabic. He took the booklet and pencil out of my hands again and started copying the digits I dictated to him one by one (in English). He did so in (Eastern) Arabic numerals, from right to left: ٦٥٦٢٢٢٦ (line 6 in Figure 3). Under that, he wrote my name complete with diacritics and vowel markers: كُيو ميلصهُ (line 7 in Figure 3).

Both the phone number and the name as written by L are fairly problematic. Arabic numerals, when they are used to transcribe telephone numbers, are usually written from left to right and not from right to left. This is a convention L is not aware of. The sixes are written in mirror-image with the horizontal stroke of ٦ placed to the right of the vertical stroke instead to the left of it (visible in Figure 3, not in the transcription above). Further, the zero is indicated with a circular form (٥) like in Roman numerals (0) instead of with a floating dot (٠); the form L has used for zero (٥) is confusingly the character for the number five in Arabic. A proficient reader of Arabic may thus not be able to dial my telephone number on the basis of L's inscription. But that is not the point here. What matters is that even though his proficiency in Arabic is far from flawless (less than A1 in the Common European Framework), L demonstrates, on my request, elementary independent literacy skills in Arabic that are (almost) good enough to enter names and numbers in a personal record. Yet, for whatever reason (insecurity?), he does not put these skills into practice. Instead, he ignores these skills, self-declares to be illiterate and prefers to be helped by friends and (younger) family members with more advanced literacy skills, preferably in English. L's booklet should thus be seen as a collaborative text product that is mediated by a network of diverse users of literacy, and a social regime of language that favours English and Arabic as languages of literacy and disqualifies local languages for literate activity.

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[6] In Western kinship terms, Jaineba would be L's cousin.

[7] Malang Sonko is my 'Gambian name.' It is customary in this part of the world to give local names to long-staying or returning strangers, including ethnographers. Many persons in L's village only know me as Malang and not by my exotic European name.

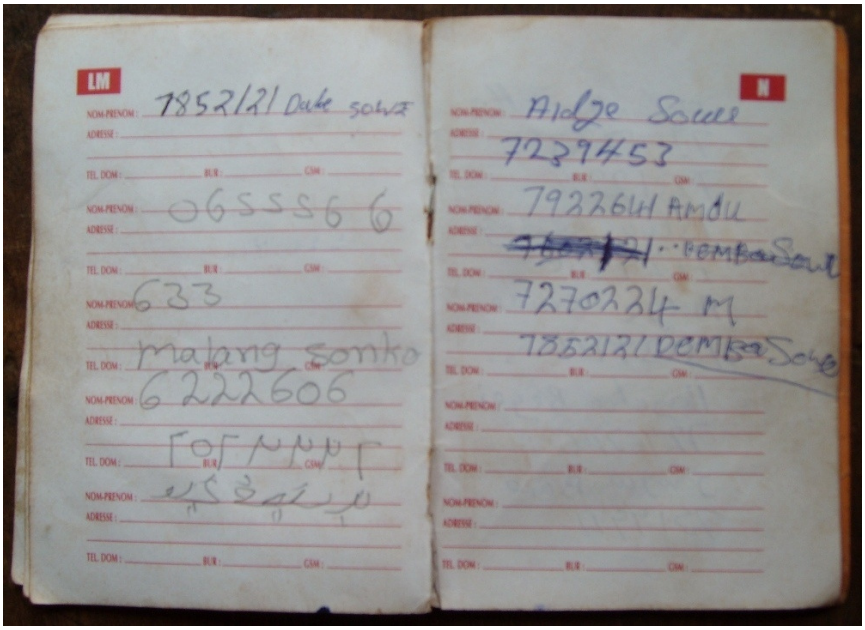

Figure 3: L's Nescafé telephone booklet, pages 12 and 13: entering my number (left)

5 Collaborative grassroots literacy

In conclusion, I would like to draw a few provisional generalisations on the nature of literacy in rural Gambia on the basis of the observations in L's telephone booklet. The first remark concerns the hetero-graphic nature of writing, and the second is concerned with the collaborative construction of literacy.

L's Nescafé telephone booklet is a typical document of 'grassroots literacy', i.e. a form of 'writing performed by people who are not fully inserted into elite economies of information, language and literacy' (Blommaert, 2008: 7). Many of the characteristics Blommaert describes as features of grassroots literacy (non-standardness, draftliness, distant genres, rootedness in orality, etc.) are also pertinent here. I want to elaborate on one characteristic here, i.e. the hetero-normativity of orthographic conventions. The 'text' reflects several orthographic traditions, i.e. more or less powerful conventions prescribing how to *write right*. On a macro scale, the text manifests itself as a contact point between two of the most important script traditions in this part of the world, Anglo-Franco and Arabic-Koranic text traditions. All but two of the entries are in Roman script but the book as a whole follows an Arabic from-right-to-left reading path. On a smaller scale, the first names and surnames in the book follow Anglo-Gambian and not Franco-Senegalese or a vernacular spelling, e.g. it reads *Jobe*, *Colley*, *Bah* instead of *Diop*, *Coly*, *Bâ* (Franco-Senegalese), and *Fatou* instead of *Faatu* (vernacular). In Anglo-Gambian spelling, surnames of local people, composed with the

syllabic regularity of local languages, are interpreted through the lens of twentieth-century English orthographic rules, and likewise for borrowed Koranic (originally Arabic, but vernacularised) first names (e.g., *Ebrima*). What seems to be the case here is not an absence of standards – there are indeed double, imported, standards operating at the same time – but the absence of a locally developed uniform monographic standard. Instead, literacy as practiced and produced by L, is heterographic (Blommaert, 2008).

L is a very low-literate young man living in a local economy of literacy that is characterised by the co-existence of Arabic and Anglo-Franco orthographies as well as by scarcity of all sorts of literacy resources, including literate expertise itself. L has enjoyed a very transient educational career, the results of which have given him only a very thin basis to deal with the bureaucratic requirements of the modern nation-state. As far as filling in forms, written correspondence and other more demanding literacy events are concerned, L is pretty much functionally illiterate when literacy is regarded as 'a complex set of skills defined in terms of the print demands of occupational, civic, community and personal needs' (Verhoeven, 1997: 128). Given the material and educational constraints in rural Gambia, a commercial free gift like L's thin Nescafé telephone booklet, becomes a valuable object. Entering the numbers of his friends and relatives in a private booklet empowers L in the sense that the booklet enables him to manipulate his own social network at times that are important to him. Yet, L apparently feels not capable of entering the names and numbers in his booklet independently. To compensate for his own low-proficient writing skills, L appeals to people in his environment to produce the entries in his booklet (Kalman, 2001). With the help of these different persons at various situations, it becomes possible for L to do literate things in his life, and in fact to 'be literate' in a very restricted sense of the word.

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THE ORAL AND WRITTEN INTERFACE IN SMS: TECHNOLOGICALLY MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IN KENYA

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1 Introduction

The focus of this paper is on the effect of language on literacy in the wake of new technological communication media like the mobile phone and SMS. We show how both oral and written language functioned in the early community followed by the sudden transition into the technological communication age. We then illustrate how the SMS as a type of new technological communication has brought with it a different form of language use, which breaks away from the norm or standard language as we know it and has led to a form of new orthography. We exemplify this by focusing on one SMS practice that we refer to as pronounceable spelling (words written in the way they would be pronounced) and investigate whether this orthography is influenced by the syllabic make-up, and the orthography used to write Swahili.

The data used is in form of SMS messages from university students in Kenya, a country in East Africa with over 42 vernaculars, Swahili as a lingua franca and English as a second language. This group represents the youth in society and it is deemed that their SMS language use is representative of other youth from multilingual backgrounds with English as a second language.

2 Oral and written language in Kenya

Oral language has been multifunctional in the Kenyan tradition just like in many other African countries. It was used both in formal contexts like in courts, trade and in informal contexts like in private conversations. Apart from face to face communication, it was also used for long distance communication with the help of a messenger. The only variation in its use was in the level of the formality of the language to suit the occasion. The benefits of oral communication included its spontaneity, speed, affordability and its freedom to be accompanied by gestures and other paralinguistic features.

In 1962, Sigmund Freud described writing simplistically as 'the voice of an absent person.' It is notable that some African communities were aware of the value of the written word and possessed established writing systems in the early 19th century, for example the Vai script in Liberia, or the Ge'ez in Ethiopia and Eritrea. However in Kenya, the written language gained a lot of popularity with the introduction of formal education by the British missionaries and the colonial government.

Initially, the written language was mainly used for formal communication. Its main advantages included its ability for preservation and documentation for later retrieval. It was propelled by literacy which came with challenges, for example, the fact that reading and writing went hand in hand and one required the knowledge of both in order to use one. An additional challenge was that the preferred language of literacy was English; therefore writing involved the knowledge of another language. These challenges made writing to be a preserve of the few elite. After Kenya's independence, the postcolonial government continued with the task of enhancing literacy levels in all parts of the country and writing soon came to be associated with intellectualism. It was a sign of status.

Writing became more popularized as more young people enrolled into schools for formal education. It broadened its scope to incorporate informal uses like interpersonal communication for example in letter writing between friends and family. Letter writing was useful in long distance communication. Even illiterate people realized this and would call on their literate counterparts to help write the letter while they dictated the content. Soon the users experienced the disadvantages of letter writing. It was an expensive medium requiring a paper, pen, envelope and postage stamps. Although hand delivery letters could exclude the envelope and postage stamps, they lacked privacy. The postal letters needed the envelope and stamps and had to pass through a slow and unreliable postage system and in many cases they never got to their intended destination.

With this background, it is not surprising that when the mobile phone emerged, it was received wholeheartedly by the masses. It was viewed as a medium that could not only combine both oral and written communication, but could also bridge long distances in a very short time. We will now focus on the SMS that is the written form of communication for the mobile phone users.

3 SMS / text message

SMS is an abbreviation of Short Message Service. It is also commonly referred to as text message. It is a service that enables the transmission of typed text messages from one mobile phone to another.

The SMS came to use shortly after the appearance of cell phones. As soon as the mobile phone handsets, network subscriptions and recharging cards became available and affordable in the early 2000s, the SMS immediately became the most widespread communication method. It particularly became very popular among mobile phone users because of its affordability and reliability. For example, the mobile phone networks made it in such a way that an SMS is cheaper than a voice call thus more cost effective, and faster than a letter. In addition, it was very reliable such that if one sends an SMS, it is transmitted and displayed on the screen of the receiver's phone. The receiver is alerted of the incoming SMS by a beep or ring tone from the phone. In case the receiver is not in range or if the phone is switched off, then the SMS will keep pending for a number of days until the phone gets back into the network range or until it is switched on. Some networks allow the sender to be notified when the SMS has been received. In cases of failed transmission perhaps due to a non-existent recipient's number or insufficient credit or airtime on the sender's phone, then the sender is

notified that the SMS transmission failed.

The SMS offers many advantages:

- it is cheaper than the voice call,
- it is less intrusive, i.e. nobody hears you sending the message nor can one decipher what the incoming message is all about,
- it enables direct conveyance of the message without interruption from the recipient,
- it can be saved for future reference unlike the spontaneous spoken word,
- it offers a choice e.g. to reply, forward, or delete them.

The main disadvantages of text messages are that they can be cumbersome to type, are only accessible to literate people, and one has to abide by the limitation which will be described in the next section.

4 SMS and written language

According to Bodomo (2009) new communication technologies do not only generate new forms and uses of language, but also new forms of literacy which are associated with the introduction and uses of new technologies. This holds true for SMS communication.

A major element of SMS communication is its limitation of 160 characters per message. Although this limitation has been removed in some networks, its effects are still strong. It has hugely affected the written language with the need for messages to be compacted to fit in this limit while still managing to communicate effectively. One therefore has to think clearly on how to best phrase the message in order to put the point across with the fewest possible number of words so as not to exceed the word limit (Döring 2002; Hård af Segerstad 2002; Ling 2005).

This need has led to creativity in the use of multilingualism and other methods like word shortening, abbreviation, use of numerals, graphones (see next section), and single pronounceable letters in order to stay within the character limit. This creativity is popular amongst the youth users. Thurlow & Mckay (2003) aptly put it that certainly, new communication technologies can empower young people and many do indeed explore and develop imaginative ways of making the technology work best for them.

The creativity makes SMS language to be a kind of independent written register that does not necessarily use the conventions of the written language as we know it. SMS language is used in a very free way just like speech between very close friends.

It has been labeled as Internet slang, webslang, chattisch, netspeak, netlingua, digital English, textese and so on (Thurlow 2007). This has made it liable to strong dismissal by many like Crystal (2001) who wrote off SMS language as simply giving young people something to do. It was followed by Sutherland's (2008) critique that,

> As a dialect, text ('textese'?) is thin and – compared, say, with Californian personalized license plates – unimaginative. It is bleak, bald, sad shorthand. Drab shrinktalk. In fact linguistically it's all pig's ear and best described as penmanship for illiterates.

The supposition that youth SMS language is a threat to standard writing has come

to evoke a range of projected fears among literate adults and language education practitioners. An eye-opener to this is the report by Australia's ABC radio that Australian educators in Victoria are stirring up a bit of a storm by teaching SMS text messaging as part of a language arts curriculum to high school students (Donovan, 2006). The students practice writing in the short message format that is common in text messaging and putting together their own glossaries of texting abbreviations. They also compare the language and syntax of text messaging with that of formal, written English. It is therefore necessary to carry out more research on this issue in order to be able to come up with an amicable counteraction if indeed this threat is true.

At this juncture, we would like to present the findings of a study on graphones which is one of the creativity features of SMS that could influence writing in English among learners. The data indicating the graphones is derived from a data set of a more extensive research investigating the manifestation of language in technologically mediated communication in Kenya. In the current paper, we have used the SMS data that shows the utilisation of graphones to communicate.

5 Graphones

This study defines the term graphone as a feature of SMS language in which words are written the way they are pronounced (spoken like writing). This comes from the words 'graphic' (written representation) and phone (speech sound). Graphone writing in Kenya seems to be closely influenced by Swahili.

As already pointed out, the average Kenyan possesses at least three languages, namely a vernacular, Swahili and English. The vernacular is mainly used locally at the domestic level, while Swahili is the national lingua franca and English is mainly used for formal communication and also amongst the elite. Owing to various reasons like illiteracy, urbanization, intermarriages etc., it is now becoming common for people to possess, a combination of a vernacular and Swahili or Swahili and English. The youth also use a form of slang referred to as Sheng.

Swahili orthography stays very close to pronunciation. Swahili phonology is characterised by a CV syllable structure. It has a five vowel system [a], [ɛ], [i], [ɔ] and [u] represented as *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*.

Our data corpus revealed the use of graphones in English messages where the words were not written with their original spelling but rather in the way that they would be pronounced. In extreme cases, the receiver is forced to pronounce the graphones loudly in order to understand the intended word and meaning.

This feature seems to be integrated into English messages because of the syllabic nature of the Swahili language and its orthography that enables lexemes to be read and pronounced in the way that they are written.

Below are some examples of the different types of graphones from the data set. Both the graphones in the original SMS and their translations are highlighted. The message is followed by a translation into the conventional writing. Note that some messages have used both Swahili and English words. The general English 'translation' is given below the examples.

(1) *I kof @ ua thot, sniz @ ua smel n cry wen u smyl @ me coz u r 2 much 4 me*
'I cough at your thought, sneeze at your smell, and cry when you smile at me because you are too much for me.'

In example (1), besides the pronounceable graphones, the writer has incorporated the symbol <@> for 'at' and the use of single pronounceable letters, e.g. <n> for 'and', <u> for 'you' and <r> for 'are'. Further, numbers have been used in place of words that share their pronunciation, e.g. <2> for 'to' or 'too' and <4> for 'for'.

(2) *M orait niko ofisi tu. iv oredi gt enuf jobo!!*
'I'm alright and just in the office. I've already got enough jobs.'

In example (2), it is notable that 'al' in 'alright' has been changed into its pronounced form [o] in both 'alright' and 'already'. However, <enuf> takes on a different trend whereby we expect it to be <inaf> but it looks as if the writer in this case decided to keep some of the original letters in the word.

(3) *Send the rekodz ova pls*
'Send the records over please.'

In example (3), the word records has been written in the way it is pronounced. Interestingly, the word <ova> has been used in place of 'over' although it is an English word with its own independent meaning.

(4) *R u kamin 4 de recoln kesho? Op 2 c u*
'Are you coming for the recollection tomorrow? Hope to see you.'

In example (4), the word coming is spelled with a k. The final g is also deleted since the writer considers them as not pronounced and hence omissible. Similarly, h and e have been left out in hope.

(5) *jus wishn u a qt dey*
'Just wishing you a quiet day.'

Example (5), has shortened all its words and then written out the word day based on its pronunciation. Also, the message begins with a small letter, a practice that is against the norm language writing.

(6) *Heeey!!! Wats with the silence? a thot we r frenz?? Beat it gal….*
'Hey! What is with the silence? I thought we are friends? Beat it girl.'

In example (6) all the words written out as graphones are shorter than when using conventional spelling. As explained earlier, this helps to fit the message within the character limitation. Notably, the word thought has been spelled as it is pronounced without the use of ugh which is silent in the pronunciation of the word.

Another graphone strategy that we discovered which involves graphones is the substitution of [ai] diphthong with <y> as shown in example (7).

(7) *stay a little wyl longer.he myt change wit tym*

'Stay a little while longer. He might change with time.'

Others examples include,

(8) *airtym*
'airtime'

(9) *lyf*
'life'

(10) *gyz*
'guys'

(11) *tryd*
'tried'

(12) *nyc*
'nice'

(13) *tym*
'time'

(14) *gudnyt*
'goodnight'

(15) *wyz*
'wise'

In addition to using graphones, people also use letters that represent the standard pronunciation of the letter as a single letter, which we have already seen in <u> for 'you' and which is also the mechanism of using <y> for the diphthong [ai] above. Another example is (5).

(16) *thanx*
'thanks'

In example *(16)*, <x> is used to incorporate the [k] and [s] sounds in the word *thanks*.

(17) *hes faced sm bad xpriens*
'He's faced some bad experience.'

In example (17), the contraction 'he's' is written without the hyphen. The word 'some' is abbreviated to <sm>. In 'experience', the initial part 'expe' is written as <xp> using the mechanism of pronouncing as single letter symbols, and the final part the <s> is a graphone again.

6 Expressing stress and emotional impact by letter repetition

In an attempt to find some more patterns, we noticed that other mechanisms were used to achieve speech-like qualities for example stress and tone in order to achieve the intended impact similar to oral speech. This is not necessarily a case of writing in a phonetic way but rather in the standard way but contained letter/word repetition to achieve tone and stress. Vowels, consonants and even in some cases words, and punctuation marks are repeated in messages in order to achieve emphasis and verbal impact just like in actual speech. For example in message (16), the word <Heeey> has been used instead of 'hey' to achieve stress.

We begin by giving examples, which use vowel repetition and then move on to consonants.

(18) *niceeeeeeeee videoooooooooooo.....*
'nice video'

(19) *had soooooooooooo much fun*
'had so much fun'

(20) *wooooooooooooow*
'wow!'

(21) *whaaaaaaaaat?????*
'what?'

(22) *byeeee*
'bye'

The following examples display the repetition of consonants in order to achieve stress like in actual speech.

(23) *fffffffffyyyn*
'fine'

(24) *it's verrrrryyyyyy good!!!!!*
'It's very good!'

The data also revealed other instances of non-standard orthography related to representation of the oral reality which is to capture actions like in examples (25) and (26).

(25) *mwahhhhhhhhhhh*
(kiss)

(26) *hahahhahahaha*
(laughter)

7 Conclusion

The revolution of mobile phone in Kenya (and the rest of Africa) has brought new dimensions to writing and its function in society. The new dimensions are not only due to the space restrictions in SMS messaging, but also to its informal feel and international practices. Owing to this, deviations from the standard orthography are common. The use of graphones is the deviation that has been discussed in this paper.

The paper has shown how SMS users write messages similar to their verbatim pronunciation and speech production. In fact in view of this, a new orthography is emerging much more based on orality because of the combination of oral and written communication in the mobile phone. In the Kenyan context the impact of this can prove to be huge because for a sizeable number of people, texting is the most common writing experience because it is cheaper than a voice call and can be stored for later access even if the phone is switched off or if the receiver is out of the network reach. Some users find texting as a more private way of communication in addition to the flexibility it offers such that one can choose to store the message for future reference or delete it. All these advantages have popularised the use of SMS and this use is in turn leading to the widespread use and acceptance of the orthographic deviations.

8 Recommendations

SMS language is here with us. Its current popularity notwithstanding, it is obvious that users are trying to find daily, practical uses for it. Nadler-Nir (2008) sums this up in his claim that 'SMS is here to stay – and grow – it is a dormant giant which affords us an opportunity to expand our ability to communicate and transact.' We therefore need to accept it and seek for solutions to the complaints that it is invading the standard written language use.

As a first step in averting this threat, SMS needs to be confined to its own communication context. It is then advisable to show its differences from the standard language to the young people affected the most. This can be done right in schools where the major complaints are raised. Students can then be made aware of the differences between standard language and SMS language. Such actions would go a long way in resolving the issue.

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