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Using the Reading Lab for Foreign Students

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Using the Reading Lab for Foreign Students

"Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International
Training, Brattleboro, Vermont."

Sheila Rich
July/ 1973



This report by Sheila Rich is accepted in its present form.

Date Feb 27, 1973 Principal Advisor Richard C. Clark
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Preface

The new Canadian Students at the junior college where I am teaching, must participate in a full time course load during the school year. Thus they are expected to take such courses as Humanities, Social Sciences etc. along with their Canadian English speaking peers. My job is to teach a remedial English course so that they might integrate into these courses and not find them too difficult.

In a regular T.E.S.L. class students should have the opportunity to practice all the language activities-speaking, listening, reading, writing; however the summer course I taught took place twice a week, three hours each time for a period of only seven weeks. Therefore, since time was so limited, I realized I would have to have priorities. On the first day of class, I discovered that most of the students had taken a T.E.S.L. course in the winter, either with me or another teacher.(there are three levels offered-beginners, intermediate, advanced). We decided to place the most emphasis on the reading and writing skills as they were most urgently required for the coming school year. Speaking and listening would take less precedence than usual and would be taught incidentally, in relationship to the other two skills.

Although the summer T.E.S.L. course is not usually streamed, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the class was more or less homogeneous. According to their records they ranged from low to high intermediate. Table 1 shows a list of the students, their backgrounds and the amount of exposure to English they had had. Although I didn't use this as a main criteria for choosing materials or methods, my past experience with foreign students and some knowledge of their backgrounds certainly helped. For example usually my oriental students have a strong foundation in grammar; my Greek students generally verbalize very well.

Crisis and Discovery

For the first two lessons I devoted much time to oral work-dramatizations, theatre techniques, etc., as well as reading comprehension passages and composition. I decided at this point that the best texts to use would be Intermediate Comprehension Passages by Donn Byrne, and Spencer's Guided Composition Exercises. These two books seemed most appropriate for our goals which were reading and writing.

Whereas normally it took only a few days for books published by Longman to arrive, I was informed by the bookstore that this time it would take at least four weeks. While I was having sections of my own copies printed up for each student, I discovered the Learning Center and its director Mr. Philip Heilig. This is a place in our school where English speaking students can get help with any reading problem they might have. Speed Reading courses are also offered. From Mr. Heilig I learned that there were many books, not designed with T.E.S.L. students in mind, that would be useful to each student in my class since they ranged in level from grade one right through college. This room became our class home for the remainder of the course.

Choosing Materials

The main problem was finding a suitable book for each student. Our method was not scientific in any way but based on years of experience and intuition. We each took a group and using a system of trial and error, we had the students do various exercises. We chose books that were challenging, but where the students would succeed. If too many errors were made at a higher level, we used a lower level. After about an hour and a half, we had each student working at the level in which he was most comfortable. For some degree of uniformity and so that I could keep track of each student, we had no more than three main programs going on. I realize that testing might have been a more sophisticated way of choosing materials, but somehow the tests seemed very inappropriate. They were designed for native speakers, making them not quite a propos for my students.

Table 1

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Country of Birth</u>	<u>How long in Canada</u>	<u>How much English</u>
Siu Wah	21	China	1½ years	6½ years
Eva	19	Mexico	6 weeks	2 years
George	23	Greece	8 months	1 year
King Chiu	20	China	7 months	5 years
Andy	21	China	3 years	5 years
King Hong	21	China	6½ months	5 years
Sun Lee	21	Korea	10 months	6 years
Susan	19	Greece	11 months	10 months
Cathy	19	Greece	1½ years	1 year
Nicolas	19	Greece	2 years	2 years
Angela	20	Greece	2 years	2 years
Mohammed	27	Iran	2 years	6 years
Lise	20	Canada		7 years
Majed	• 19	Jordan	4 years	6 years

On the next few pages are the names and descriptions of the various materials from the Learning Center that were used by my class.

88 Passages

Originally intended for reading instruction at the 6th through 9th grade levels, it has been used in the junior colleges to develop in the student an understanding of the structure of the paragraph as a method for developing better reading comprehension.

88 Passages develops 6 distinct reading skills

- 1) Reading to determine subject matter
- 2) Reading to grasp main ideas
- 3) Reading to identify relevant details
- 4) Reading to see the author's purpose
- 5) Reading to draw significant conclusions
- 6) Reading to understand the meaning of words in context

Once the student learns these skills, he has a good comprehension of the passage. His reading becomes more purposeful and less passive. The authors of 88 Passages believe that one of the best ways to teach reading is to teach students a sense of structure. Once the student sees the structure of a communication he is in a good position to comprehend it clearly. The six skills listed above are the basic elements. These basic elements are woven into an overall pattern referred to as structure. 88 Passages break down into these patterns-

Persuasive Pattern 25

Informational 58

Narrative 5

Materials which comprise 88 Passages

- a) Reader- contains 88 primarily non-fiction passages, ranging in difficulty from 'easy' at the 6th grade level to 'difficult' at the 16th grade level. Over 65% of the material falls into the 6th to 10th grade levels.
- b) Question Book - contains questions on each passage which test comprehension skills.
- c) The student uses the above two books- all this material is found in the

Teacher's Manual.

Teaching Procedure used for 88 Passages

First I asked the students in the group to read the Passage for the main thought. Before assigning passages I surveyed the vocabulary and quizzed words that might give trouble.

When they had found the main thought, I tried to get them to formulate it as precisely as they could. In discussing the main thought they had to express the details which supported it. I then had students answer the questions. When I was working with another group, the entire group compared answers. At the back of the teacher's Manual is a Readability Study which tells how many words each passage contains, the average sentence length, the number of one syllable words, the reading ease index and the grade level of each passage. Therefore with the help of the manual, I did not have too much difficulty choosing passages.

The Macmillan Reading Spectrum

A complex of instructional materials, these books are designed to help individualize reading instruction in the intermediate grades. The goal of the Vocabulary Development booklets is to persuade the pupil that there is far more in words than he had supposed and awakens in him an active consciousness about words. For example book 111 is divided into-Synonyms and Meanings

Context clues to meaning

Defenitions

Precision in language

Word Formation

Finding word meaning from
word parts

The goal of the Reading Comprehension booklets is to improve the students ability to comprehend and enjoy what he reads.

In the Word Analysis booklets, the pupil is made aware of letter sound relationships and becomes interested in letter- sound phenomena. He is led to make a proper response to letters and letter combinations as they appear in words, and learns how to work out the recognition of unfamiliar words in an orderly, systematic way.

The Macmillan Reading Spectrum is comprised of six levels represented by six different colours.

Teaching Procedure: Because each student was working at his own pace, on his own level, I worked individually with each one.

The Macmillan Reading Spectrum, The Macmillan Company, New York (Collier - Macmillan, Canada, Ltd. Toronto, Ontario, 1964)

Extra Activities

The EDL Word Clues¹ Each of the thirty lessons in the book starts with the beginning of a story. The student then must complete ten frames and master ten words. This book helps the student learn to use context clues in unlocking words - which is a most helpful reading skill. Self tests and answers are at the end.

The EDL Word Clues book was used primarily by King Hong and Siu Wah. Although the lowest level we had available was book J, and I thought it might be a bit difficult, they enjoyed the challenge and I think preferred it to 88 Passages.

S.R.A. Spelling Lab², Edition 111a: this is a multilevel, developmental spelling improvement program. It is designed for use in the seventh grade, but contains words and spelling skills needed by eighth and ninth grade students as well. The student work in the Spelling Lab is completely individualized. The objective of the Spelling Lab is not only to teach the spelling of words, but also to teach principles that will aid the student in spelling many other words.

The S.R.A. Senior RFU Reading for Understanding Box³ consists of 4000 reading exercises for use in high schools, both junior and senior. These exercises are designed to help the student develop the ability to grasp or comprehend what he reads. This kit was used by everyone in his or her spare time.

¹Taylor, Frackenpohl, McDonald, Joline, EDL Word Clues (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961)

²Parker and Walker, Teacher's Handbook Spelling Laboratory 111a, (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1960)

³Thurstone, Thelma, Teacher's Handbook Senior Reading for Understanding, (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1965)

The following few pages list the division of groups and how they were divided according to the materials.

Group one	Main Program	Extra Activities
Group one	<u>The Macmillan Reading Spectrum</u>	S.R.A., Spelling Box
Sun Lee	<u>Vocabulary Development-Orange, level 2</u> <u>Reading Comprehension-Red, level one</u> <u>Word Analysis - level 3</u>	
King Chiu	<u>Reading Comprehension-orange level 2</u> <u>Vocabulary Development level 3</u>	
Susan	<u>Vocabulary Development- green level 5</u> <u>Reading Comprehension-green</u>	

This was the least advanced group. Although Susan would have been fine in the next group, she had used these materials before on a lower level, and was most anxious to finish them. She also served as a most helpful guide to the other two, when I was with another group. Because they each had a different language background the conversation was always in English. This was more of a problem in my other group. Except for Sun Lee, these books were not allowed to be taken home. I checked her homework ten minutes before class started, made sure she understood everything, and if she did, assigned the next lesson. After each exercise she rotated books, so she had little time for extra activities. King Chiu was always anxious to finish an exercise because he loved the S.R.A. Box. He would never hesitate to ask if he didn't understand something, so he worked mostly on his own with the occasional pat on the back and checking up from me.

Group	Program	Extra Activities
Group 2	<u>88 Passages</u> (first half)	S.R.A. Spelling Box Reading for Understanding Box
Eva		
George		
Andy		
Cathy		
Nicolas		
Mohammed		
Lise		
Majed		

This group was encouraged to consult each other about various possible answers and worked very well together. I was always sure to keep an ear open to make sure that George, Cathy and Nicolas weren't lapsing into Greek. They usually worked on the same passage at the same time although occasionally one or two would forge ahead. They had this alternative if they preferred not doing the extra activities. After each passage the answers were available and I checked vocabulary and comprehension as much as possible. Occasionally we did one together and I was able to make sure that everyone understood what was required and that the level was appropriate.

Group 3	Program	Extra Activities
Siu Wah	<u>88 Passages</u> (second half)	S.R.A. college reading
King Hong		comprehension kit.
Angela		E.D.L. Word Clues

This group worked quite individually. They were encouraged to work on any one of the above activities without having to do a passage. Because there were only three, I was able to keep track of what each one was doing. Although Time magazine and newspaper articles would have been perfect for this group, I decided that since time was so limited, they could use the extra structure provided by these materials.

Homework

Because we met only twice a week, homework was a necessary part of the program. Except for those used by Sun Lee, the books were not to be removed from the Learning Center, so I printed exercises from Reading Comprehension Passages and assigned at least one a week. These we corrected together and no. 8 of each exercise provided us with our grammar lessons. Sometimes we would do no. 7 on the blackboard. (See next page) This composition exercise was especially valuable in allowing me to see what type of problems each student was having, whether it was tense, punctuation, comprehension, etc. The book consists of three sections: Reading Comprehension- which I assigned for homework, Recall Exercises- which consist of extracts from Section one but with certain structural features omitted. The student would have to insert the proper tense, the correct articles, prepositions, or linking words. These I did in class. The third section- Aural Comprehension Passages, I would read in class at the recommended point indicated at the end of the passage. These usually related to two or three passages in Section one and were followed by twelve dictation passages which were also related to the passages in section one. Both these sections helped reinforce what had been done for homework and what had been learned. The page following is one of the reading comprehension passages they did at home.

For homework assignments and classwork I also worked with them on Section three of Spencer's Guided Composition Exercises. This section, entitled "From Guided to Free Composition," provided practice in relatively free composition.

II

Mrs Brown was tired after her day's shopping in London, so she went into a restaurant for a cup of tea before catching the train home. When she had ordered her tea, she suddenly remembered that she had to buy some medicine for her husband, who had a cough.

"Is there a chemist's near here?" she asked the waiter. "Yes, madam," the waiter said, "it's only about three minutes' walk away. Turn right when you go out of the restaurant, then take the second turning to the left. You'll find a big chemist's about five, but if you hurry, you'll just get there in time."

Mrs Brown followed the waiter's directions carefully and found the chemist's shop without any difficulty. She bought the cough mixture and started to make her way back to the restaurant. But after she had walked for about ten minutes and there was still no sign of the restaurant, she realised that she must have made a mistake.

"Oh! I am stupid!" said Mrs Brown. "I've left all my shopping in the restaurant and now I'm lost."

She was still wondering what to do when a policeman came up and asked if he could help. Mrs Brown explained what had happened.

"Well, first of all," said the policeman, "we had better go back as far as the chemist's."

"Now," suggested the policeman, "when they got to the chemist's, let's go in this direction. It leads to the main road, where we shall probably find your restaurant."

When they reached the main road, the policeman said: "I think you'll find the restaurant you are looking for along there, on the opposite side of the road."

Mrs Brown thanked the policeman for his help.

"I can't understand how I went wrong," she said.

The policeman smiled.

"It's quite easy," he said, "to get lost in a big city like London."

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1 Choose the best answer.

- a Mrs Brown called herself stupid because
 (i) she had walked for ten minutes before she realised that she had lost her way
 (ii) she had managed to lose her way just coming back from the chemist's shop
 (iii) she had left her shopping in a restaurant which she could not find
 (iv) she had taken the wrong road back to the chemist's

2 Answer the following questions briefly, in your own words as far as possible. Use one complete sentence for each answer.

- a Why had Mrs Brown come to London?
 b How far was the chemist's from the restaurant?
 c When did Mrs Brown realise that she had made a mistake?

3 Answer these questions, using only short form answers.
 a Did the waiter give Mrs Brown good directions?
 b Did Mrs Brown reach the chemist's in time?
 c Did the policeman come with Mrs Brown as far as the chemist's?

4 Complete the following sentences. Your answers must be related to the ideas contained in the passage.

- a Mrs Brown went to the restaurant for a cup of tea because
 b Mrs Brown's husband had a bad cough, so
 c Mrs Brown had to hurry to the chemist's because
 d The policeman came up to Mrs Brown and asked her: ".....?"
 e Mrs Brown might not have found the restaurant again if
 5 Choose the best explanation according to the context.
 a in time (ii) means
 (i) eventually
 (ii) punctually
 (iii) before it closes
 (iv) at the right time

6 Find words or phrases in the passage which mean much the same as the following.

- a instructions how to get to a place
 b to return
 c made a mistake

7 Composition: Imagine that you were the policeman mentioned in the passage. Describe in not more than 50 words what happened

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from the time you first saw Mrs Brown until you took her to the main road. Do not include any ideas which are not in the passage. Use your own words as far as possible.

3 Complete the following sentences by putting the speaker's words, given in brackets, into Indirect Speech. Follow this model:

Mrs Brown said ("I've left all my shopping in the restaurant.")
Mrs Brown said that she had left all her shopping in the restaurant.

a Mrs Brown asked the waiter ("Is there a chemist's near here?")

b The waiter told her ("It's only about three minutes' walk away.")

c He told her ("Turn right when you go out of the restaurant.")

d He said ("You'll find a big chemist's about a hundred yards up the road.")

e He said that the chemist's closed at five, but ("If you hurry, you'll just get there in time.")

f The policeman said that first of all ("We'd better go back as far as the chemist's.")

g The policeman took Mrs Brown in the direction of the main road, where he said ("We shall probably find your restaurant.")

h When they reached the main road, the policeman told Mrs Brown ("I think you'll find the restaurant you are looking for on the opposite side of the road.")

i Mrs Brown thanked the policeman and said ("I can't understand how I went wrong.")

j The policeman smiled and said ("It's quite easy to get lost in a big city like London.")

As the train approached the seaside town where I was going to spend my holidays, I went into the corridor to stretch my legs. I stayed there a short while, breathing in the fresh sea air and exchanging a few words with one of the passengers, whom I had met earlier on the station platform.

When I turned to go back to my seat, I happened to glance into the compartment next to mine. Sitting there was a man who many years before had been my neighbour. He was a great talker, I remembered; it used to take hours to get away from him once he began a conversation. I was not at all sorry when he went to live in another part of London. We had not met since then, nor did I wish to meet him now, when my holiday was about to begin.

Luckily at that moment he was much too busy talking to the man opposite him to catch sight of me. I slipped back into my compartment, took down my two suitcases and carried them to the far end of the corridor so as to be ready to get off the train as soon as it stopped. The moment the train came to a halt, I called a porter, who in no time at all had carried my luggage out of the station and found me a taxi. As I drove towards my small hotel on the outskirts of the town, I breathed a deep sigh of relief at my narrow escape. There was little chance that I should run into my boring ex-neighbour again.

When I reached the hotel, I went straight to my room and rested there until it was time for dinner. Then I went down to the lounge and ordered a drink. I had barely raised the glass to my lips when an all too familiar voice greeted me. I had not escaped from my tiresome neighbour after all! He grasped me warmly by the hand and insisted that we should share a table in the dining-room. "This is a pleasant surprise," he said. "I never expected to see you again 30 after all these years."

1 Choose the best answer.

- a This is a story about a man who
- (i) got off the train to avoid meeting an ex-neighbour
 - (ii) went with an ex-neighbour to spend a holiday at the seaside
 - (iii) tried to get away from an ex-neighbour but did not succeed
 - (iv) was surprised to meet his ex-neighbour in a small seaside hotel

Recommendations and Conclusions

Now that the Learning Center has been introduced to our new Canadian students, it will be available to them throughout the school year. With the assistance of the reading consultant they will be able to work at their leisure, apart from the regular program.

When we first started using these materials, at least an hour and fifteen minutes of each class was spent on them. But as homework assignments increased and problems in writing were discovered e.g. grammar, punctuation, etc., we were sometimes forced to use the materials as fill in work. When a student finished an assignment he would go and do a reading activity, working completely on his own.

If they enjoy the reading materials, then there is nothing wrong with having the students work on them in their spare time. In a regular classroom situation where the students are English speakers, this type of activity might be looked upon quite negatively as just busy work. But in a T.E.S.L. class, since the "busy work" is being done in a language they are in the midst of learning, the lessons are more meaningful and instructive in another sense.

However the teacher should be sure that the pupils are thoroughly familiar with the techniques of using these materials, making sure to point out that there are answer booklets and self-tests. This way he isn't floundering but can become quite self-directed. I realized this when I discovered one boy who seemed to be lost and uninterested- not because he didn't understand the passages, but because he didn't know what he was aiming for and how to use the materials properly. Having missed the last class he needed personal attention to start him on his way.

The chief criticism is that I did not keep with my main attempt at individualization. The only time they worked in their groups, or as individuals was when they were using the materials from the Learning Center. With the Longman materials they worked at the same pace as I found it difficult to individualize all of the time. I still needed some degree of uniformity- to keep them together. I also found it difficult to test them on the basis of the reading materials from the Learning Center. Therefore the small amount of testing was based solely on the Longman materials.

The strongpoint was the enthusiasm and self direction that resulted. I feel that students learn more when they are interested and involved and that these factors are vital for any program the teacher wishes to adopt. Many of the students who did not have summer jobs came earlier and stayed later in order to use these materials. The interest was also displayed during the break, when many of my students kept right on working.

In retrospect, mainly because of student interest and enthusiasm, I am quite satisfied with the past summer's T.E.S.L. program and will continue to make use of the Reading Lab.