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A Ten-Week Internship Teaching Literacy to Adult Refugees: Pre-Literate, Semi-Literate and Non-Literate.

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A TEN-WEEK INTERNSHIP TEACHING LITERACY TO ADULT REFUGEES: PRE-LITERATE, SEMI-LITERATE AND NON-LITERATE.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the culmination of a ten week internship teaching literacy to adult refugees who had attended little or no school prior to living in the U.S. Included in this paper are definitions of literacy terms, and a description of the host institution and students involved in this internship. Also included is a list of my assumptions about teaching and learning literacy, an explanation of my teaching approach based on these assumptions, and several methods, materials and ideas for teaching literacy also consistent with my approach.

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Introduction

Three years into teaching ESL I enrolled in the MAT program at SIT. It was in the Spring term of that year during the Literacy Module that I first heard the words, "literacy training" being used in reference to an ESL class. "But I don't teach literacy", I remember thinking. "That's for another group of professionals. I teach English!"

Throughout the literacy module I was asked to define literacy and to become aware of all the ways I rely on being literate in my daily life. I was exposed to languages that were written in a script I could not decode, and I experienced great anxiety in not being able to understand the information that was obtainable only through being literate in that script. And, finally, I articulated for the first time., the feelings I had when in Japan and was not able to find my way around or read a menu because I could not read in a society that was designed for literate people. Then I realized that English speaking countries are also designed for literate people, and part of preparing students to function in the English language is to prepare them to read and write English. By the end of that term I had a new attitude about teaching reading and writing and a new definition of myself as a professional; I do teach literacy, and I could not wait to begin!

One year later, in Seattle, Washington, I was offered a job in the Adult Refugee Program at Seattle Central Community College (SCCC) to teach a literacy class. I was being given a chance to put my new professional identity as a "literacy trainer" into action.

This paper is the culmination of that 10 week assignment. This experience has forced me to thoroughly examine the process of learning and the way that a teacher can facilitate the process. It has also been a rewarding opportunity to work with ESL students at a level I had never explored before: to discover what skills the student brings to the classroom and ways to use these skills and introduce new ones as we work toward literacy.

In this paper I will define literacy terms as I am using them, provide a description of the institution and students involved in this internship, define my approach to teaching and include several ideas, techniques and materials I used for teaching based on this approach.

Literacy Terms

Literacy terms are not often used consistently and often mean different things to different people. This is partly because literacy training in ESL classes is a fairly new phenomenon.

In 1975, most of the Indochinese refugees in this country were highly educated urban professionals, many of whom had had years of training in English and/or French and needed merely a refresher course upon arriving in the United States. Since 1980, however, many of the refugees from Indochina and Africa have never heard English or had any contact with Western culture. In fact, many of these refugees have very few literacy skills in their native language and some have never seen their native language (let alone English) in written form.

A person's native literacy often influences the ease with which she[1] acquires English. Among the post 1980 refugees, the lack of literacy in English is clear, but the degree to which they are literate in their native language varies and is much more difficult to determine and define. For these reasons, the literacy terms I use throughout this paper need definitions. For the purposes of this thesis I will define four groups; pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate, and non-Roman-alphabet-literate. A pre-literate adult is one who speaks a language that has no written form. Examples of pre-literate groups that attend ESL

[1] "She": used in the generic sense in this paper refers to both men and women.

classes in Seattle are the Hmong and Mien from Laos and the Saho, Kunama and Elit from Eritrea and Ethiopia. In the last 30 years, some of these languages have been transcribed into the Roman alphabet by Western missionaries, but the materials are limited to Western religions and tend not to be accessible nor desirable to the majority of the culture.

A non-literate is one who speaks a language that has a written form, but who had very little or no training in literacy and does not read or write her native language. Semi-literate adults have some literacy training in their native language, but generally not more than three to four years of formal education which may have been 20 to 50 years ago. non-Roman-alphabet-literate adults are literate in their native language (eg; Cambodian, Lao, Chinese) but need to learn the formation of the Roman alphabet. These adults are aware of the sound symbol correspondence, as are semi-literates, and therefore need to transfer literacy skills from the use of ideograms to the English alphabet system. Some non-Roman-alphabet-literates require less intensive literacy training than a semi-literate; however, others because of age and/or other factors will benefit from the same kind of literacy training as a pre-literate or non-literate.

Defining Literacy Within Adult Education Complexes

The bottom line of any adult refugee program is to prepare the refugee for independent life in the United States. In some institutions the students are placed in classes according to their verbal abilities, and the focus in these classes is not on literacy in English but on acquiring enough spoken English to get a job. Indeed there is a growing group of government representatives and residents in the refugee community that is presently advocating more emphasis on funding for job training and less on ESL.

For those institutions, programs and teachers that do include literacy in their curriculum design, it becomes necessary to define when a person becomes literate. The definitions that I found regarding when to consider an individual literate pre-suppose some degree of spoken language fluency:

"A person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life."[3]

"A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainment in reading and writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development."[4]

"That person is literate who, in a language he speaks, can read with understanding anything he would have understood if it had been spoken to him, and he can write, so that it can be read, anything that he can say."[5]

I could find no definition of literacy that does not assume command of the spoken language and yet the students who attend adult refugee literacy classes at best speak only a few words and phrases in English. To meet the criteria of the above definitions of literacy, the student would have to attend several years of ESL classes before beginning literacy work.

[3]As defined by UNESCO, 1951.

[4]As defined by UNESCO, 1965.

[5]As defined by Sarah Gudchinsky, 1973. A Manual of Literacy For Prelit Peoples Ukarumpa, Papua, New Guinea 1973.

The definition of ESL literacy that I use includes mastery of the pre-writing skills like holding a pencil, approaching a piece of paper, writing the alphabet and numbers to 1000, recognizing common sight and survival words and knowing how decoding works. These skills prepare the student for a beginning ESL class where literacy may be assumed. Decoding is a skill that is not completed in the literacy level class, and indeed upon entering a beginning ESL class with literate students, the newly literate student may decode words encountered in a beginning level course in a slower less practiced manner than the other students but she will have the same skills.

Seattle Central Community College (SCCC)

SCCC, the institution where I did my internship, is located in the heart of Seattle, Washington. It serves the inner city population within the Seattle Community College district. From its courtyard is a view of the Space Needle and the Olympic Mountains. Surrounding the school is the ethnic diversity, the fast paced life and the changing store fronts of any U.S. gateway to the world.

SCCC has the largest adult refugee program in the state. In the eight years that the program has been in effect, SCCC has served more refugees in ESL classes than any other institution in Washington.

The Federal Government supports this program through the Refugee Act of 1980. At present the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in Washington has allocated 720 instructional hours of ESL study to each adult refugee in the program. There are approximately 120 hours of classes in one 10 week quarter. If a student uses her hours in consecutive quarters, it takes her 18 months to complete the program. At this writing, there is no time limit as to when she must complete the hours allotted her.

The SCCC Adult Refugee Program has a competency based curriculum

and is divided into different levels with corresponding benchmarks that should be covered at each level.(See Appendix)

The greatest number of refugees served at SCCC are Indochinese; Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. There are also many refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia and many eastern European nations such as Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and even Russia.

Literacy Classes at SCCC

The literacy program at SCCC was designed to meet the needs of students who could not function in a beginning ESL class because they lacked the literacy skills in English. Prior to the creation of the literacy classes many of the students placed in a beginning class could not recognize the letters of the alphabet and struggled to write their names. The literacy demands placed on them were too great, and many dropped out in discouragement. After the need for a literacy class was determined, a placement test was designed to assess whether a student was literate enough to attend a beginning class or whether she would benefit from a literacy class.

A few of the students in literacy classes are truly pre-literate and have never seen their native language in written form. The rest are either non-literate, semi-literate, or literate in their own languages but have had little or no exposure to the English alphabet or to the up to down, left to right style of writing utilized in written English. Often, because of class size restrictions or funding limitations, pre-lits, non-lits, semi-lits and non-Roman-alphabet-lits are all placed in the same class. None of them are literate in English, but all may be at different stages in acquiring literacy; definitely a built- in challenge for the teacher.

Prior to arriving in Seattle, most of the Indochinese refugees attended 3 to 5 months of English language training and cultural

orientation at refugee processing centers located in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. There the refugees were introduced to such skills as holding a pencil, approaching a piece of paper, and/or focusing on a given task in a classroom environment.

A student walking into a literacy class at SCCC could be pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate or literate in her native language. She may have had some training in pre-writing skills. She may be able to write her name and some or all of the letters of the alphabet. She may know all this, or she may not know any of these things. In a literacy class at SCCC, nothing should be assumed.

The Students in the Class

The class that I taught was the" Preliterate"1 level; the lowest level offered at SCCC. It is designed for students with little or no literacy skills or education. By including a sample of the students (there were 15 total in the class), the reader will have a clearer understanding of how my teaching approach was influenced by the needs of the class.

The following is a sample of the students as they entered class;

Yet was a 41 year- old woman from Cambodia. She had been a farmer in Cambodia and had not attended school. She had escaped to a refugee camp in 1983 where she had had one year of school in the camp and learned to read and write Cambodian,"just a little". She had also learned a few words and phrases in English and had had some exposure to the alphabet.

Muth was a 51 year- old male from Cambodia. When he was 18 years old he went to school for one year. He had been a farmer and had left school to work the farm. He could read some Cambodian and could write a little but did not feel fluent in either. He had had one more additional year

of school in the camps prior to coming to Seattle. He did not know how to

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of school in the camps prior to coming to Seattle. He did not know how to

read or write any English.

Paw was a 49 year-old woman from Laos. She had been a farmer in Laos and had never attended school either in Laos or in the camps. She could not read or write Laotian at all. SCCC was her first classroom experience.

ChoySin was a 55 year-old male from Laos. When he was 10 he had had a Chinese teacher for one and a half months. Later, his father and cousin had continued to teach him sometimes at night after work. He could read and write "some" Chinese, but could only read a "little of the newspaper". He had been a farmer in Laos. He had apparently had no schooling in the camps and could not read or write English.

Ethiopia was a 37 year-old mother of 9 from Eritrea, Africa. Before and after marriage she had been a farmer and had never attended school. She had learned to write a few words in Amharic (written language in Eritrea) from her husband. She had never studied English before coming to the U.S.

Mun was from Cambodia. She was 21 years-old. She too had been a farmer and had never attended school until she had had one year of education in the camps just prior to coming to Seattle. She could read and write a "little" Cambodian and had had some exposure to English in the camps.

I was able to get this information about the students through the use of a translator and it is at best very limited. Most of them had never been asked about their educational histories and were not used to explaining such things. When asked about why they wanted to study English and /or learn English literacy, none of them had an answer, except one woman who said, "What do you mean? Everyone has to know things!" She did not go into detail about what the "things" were that everyone must know, and

perhaps she was not sure. Unlike a class of students who have experience

with studying in a classroom and setting academic goals, the students in my class wanted to come to school but did not know why. Being literate was not necessarily high on their list of priorities, but "knowing things" was for some of them. It was up to me to decide what that meant.

An Approach to Teaching Literacy

The approach I take to teaching literacy is based on 9 assumptions. Below is a list of these assumptions and following it is a brief explanation of each.

1. A student cannot learn when she is focusing on her fears and insecurities. The teacher must help the student refocus on learning through tasks that are simple and clear.

2. A student brings with her a "learning system" which the teacher can utilize.

3. The teacher is reponsible for presenting the language/material and the student is responsible for learning it.

4. A student needs to discriminate between the different aspects of the material and check whether her perceptions of it fit with reality.

5. Everyone is capable of becoming literate.

6. Learning is like a spiral, not a staircase.

7. The more relevant the work is to the student's life and interest, the more motivated she will be.

8. Being literate in English involves a combination of sight reading and phonetic decoding.

9. A "community" classroom encourages caring, trusting and willingness to risk.

1. " A student cannot learn when she is focusing on her fears and insecurities. The teacher must help the student refocus on learning through tasks that are simple and clear."

When I walked into the literacy class on the first day of this

internship, I was struck by the fear and insecurity that seemed to be emanating from the students. Most of them had had one year of education in their whole lives and a few of them had never been to school. As I looked at a middle aged man in the back of the room, blue in the face and trembling, I understood what I had been told before; a major part of teaching a literacy class is alleviating insecurity and fear; fear of not knowing what to expect and fear of being thought dumb and unable to learn.

A refugee's immediate past is full of horror, seperation of family and the sudden upside down panic of leaving her homeland forever and escaping to safety in a strange land. More often than not, a student in a literacy class has never been to school for more than three or four years in her entire life. She enters the classroom not knowing what to expect, but knowing she cannot do the things that other adults can; she cannot read or write, or understand the new language that surrounds her. She is afraid. A student who is afraid cannot focus on learning.

Working with ways to alleviate the student's fears and insecurities is so basic to the elements necessary for a learning environment that without it, all other assumptions I might have or techniques I might use in working with the student fail. The foundational approach I take to teaching literacy is to replace the student's fears with absorption and focus on the task of learning. In order for the student to focus on something outside of her own self image and safety, I must assure that everything we do in class is non-threatening and within her capabilities.

The capabilities that a student has on any given day fluctuate greatly. Students frequently arrive at school full of family troubles, financial panic or cultural adjustment. On these days, perhaps because the student is pre-occupied, what she had known and worked on for days may suddenly seem new and incomprehensible. If several students are experiencing this, I need to be prepared to quickly readjust my lesson plan and start back at a point that I sense they will be familiar with, and move on from there. I

have discovered that the students want to attend class during difficult times as a way of removing themselves from the troubles at home, and they welcome the distractions that school provides. As the teacher, I must be prepared to deal with the unexpected; take a "reading" of the students' capabilities that day and adjust the material accordingly. I must also assure that the presentations of the material, the expectations I have of the student and the instructions I give about what I want her to do are so clear that she will not be focusing on these things but on the task at hand. Clarity and simplicity are the keys; as much as possible I demonstrate what I expect from the student so that the instructions I am giving or the behavior I want are totally clear. Words are only helpful if they are understood by context or demonstration. I never ask a literacy student to guess at what is expected of her.

2. "A student brings with her a 'learning system' which the teacher can utilize".

Whether or not a student has ever attended school before, she enters the classroom as a functioning member of a particular social/cultural group. She has developed a highly complicated system of making sense out of her world and learning to exist within it. She has successfully used her intuitions, perceptions and intellect in mastering the meanings, and language that surround her. She is a language and culture expert.

The task in language learning is for the student to attach the appropriate arbitrary sounds of the target language to the concepts and perceptions that she already knows. She has successfully done this in her native language and she can use this learning system in working on a second language. She has developed, consciously or unconsciously, a way of connecting new ideas to already existing mental structures to "learn" something new. She has done this by forming images that connect the new

with the known, hence creating a reference point; she can recall her image and ellicit the new associated with it.[6]

My approach to teaching involves recognizing that all students have this developed "learning system" and feeling free, as their teacher, to use their learning skills and use of imagery in working on literacy.

3. "A teacher is responsible for presenting the material, and the student is responsible for learning it."

I am responsible for presenting the different aspects of English literacy in a way that enhances the student's ability to use her already existing "learning system". I am responsible for presenting the material in a clear, image-provoking way, selecting activities and materials that illustrate the concept and at the same time allow the student to form her own images associated with it. My assumption is that learning will happen when the student focuses on the work, and then consciously or unconsciously forms images that she assiciates with it, and connects the image to mental structures that are already a part of her. After I have presented the material, it is my responsibility to stand back and allow the student to take responsibility for learning it.

4. "A student needs to discriminate between the different aspects of the material and check whether her perceptions of it fit with reality."

As a part of learning, the student needs time to discriminate and check out whether her perceptions of the material fit with reality.

[6]Teaching and Learning Languages; Images,Earl W. Stevick , Cambridge University Press ©1982, pp. 24, 29, 33, 35, 50,57, 65, 69, 82, 89, 97, 106, 124, 137, 141, 189.

For this reason, allowing time for experimenting with language and literacy through practice and making mistakes is a very valuable part of learning. Through practice of the material, the student is allowed a chance to reproduce what she has been working on and test whether she understands it. Through making mistakes, the student learns what is wrong, what is right, and can relate what is right to something meaningful to her.

Depending on student-corrected mistakes shifts the responsibility of discovering how the language works to the student. She did this work of discovery in her native language and she can do it in learning English/literacy as well. As the teacher, I am constantly assessing whether the mistake stems from my presentation of the material, in which case I am responsible for presenting it in a clearer way, or if the mistake is the result of how the student is working on the material. If the mistake is the result of the student misunderstanding how English works, I am responsible for pointing out where she is incorrect, but not what is incorrect. In this way, she will be forced to work with what she knows and take responsibility for learning the language/material, and not just blindly repeat "sounds" that the teacher offers as the correct way.

5. "Everyone is capable of becoming literate."

For the pre-literate, semi-literate or non-literate who has never been to school or mastered writing in her own language, the process of acquiring literacy skills is a tremendous task. With each new aspect of literacy that she is working on, many skills are involved; recognition of the material, reading the material, saying it, and then putting together all the literacy skills necessary to write it; holding a pencil, manipulating a sheet of paper, producing a mark that represents the given material in written form and then recognizing whether what she wrote is indeed correct.

Some of my colleagues have said that only the young literacy student is capable of ever really learning something as complicated and challenging as reading and writing. They say that the older literacy student, who will not be held responsible for the financial support of the family, and who could rely on the younger family members to do her necessary communicating and paper work, does not need literacy skills and in fact could not acquire them anyway. I have seen nothing in my work with literacy students to support either claim. Learning knows no speed and no age limit, and each student approaches literacy at her own pace.

6. "Learning is like a spiral, not a staircase."

As the orchestrator of the classroom, I can enhance this learning process by recognizing each success as a basis for the next. What the student has learned becomes the known in connecting new concepts and skills. In this way, learning is not like a staircase, where one progresses upward without ever retracing steps, but like a spiral; the student comes back around to material learned before and expands on it while continuing to progress upward. As the teacher, I am constantly assessing how the spiral works and what a logical next move would be in continuing to progress upward.

7. "The more relevant the work is to the student's life and interests, the more motivated she will be."

A U.S. urban-dwelling pre-lit, non-lit, orsemi-lit adult refugee, has moved from a society that does not use language in written form, to one that is designed for literate people.

In a society that expects literacy from an 8 year old, illiterate people are functionally handicapped and branded as dumb. In a country that is

designed for literate people, vitally important information may only be available in written form; signs that read; "stop!", "danger!", "explosives!" For the person who will live in the U.S. the rest of her life, assimilation and participation into this society is limited if she is unable to read and write.

Certain words and skills are relevant to all U.S.-dwelling adults and being able to both read and write these is a matter of daily importance; information like one's name, one's address and street name, words that represent the organization and expectations of this culture; "men" and "women" written on restroom doors, "exit" and "enter", "stop" and "walk" "don't walk", etc. It is both dangerous and humiliating not to be able to recognize them, and I have watched eyes open wider as students realize that the words convey meanings and how knowing this will change their lives. This relevancy of material and the interest the student takes in working on it, enhances the focus and energy that the student brings to the activity. The more the material reflects the needs and interests of the student, the more reading and writing becomes a method for sharing, understanding, and relaying information that has a meaningful impact on the students and the more motivated she will be.

8. "Being literate in English involves a combination of sight reading and phonetic decoding".

Literacy in English involves systematic control of certain sound-symbol combinations, a large degree of inference and "guessing" from context, as well as the memorization of hundreds of non-phonetic sight words. All of these aspects of reading and writing should be introduced early on in a student's literacy development so that she forms ideas about reading that reflect the "rules with lots of exceptions" nature of phonetic decoding. She also begins to sort out sight words from phonetic

ones and learns to make intelligent guesses from context; a skill that any fluent reader utilizes.

9. "A "community" classroom encourages caring, trusting, and the willingness to risk".

Though the students in a literacy class may come from many different countries and backgrounds, there are certain experiences and beliefs that they all share. They have all experienced the learn-from-others/ teach-to-others phenomenon present in every society (mother to child, group leader to group member,etc., and the continuation of these teachings passed on through generations). They all have certain expectations and beliefs about group harmony based on agreed upon mutual respect and group norms, present in every society. And because most of them had been farmers, living in extended families and/or sharing the farm with other village people, they know the value of combining resources and sharing responsibility to complete a task.

When the classroom becomes a "community", with students learning from and teaching each other, respecting each other's needs and skills and combining resources to complete a task, then learning occurs through caring, trusting and the willingness to risk. This kind of environment is familiar to them , and is one where they can use their already acquired and highly developed "community" skills. They relate to English as a way to communicate and express ideas, much like they see their respective native languages. They also begin to trust their own inner resources in using the language and this increases their feeling that English and literacy are not just things the teacher knows.

A teacher can set up activities that encourage the participation of each member of the class according to capability and/or need and encourage the students to combine resources and work as a group. In this way, the language/ literacy classroom resembles a "community" where the opportunities for mutual respect and risk taking are enhanced.

Summary:

A student in my literacy class may enter on the first day filled with fear and not knowing what to expect. As the teacher I make it clear exactly what I expect, in activities that the student is ready for. I keep the material that the student is working on relevant to her life and/or interests, and whether or not she could articulate it, she would sense that I believe she can learn. What she learns becomes the basis for what she will learn next.

Finally, she finds that the "scarey" classroom that she entered on day one becomes a "community" of students trusting and respecting each others' wisdom and working together on their new literacy skills.

Methods, Materials, Ideas, and Techniques for Teaching Literacy Based on My Approach.

The methods, techniques and ideas I use for teaching literacy are all based on one or more of my assumptions about literacy, learning and teaching .

I have included a specific lesson plan for each assumption, with the exception of my overall belief that everyone is capable of learning literacy. Inherent in each lesson is the belief that everyone is capable of participating in the activity and learning the material.

The lessons that pertain to sound-symbol combinations and decoding (lessons 1-4) are in the order that I presented them to the class. To represent the differences between the name of the letter and the sound it represents phonetically I have underlined the name of the letter ie., a and placed the phonetic symbol (The International Phonetic Alphabet) in slash marks, eg., /æ/.

What is not included in this section is the work done on learning and forming the letters of the alphabet. This class was divided into two sessions and was team taught. I shared teaching this class with a woman who is very creative and experienced in teaching initial writing of letters, and she worked with the students on this. (For a lesson plan on how to teach writing the letters of the alphabet, see appendix.)

Lesson #1

A Sounds Like /æ/.

Short Vowel Sound-Symbol Correspondence

Objective: Student can recognize and produce the difference between the names of the vowels and the short sounds they represent.

Assumption: The teacher is responsible for presenting the material and the student is responsible for learning it. A student brings with her a "learning system " which the teacher can utilize.

Rationale: Hundreds of words commonly used in English follow phonetic rules of spelling. By learning the short-vowel sounds, the student can read and "sound-out" many words that she encounters on a daily basis. (See Variations for work on consonants)

Procedure: 1. Have ready five cards with one of the five vowels on each (lower case vowels will be encountered most often in reading and should be used instead of upper case).

2. Tape one card to the blackboard.
3. Point to the card (ie, a) and ask, "What's the name of this?"
4. Students reply, "A". (see notes)
5. Next, ask, "What's the sound?" (see notes)
6. At this point, the students may attempt all sorts of sounds that are not right. If a "native speaker-like" /æ/ is produced, use that person as a model for others. If this does not happen, say to the students, "Listen". GET THEIR FULL ATTENTION and then model only

once,/æ/. (see notes)

7. Students practice this sound individually and as a group.
8. Do the same for the other vowels, taping them up as they are introduced. Always distinguish between the name of the vowel and the sound it represents.
9. When all five vowels have been practiced, or as another is introduced, work with the contrasts in the names and sounds of each; "What's the name?", A, "What's the sound?", /æ/. "What's the name?", E, "What's the sound?", /e/. etc. "Sound?",/æ/. "Sound?", /e/, etc.

Variations: 1. Caleb Gattegno's sound color charts may also be used to work with the sound symbol correspondence of the short vowels. The students learn the sounds of the five short vowels by associating them with a specific color on the color chart. Then they learn the written vowel that corresponds to that sound. In this way, familiarity with the sounds of the vowels comes before recognizing the vowel in written form.

2. Use this method for introducing consonants, consonant clusters (gl, bl, pl, etc.) and digraphs (sh, ch, etc.).

Notes: 1. Usually, at least one student in the class knows the letters of the alphabet. By eliciting the names from the class, it enhances the idea that others besides the teacher know English, and that the students are responsible for the material.

2. If the students do not understand the question, "What's the sound?", indicate or illustrate what it means. This can be done by cupping one hand around the back of the ear .

3. Through teacher modeling only once, the students quickly realize

that the work of hearing the sound and figuring out how to produce it is their responsibility. They will not be blindly repeating after the teacher but using this time to utilize whatever learning system they have to learn the new sound.

4. The short vowel a (/æ/) is often difficult for students. Sometimes giving the students an image to associate the sound with is helpful. For the /æ/ sound of a, I often compare it to a baby's cry. Another way to work with the short a sound is to produce the /a/ sound of o and without stopping, break into a big smile. This is most successful if the /a/ sound of o is introduced first.

Lesson #2

Discriminating Between the Short Vowel Sounds

Objective: The student can differentiate between the different vowel sounds and can select the written vowel that a sound represents out of a choice of several vowels.

Assumption: A student needs to discriminate between the different aspects of the material and determine whether or not her perceptions of it fit with reality.

Rationale: (Same as Lesson #1)

Procedure: Prepare a worksheet that includes numbered rows of vowels in different order;

1. a e i o u
2. u a i e o
3. a i e o u etc.

2. Have the students read the sounds of the vowels row by row. This can be done in groups, pairs, or individually. While they do this, reproduce the same worksheet on the board.

3. As a class, have the students read the sounds in row 1.
4. Next, say, "circle /i/". (see notes)
5. Students circle the letter that the sound represents (i).
6. As a class, students read row 2.
7. Say, "circle /a/".
8. Students circle the letter o.
9. Continue until all rows are finished.

10. Go through each row again and repeat the sound they should circle for each row.
11. Collect papers.
12. Students volunteer to circle the sound for each row using the reproduced worksheet on the blackboard.
13. Monitor the blackboard work while at the same time going through all the papers and circling any sounds they missed.
14. Return the papers and if necessary, review problem sounds or answer any questions.

Variations: 1. This activity is also great for working with numbers; phone numbers, social security numbers, money,etc.

2. To focus on particular challenges in differentiating the sounds, limit each row to two vowels for a more definite contrast;

1. a o
2. i e
3. a u, etc.

Notes: 1. The first time this activity is presented, a teacher demonstration of the circling process will prevent anxiety over what the students are being asked to do. Draw the worksheet on the board. It may be necessary to do some work with reading across a line (left to right). Have the students read the vowels in the first row, say, "circle /æ/", hesitate, and then slowly and demonstratively circle the a in row 1. Repeat the same for row 2. and row 3. or until you sense that the class understands what is expected of them.

2. To encourage the students to listen carefully, say, "circle--" only once. Be sure they are watching because the formation of the mouth is helpful in knowing which sound is being made.

Lesson #3

Vowel Consonant Combinations

Objective: Student can recognize, and read aloud various vowel consonant combinations. Decoding skills begin.

Assumption: Learning is like a spiral; what the student has learned becomes the known in developing new skills.

Rationale: In addition to knowing the sounds that vowels and consonants represent (See Lesson #1), the student can recognize and reproduce the sounds of two or more letters combined. This is a challenging and necessary skill for any reader.

Prodecure: 1. Have ready five cards with one lower case vowel on each, and two or three consonant cards (bilabials p,m seem to be the easiest starting point, with the alveolars d,t,s,n, next).

2. Tape all five vowel cards on the blackboard and review the sounds that each represent.
3. If the sound for p and m have not yet been introduced, work with them as in lesson plan #1. If they have, review these sounds respectively too.
4. Next, tap the a card (or some other vowel card) and ask, "What's the sound?" (see notes)
5. Students reply /æ/.
6. Tap the p and ask, "What's the sound?"
7. Students reply /p/.
8. Tap the a and then the p and ask, "What's the sound?"

9. Students reply /æp/. (see notes)

10. Tap the a card and ask,"What's the sound?"

11. Students reply /e/.

12. Tap the p card and ask, "What's the sound?"

13. Students reply /p/.

14. Tap a and p and ask, "What's the sound?"

15. Continue in this way combining various vowels with p and/or m.

Variations: 1. After reviewing the sounds of the five vowels, introduce a list of vowel consonant combinations that all end in p, eg; ap, ep, ip, op, up. Say each aloud several times. Next, repeat the sound of ap and then ask, "What's the sound of a?" "What's the sound of p?" In this way, the discovery of the vowel consonant combination comes from deciphering separate sounds from sound clusters.

Notes: 1. Using a pointer or ruler to point to or "tap" the vowel and consonant cards keeps the teacher from obstructing the students' view of the cards and also helps to keep the students' attention on the cards and not on what the teacher is doing.

2. Students will be very challenged by this activity and it may take several days before the concept of symbol/sound combining seems clear.

3. Do not model the sound of the vowel consonant combinations unless frustration and /or insecurity is in the way of learning and/or moving on. The intent of this lesson is to help the student discover sound/symbol combining, not to blindly repeat after the teacher.

Lesson #4

"Group Tap"

Decoding Two and Three Letter Words

Objective: Upon hearing a word the student can spell it phonetically.

Assumption: A "community classroom" encourages caring, trusting and the willingness to risk.

Rationale: Through working with a group, the student will be trusting the wisdom of her classmates as well as her own inner resources which encourages her willingness to risk and reflects a sense of community in the classroom.

Procedure: 1. On the blackboard or on large sheets of paper write the key letters of the alphabet that make up the words that will be worked on ;

a e i o u

b d f g h j l m n p s t

Make enough sets so that 3 groups of 3 or 4 can work together.

2. Give each group a pointer or ruler or something with which to tap out letters on the board to spell words.
3. Say a word (two or three or four letter word depending on ability) ie; "big"
4. The groups confer and tap out the letters that spell "big". b-i-g. Order is important, i-g-b is not acceptable.
5. Continue. Say a word and each group spells it out.

Variations: 1. Pass out cards with phonetically regular words on

them to the students left sitting. These students read the words to the groups instead of the teacher.

2. This activity can be used for working with money. In this case, the appropriate symbols like $ ¢ . must be included. ie;

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

$ ¢ .

Teacher says, "fifty cents". The groups tap out 5-0-¢ or 50¢.

Notes: Asking for volunteers to work in the groups assures that those who tap out in front of the class have chosen to be there.

2. This type of spelling activity may not work well with sight words due to the non-phonetic, non-systematic nature of sight words. Memorizing the word as a whole is the most conceptually clear way to remember the word. A spelling bee much like American students use for spelling practice might be good, or an exercise where the students circle the correct word out of a choice or two or three;

1. Monday Menday Munday
2. tiday today tedey etc.

Lesson #5

Language Experience

Reading About Students' Daily Lives

Objective: Through reading that reflects the students' daily lives, they will see the power of the written word in representing or extracting meaning/information.

Assumption: English literacy involves reading and writing non-phonetic sight words as well as intelligent "guesses" from contextual clues. The more relevant the work is to the student's life and interest, the more motivated she will be.

Rationale: (see assumption above.)

Procedure: Before beginning the literacy part of this activity, the teacher will need to be sure that the students have enough language for this to be effective. (see notes)

2. Decide on a general theme for a conversation, dialog, or story to work on.(e.g.,two people meeting for the first time, a person tell a story about his life and family, a short story about someone go to the market, etc.)
3. Bring in a picture that illustrates the theme or the situation. The situation can also be introduced with stick drawings on the board or a short skit by the teacher.
4. Elicit the story or conversation from the class, giving clues and/or help when necessary.
5. Practice structure and/or pronunciation until the class is comfortable with the flow of the conversation. It may go something like this; Responding to a drawing of two stick figures

on the board who are shaking hands;

Hi. My name is Tom.

Hi. My name is Pat.

How are you?

I'm ok. And you?

I'm ok.

Ok, bye.

Bye.

6. Acting as secretary , ask them to dictate it back and write it on the board.
7. Have them read it.
8. Read several times as a group and individually, if appropriate.
9. Single out key words. (e.g., Hi. Ask, "What's this?") Students usually know and enjoy telling you.
10. Underline a word that occurs more than once in the story or dialog. Ask, "What's this?" Next, underline the same word as it occurs in different places in the story and ask,"What's this?" Students see that these are the same words.
11. Without underlining or indicating which word is being referred to, ask how to spell a key word, "How do you spell 'bye'?" If the students do not know what "spell" means, introduce this concept now, by demonstrating how to spell "bye"; "Bye is spelled b-y-e".
12. If appropriate, erase names or information about the people in the story or conversation and replace these with a line to make a cloze exercise for the student to copy and fill in their names or pertinent information. ie,

Hi. My name is _____

Hi. My name is _____ (A friend , the person next to them, etc.)

How are you?

I'm _____. And you? etc.

Variations: Introduce new vocabulary that is useful/relevant through a TPR-like activity or short skit. Words like; live, married, go, eat, have, don't have, do, etc. After the students remember the sequence or skit, have them give it back and write what they say. However, do not ask them to recognize the skit in written form on the same day that they are learning new vocabulary if this seems like too much for them.

Notes: 1. The content and length of this activity should directly reflect what level the student is at verbally. This can be a powerful exercise in extracting meaning from the written word if the language is easy for the student. If the vocabulary is new or difficult for the student, the activity becomes hard work where meaning is lost and remembering verbal meaning takes precedence over the written word.

2. As a follow-up to this activiy, write each line of the dialog or story on a sentence strip. The students work in groups to put the strips in logical order. Often, the order of the strips can be rearranged and the story still makes sense. ie,

Her name is Yet.
She is from Cambodia.
She lives in Seattle.
She has five children.

She is from Cambodia.
Her name is Yet.
She has five children.
She lives in Seattle.

Lesson#6

Reading Signs

Objective: Students can recognize and read sign words that have immediate usefulness and relevancy in their lives.

Assumption: The more relevant the work is to the students' lives and interests, the more motivated they will be. Everyone uses intuitions and perceptions to master meanings and language.

Rationale: In a society designed for literate people, certain important safety and cultural information is available only in written form such as on signs or on doors, etc. To fully participate in this society, an adult must be able to read these signs and follow them accordingly.

Procedure: 1. Select 4 or 5 sign words that every adult needs to be able to read; ENTRANCE, EXIT, IN, OUT, PUSH, PULL, DO NOT ENTER, NO EXIT,etc.

2. Make signs in capital letters (see notes), one for each word or message.
3. Demonstrate the meaning of the sign through presentation of the meaning, eg; PUSH PULL
4. Tape the signs to the door according to function.
5. Read the card aloud and slowly demonstrate what it says to do.
6. Have students volunteer to read the sign and demonstrate what it says to do.
7. Leaving the cards on the door , ask the students what each one says, how to spell it,etc.
8. Remove the cards from the door and use them as flash cards for recognition and reading practice.

9. Hand out the signs to students and have them domonstrate the meaning by taping them to the correct side of the door.

Variation: Take a field trip through the school or neighborhood and locate real signs: Demonstrate the meanings of each in the environment where they would be found.

Notes: Signs are usually written in capital letters and should be practiced in this form.

Conclusion:

In the final weeks of this internship I experimented with more ways to help the students conceptualize the written word as a means for expressing and extracting information. I experimented with ways to use meaningful vocabulary and topics with which to practice phonetic decoding and/or sight reading, to enhance the feeling that reading can be used as a mode of communication, like speaking. A student who has just read about herself or her peers has an immediate understanding of how the written word can convey intimate/significant information. Reading becomes not only a way to understand signs and warnings, but it is also a way to have fun and be creative. In the final weeks of this internship, I would use words or letter combinations that we had worked on, and began each class with a short sentence or story on the board which conveyed something meaningful to the students (eg: "Hi. How are you, today? I'm fine, but I'm hot!") Usually, the entire class would work together to figure out what it was I had written that day. This activity seemed to enhance the students' self-images that they are readers and can extract information from the written word. On several occasions, I would walk in to class and there would be a message for me on the board, written by the students. The stories and messages on the board became an important ritual in beginning our class.

With the next opportunity I have to teach a literacy class, I will be working on many different things. I want to experiment with ways to teach long vowels; the most conceptually clear way to introduce them, and the order in which it would make the most sense.

I will also experiment with more ways to introduce vocabulary and

English structures without the use of the written word (so that the students are not being asked to do more than they are ready for: hearing, understanding, remembering and reading a new word all at once!).

Teaching the literacy class has been a very special opportunity. It has broadened my approach to teaching, enhanced my sense of awe regarding the learning process and how it works, and has brought me closer to some incredibly fine students/colleagues who have strengthened my respect for teaching and learning. They have taught me so much!

APPENDIX

A LESSON PLAN FOR WRITING THE ALPHABET

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The Process: 1. Hand out paper with widely spaced lines.

2. Draw lines on the blackboard. (a chalk holder is useful.)

3. Have students observe you as you write the first 3 strokes.

4. Have students copy your strokes (At this time you help students hold pencil, copy correctly.)

5. Complete the letter, writing each stroke 3 times.

6. Ask,"What is it?"

7. Use your finger to create the letter in the air. Again ask, "What is it?"

8. Write a large copy of the letter on the blackboard. Have students name it.

9. Have students "finger write" the letter in the air, repeating its name with each stroke.

10. Go to the blackboard and write the letter 3 times as students watch.

11. Have the student copy the letter 3 times on their paper.

The Order of the Presentation :

1. Straight line letters- A E F H I K L M N T V W X Y Z
2. Large curve letters- C D G O Q
3. Small curve letters- B P R S
4. Finally- JU

Follow-Up Activities:

Dictation: -Send some students to the blackboard and dictate letters.

- Have the class dictate letter from cards to students at board.

- Spell a student's name while other students write it. (See if student recognizes name.)

- Have students dictate and spell their own names.

- Have relays as you dictate.

PRELITERATE I BENCHMARKS

Functional Literacy [7]

The student is able to:

L-1 Read, write and sequence the cardinal numbers from 0-100.

L-2 Read, write and sequence the letters of the alphabet in upper and lower cases.

L-3 Read basic sign words and symbols (e.g. men, women, stop, don't walk).

L-4 Recognize and write basic personal family information (e.g., name, address, phone number, social security number).

L-5 Make basic sound-letter correspondence with relevant vocabulary.

L-6 Read, write and sequence the days of the week.

L-7 Read and write money amounts.

L-8 Read and write digital time.

[7] There is also a list of oral/aural Benchmarks but they were not addressed in this paper and are not included here.