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Abstract

Although many organizations offer free "beginning" English classes for adult refugees and immigrants in the U.S., most of these classes depend on written worksheets and other print materials – therefore requiring students to be familiar with the English alphabet in order to follow along. The lack of accessible beginning literacy classes for adult refugees and immigrants puts students with limited or interrupted formal education and those whose language(s) don't use the roman alphabet at a stark disadvantage. Additionally, most literacy coursework is designed from a Western perspective whose historical, political and social foundational structures hold English literacy and Western funds of knowledge as superior to others. In this thesis, the author explores the question of whether it might be possible to decolonize English literacy instruction, why this is important, and how instructors can shift away from the imperial influence inherent to Western teaching methods. Additionally, the author outlines some key considerations for English literacy instruction that have proven effective for adult refugees and immigrants. This includes expanding upon the ways in which adult refugee and immigrant students' prior knowledge, wisdom and personal motivations might be integrated into beginning English literacy curriculum. The paper concludes with a collection of practical teaching recommendations and sample materials.

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Decolonize the Approach(es)

In the U.S. today, the ability to read and write in English is often expected from all individuals after early childhood. Because of this expectation, very few English as a Second Language (ESL) courses include literacy instruction in their curriculum; however, most courses do rely heavily on written materials and assignments to impart information and demonstrate students' understanding. Textbooks and other written materials are an integral resource in many ESL classes, but these are little use to students if they are unable to read them. This poses a particular challenge for some refugee and immigrant students, either youth or adults, who have not yet learned beginning English literacy. My attention to this topic stems from an interest in teaching basic literacy skills to those adult English language learners who are left behind by the more mainstream teaching approaches.

I've seen this with my own students – in my current teaching context, our beginning-level English class consists of adult students from a wide range of backgrounds and with a variety of educational needs. Historically, the majority of students were Vietnamese immigrants who had completed high school and often post-secondary education as well. This meant that most students possessed high level literacy skills in Vietnamese, which translates rather easily to English because of the similarities between the two alphabets. For this reason, our beginner ESL class has traditionally been designed with the belief that students are already familiar with the English alphabet; as such, the course begins with a quick review before moving onto more complex skills. However, in recent years our ESL program has begun to see an increase in immigrant and refugee students from countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan. Many of these new students have limited formal education and low-level literacy in both their home languages and English, therefore putting them at a stark disadvantage. We need to adapt our beginning level class to the specific needs

of these students who are still learning the basics of English literacy so that they can feel successful in the classroom.

Of course, English literacy can be beneficial to students beyond the classroom – it is often a requirement for employment, is associated with higher self-esteem and longer life expectancy, and better equips students to advocate for themselves, to name a few reasons (Ammar et al., 2021). For many of my students, English literacy is particularly important because it is a requirement of the U.S. citizenship test; passing this test would allow them access to those resources only available to U.S. citizens. Similar to Paulo Freire's thinking, MacDonald (2017) sees literacy as "a powerful means of awareness and resistance" (p. 18). However, teaching English literacy without any further reflection of the power structures that are being upheld and/or broken down is not a radical act on its own; the idea of literacy sponsorship in and of itself is problematic in that it assumes those who are not English-literate in need of help (MacDonald, 2017). At its most extreme, this "'white savior' mentality" (Becker & Alcaide, 2020, p. 68) can turn into a harmful misunderstanding of the needs and capabilities of speakers of other languages. As evidence of this, teachers at a primary school in New York thought "that something was inherently wrong" with Iraqi students who struggled to learn English literacy skills in their classrooms and began to refer these Iraqi students to special education classes at an increased rate (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010, p. 6). MacDonald (2017) suggests that English literacy acquisition be approached from a decolonial perspective which breaks down imperialist power structures rather than uphold them.

This can be achieved in a number of ways and through a number of different avenues. When teaching English literacy, it's important to consider a combination of aspects – the imperialist nature of literacy sponsorship and English language instruction (Freire, 1970/2000; Kee & Carr-Chellman, 2019; MacDonald, 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2019), student involvement and representation in the classroom (Beach et al., 2020; Bigelow et al., 2017; Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Nykiel-Herbert,

2010), cultural responsiveness (DeCapua et al., 2018; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010), mediums of instruction (Bigelow et al., 2017; Kaur, 2016; Perry & Moses, 2011), language of instruction (Beach et al., 2020; Bigelow et al., 2017; Condelli et al., 2002; D'Annunzio, 1990; Hasan et al., 2020; Osterling, 2001), content (Auerbach, 1990; Carroll, 2017; Condelli et al., 2002; Ewert, 2014; Huang, 2013; Malicky & Norman, 1989; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Wurr, 2002) and more. However, it's important to recognize that limited English literacy is not necessarily the disadvantage many think it is for refugees in English-speaking countries. Those who cannot read or write in English often develop strategies to mitigate any challenges associated with this obstacle; for example, they might turn to their social networks to help translate notices and fill out forms (Nakutnyy & Sterzuk, 2018; Walter, 1998). While these networks may initially be limited compared to their home countries, one case study found that refugees with limited literacy continue to find support from immediate family members, social workers and other community members in their new countries (Nakutnyy & Sterzuk, 2018). In fact, this collectivist sentiment is the norm for many immigrants and refugees even before arriving to the U.S., particularly those that come from oral cultures and therefore have always relied on social networks to relay information (Thompson, 2015). Additionally, despite being thought of as English-dominant, many community spaces in the U.S. are multilingual in nature – for example, even the most mainstream grocery stores often carry products with labels in languages other than English, so you don't necessarily have to be English-literate to navigate those spaces. Furthermore, many refugees are multilingual and multiliterate in languages other than English which means that they can read labels, signage and documents in one of their many languages (Walter, 1998). I found this to be the case with my own students, all of which speak at least two languages other than English. As an example, most of my Vietnamese students are literate in both Vietnamese and Cantonese, so they can use Vietnamese and Cantonese signage to navigate public spaces. Most of my Vietnamese and Chinese students don't need to use English in their day to day lives because they live in communities

where the stores, community organizations, restaurants and neighbors all use Vietnamese and Cantonese as their main form of communication.

This calls into question *why* we think literacy is so important in the first place – and challenges us to question our true motivations for promoting English literacy, as well as the methods we employ to guide students' learning. The first section of this paper explores whether it might be possible to teach English literacy in a way that disrupts the colonial power structures inherent to the English language and Western forms of instruction. The subsequent section breaks down some of the best practices associated with English literacy learning, followed by a brief description of two approaches to literacy instruction and a collection of suggestions for teaching. Finally, the author concludes with sample teaching plans for beginning literacy adult refugee and immigrant students based on the findings from this paper.

Decolonizing English Literacy Instruction

The English language has long been used as "an instrument of colonial imperialism" and it's instruction, particularly in indigenous communities and non-English speaking countries, "presents an implicit risk of recreating and reinforcing neocolonial hierarchies of knowledge production that favor Western perspectives over traditional indigenous systems of knowledge" (Rodrigues et al., 2019, p. 2). English literacy instruction in particular is often driven by white supremacist and imperialist power structures that value written literacy over all other language skills (MacDonald, 2017). Historically, the English language has been taught using methods that not only pose a risk of subjugating non-English speaking communities to Western culture and systems of power but, in many cases, actually do so (Rodrigues et al., 2019). This is because the primary goal of such educational methods was assimilation rather than the exchange of multiple cultures, languages and forms of knowledge (Kee and Carr-Chellman, 2019). This phenomenon is what Freire (1970/2000) designates a "cultural invasion" in which an oppressive group imposes their values and worldview

onto others. However, Rodrigues et al. (2019) suggests that there may be "a weakening in the Western influence" of the English language as it is increasingly used as a lingua franca that does not uphold the native speaker as the ideal standard (p. 7). This implies that there may be a number of actions English language and literacy instructors can take to move away from this cultural invasion and towards a decolonial approach to instruction. For example, Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) call for "programs that allow students to switch between Indigenous and Western modes of thinking without deeming one culturally inferior or inappropriate for the classroom environment" (p. 101).

One way to further weaken this Western influence is to turn to non-English speaking instructors and students when creating English literacy programs. Educators always bring "marks of their origin" with them into the classroom, including prejudices, values and worldviews; however, they must be careful not to impose these prejudices, values and worldviews on their students (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 60). Because most Western and native English-speaking teachers were taught according to the Western values that uphold colonial structures, they often revert to these same problematic educational models – even if they try not to. For this reason, it would be problematic for them to design decolonial educational programs on behalf of their students; as Freire (1970/2000) writes, "It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education" (p. 54). Therefore, it's preferable that English literacy teachers come from similar backgrounds as their students. When this is not possible, Western and native English-speaking teachers should work to equip more individuals from these backgrounds to become teachers themselves. For example, the non-directive model of English literacy instruction in D'Annunzio (1990)'s study was created such that adult students could move into an instructor role once they became familiar with the approach and reached a certain level of English proficiency.

Rodrigues et al. (2019) claims that English language instruction can indeed be decolonized but only within these bounds:

Instead of subjecting indigenous students to Westernized neocolonial discourse through the teaching of native speaker English and culture, a more positive goal would be to focus on ways of helping indigenous students to tell their own story to the world, using English as a tool to negotiate from within the language and to resist discourses of the colonizing Self and subaltern Other. (p. 9)

The common theme here is storytelling; English language instruction can be decolonized only if it is presented as a resource that marginalized learners can use to combat Western discourses that uphold systems of oppression. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for instructors to dialogue with students (Freire, 1970/2000) and support them to share their stories in English (Rodrigues et al., 2019). Primary school teachers in Uganda echo the importance of "discussion, collaboration, and storytelling" in decolonized instruction (Beach et al., 2020, p. 221).

For those teachers from Western backgrounds, the decolonization of our instructional practices will require that we shift our understanding of ourselves, our relationship with our students and our role in the classroom. In traditional educational paradigms, the teacher is considered an all-knowing authority figure and "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 72). Even the most well-intentioned teacher is susceptible to reverting to this "banking concept of education" because it's what is familiar to them (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 72). Instead, we must position everyone in the classroom as both students *and* teachers (Freire, 1970/2000) and create a self-directive space in which students "are involved in mutual inquiry with the teacher" (Davidson & Wheat, 1989, p. 344). True learning occurs when teachers and students engage in discourse and make discoveries together. Freire (1970/2000) describes the relationship between teacher and student as such:

The teachers thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them… If it is true

that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible. (p. 77)

In Freire's view, decolonized education is "co-intentional education" in which "while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others" (1970/2000, p. 66).

Becker and Alcaide (2020) suggest that popular education might be an effective response to colonial power structures in the classroom. One tenant of popular education is the idea of horizontal teaching, which places value on students' funds of knowledge and their active learning. According to Gonzalez et al. (2005), "The concept of funds of knowledge…is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (p. ix-x). The funds of knowledge approach suggests that instructors recognize and highly value all of the experiences, skills and prior knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom (Osterling, 2001). This is different from the more vertical nature of most Western classrooms in which the instructor is the all-knowing expert who lectures to students. Nykiel-Herbert (2010) makes the case that a classroom in which the "cultural and experiential knowledge" of each student is prized rather than seen as an annoyance or deficit is most effective when it comes to English literacy learning (p. 4). When teaching younger students, Western norms can be broken down to allow student agency in subtle ways – for example, Nykiel-Herbert (2010) and her team included middle school students in classroom decision-making by encouraging them to choose their own seats each day. Whether it's where they sit or the curriculum they learn, input from English literacy students of any age should be valued above the beliefs of instructors from inside the colonial framework, i.e. white Western teachers.

Practicing cultural responsiveness is one way to value and uphold students' beliefs in the English literacy classroom. Culturally responsive pedagogy asks instructors to "critically explore their students' underlying cultural beliefs and assumptions as well as their own" in order to leverage

elements of students' culture and experiences to support their learning in class (DeCapua et al., 2018, p. 18). As a practice, cultural responsiveness requires that instructors undergo a reflective and transformative process in which they question what they believe to know about teaching and learning so as to provide instruction that aligns with students' own backgrounds (DeCapua et al., 2018). In the case of refugee students living in their new countries, it may be important to integrate students' home cultures with that of the country they've settled in. A pilot program by Nykiel-Herbert (2010) in New York used cultural responsive teaching practices to help Iraqi refugee students learn written English literacy as a tool to improve their oral story-telling abilities, which was highly valued in their culture. Whereas many Western classrooms promote written texts as the final product to aspire to, the teachers in this pilot program found that by showing students how writing notes could prepare them for more advanced and engaging storytelling, they became very invested in practicing written literacy skills. The teachers also practiced cultural responsiveness by allowing students to "copy" and assist each other with their work, thereby validating the collectivist learning values of the Iraqi students over the U.S.'s individualism and competition. Nykiel-Herbert (2010) sums up the findings of her study as follows:

> Hybridized cultural environments…in which the norms, values, and expectations inherent in our public education system provide space for the norms, values, and expectations of students from outside the majority culture, appear to positively affect these students' experience of the education process and their academic performance. (p. 13)

If we are truly dedicated to decolonizing English literacy instruction, we need to commit to unlearning everything we thought we knew about teaching and learning, and then re-learn in collaboration with our students who possess knowledges outside of the Western frame of reference. Furthermore, instructors from Western backgrounds will have to "acknowledge and recognize their own complicities in the process of knowledge production about these populations, thus unlearning

their privilege, and seeking to learn from the subaltern instead" (Rodrigues et al., 2019, p. 4). This will require constant and critical self-reflection (Freire, 1970/2000) and it may be useful to have a trusted mentor who can act as an accountability partner as we work to hold our commitment to our goals (DeCapua et al., 2018).

Considerations for English Literacy Instruction

Building Social Networks

It should be noted that learning is an affective process and a social practice that is both heightened by and relies on personal connections and community-building. The community-building aspect to language learning can be a significant motivator for students. I find this to be true in my own teaching context where students repeat the same course many times in order to continue building relationships with the friends they've made in class. Some literacy programs have taken advantage of this fact by prioritizing opportunities for community building in class; for example, a family literacy program in Australia was designed to focus on building social capital and support networks by including a shared meal between participants and instructors after each session (Carroll, 2017). Similarly, a workplace literacy program for Somali refugee workers in the U.S. found that participants' non-familial networks grew as a result of attending classes (Nwude & Zajicek, 2021). The social capital that refugee and immigrant adults can acquire from English literacy classes has impacts beyond a sense of community and belonging; these networks can help bridge gaps in social inequity by providing learners with better access to resources and support.

The act of attending English literacy classes alone is unlikely to solve adult refugee and immigrants' social and economic disadvantages. Instead, literacy programs need to be combined with additional services (Malicky & Norman, 1989). This is why many researchers such as Nakutnyy & Sterzuk (2018) and Osterling (2001) call for community schools that offer both literacy classes and social, wellness and other services. A study conducted at a community school in Pennsylvania found

that middle school-aged English language learners (ELLs) who were provided with holistic resources to meet all their basic needs, both academic and non-academic, outperformed their counterparts in the mainstream school (Ammar et al., 2021).

Collaborative Learning

Collectivism is a common thread between most refugee populations here in the U.S. For this reason, classroom collaboration is important from a cultural responsiveness standpoint – students may feel more comfortable working together in class if they come from a culture where literacy is socially mediated. Collaborative and cooperative teaching strategies can also be beneficial when it comes to learning outcomes. Especially when dealing with complex topics and concepts, collaboration allows for students to pool their prior knowledge and, in the context of English literacy, convey or understand meaning at a higher level than each individual would be able to on their own (Ewert, 2014). Group work can be particularly effective in the context of multi-level classrooms where higher-level students can help lower-level students construct meaning and communicate their thinking (Çekiç, 2010). Pappamihiel and Knight (2016) led a collaborative activity in a second grade class in an effort to engage an ELL who had been isolated because of his low English proficiency. This digital storytelling project required students in each group to assign themselves to a specific role and then work together to create a final product; as a result, "Not only was he [the ELL] engaged in the activities…, the other students were engaged with him—an essential benefit of this activity" (Pappamihiel & Knight, 2016, p. 278). Collaboration can also address typical logistical hiccups in the ESL classroom – things like catching up students who miss class, who didn't have time to complete homework assignments, or who join the course later on. A case study on Collaborative Strategic Reading found that adult students enjoy group work and find it useful when trying to comprehend texts (Lee, 2016). In a different case study, a young Sudanese refugee reported a preference for classes and instructors that made use of group activities (Nakutnyy & Sterzuk, 2018). Similarly,

Severinsen et al. (2018) identified the promotion of collaborative learning as one of six effective teaching strategies to increase motivation of adult literacy learners.

Native Language Instruction

Although there tends to be some disagreement among scholars around the incorporation of students' native languages in English language instruction, it may help adult ELLs to learn to read and write in their own languages(s) before moving on to English (Osterling, 2001). Based on their teaching experience, a group of Ugandan schoolteachers assert that "mother-tongue literacy" should be taught before introducing English literacy (Beach et al., 2020, p. 221). Additionally, one study of almost 500 adult English literacy learners in the U.S. found that basic reading comprehension and oral English language development saw more growth when students' native languages were integrated into instruction (Condelli et al., 2002). Practices like translanguaging (Hasan et al., 2020) and other uses of students' native languages in the classroom can help promote literacy, especially in the case of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) (Bigelow et al., 2017). D'Annunzio (1990) found bilingual instruction to be effective in a modified version of the Language Experience Approach; adult refugee and immigrant students' reading and writing scores increased significantly after only a few months of instruction. Even if they don't speak the same native language as their students, literacy programs with non-native English-speaking and foreign-born instructors may also contribute to improved learning outcomes. A class of adult learners in central Texas was successful in improving their written literacy skills after exchanging letters with foreign-born instructors – likely due to the instructors' ability to relate to their students' experiences, form an emotional connection with them, and provide a unique sense of support and belonging (Larrotta & Chung, 2020). Furthermore, many learners prefer to be taught by teachers who can communicate with them in their native languages. As evidence of this, a survey of parents of Latino K-12 students

in Virginia found that there was a clear want and need for English literacy classes with bilingual
teachers (Osterling, 2001).

Use of Media and Technology

Media and technology have increasingly been used as a tool for English language instruction.
Social media seems to be an effective medium for English literacy learning because of its relevant
nature and access to easy and efficient translation tools, as well as the way it allows for multilingual
texts (Kaur, 2016). It is increasingly common for refugees in the U.S. to use messaging apps such as
WhatsApp to communicate with family and friends both in their home countries and here in the U.S.
Some adult ESL classes already use this to their advantage, creating WhatsApp groups where
students can post messages and short responses to assignments as well as communicate with the
instructors (J. Weemaes, personal communication, October 24, 2021). For adult refugee and
immigrant learners who are job seekers, it may be effective to incorporate online job search strategies
with English literacy instruction. A pilot program with mostly Somali secondary school students in
Minnesota successfully incorporated both multilingual instruction and social media to facilitate
English literacy learning; students were asked to critically reflect on the representations of their home
cultures on the internet and express themselves through written posts on Facebook (Bigelow et al.,
2017). This particular approach, despite its effectiveness, required either an interpreter or a bilingual
instructor which is unfortunately impractical in many ESL teaching contexts. Fortunately, refugees
and immigrants can use different forms of media to learn English outside of the classroom as well. In
one example, a Syrian refugee in New Zealand found it most practical to practice her English literacy
skills in the form of text messages with her psychologist (Kaur, 2016). Television can also be an
impactful resource for language learning; a study of Sudanese refugees concluded that all participants
– both children and adults – used television to learn English, including print literacy and the Roman
alphabet via captions on the news (Perry & Moses, 2011).

Course Content and Suitable Materials

One of the biggest considerations for English literacy instructors is the content of their course. It's important to ensure that instructional content is relevant, age-appropriate, level-appropriate and culturally responsive while avoiding harmful stereotypes or tropes that are often imperialist in nature. Especially for adult learners, finding suitable materials can be really difficult; lower-level texts generally are geared towards younger audiences, and it's not uncommon for instructors to simplify content rather than simply modifying it (scaffolding) to meet students' English levels. Wurr (2002) notes the importance of written materials that are simple in form but complex in substance, while Freire (1970/2000) emphasizes the importance of codifications – that is, images or other realia to be reflected upon – that are "neither overly explicit or overly enigmatic" (p. 115). Additionally, standardized curricula often do not take students' unique backgrounds into account (Ewert, 2014). One way to gear curriculum towards students' true interests and language levels is by administering needs assessments (Osterling, 2001). In the context of family literacy programs, content is not as much of a concern because the aim is for parents to learn literacy skills so they can read with their young children and promote literacy at home; in this case, it would be acceptable to use children's books to facilitate parents' learning (Carroll, 2017). Vocational English classes also present a solution to this issue as materials can be gathered from students' workplaces. For example, students in a class geared towards food service workers might read a passage on the shelf life of various food items and then create an ordering plan for a restaurant (Ewert, 2014). In order to include all students' interests and real-life contexts, especially those of more introverted learners, Severinsen et al. (2018) recommends rotating students who choose a theme or share their stories with the class.

In some cases, it's best to allow students to generate their own content. In one pilot program, Iraqi students created their own texts based on stories they told verbally in class (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Because these Iraqi students possessed an intermediate level of verbal English skills, they

were able to generate relatively complex texts; in the case of true beginning-level students, the texts might be as simple as a phrase or basic dialogue. Texts that have been created by students support language learning because they are familiar and contextualized, therefore "facilitating the link between sound, symbol and meaning" (Auerbach, 1990, p. 165). Additionally, student-generated texts are one possible response to Osterling (2001)'s call for community-led and student-centered design (see the section titled "The Language Experience Approach" on page 20 of this paper).

Whether materials are student-generated or otherwise, it is important that an English class' content is tied to real-world experiences (Condelli et al., 2002; Malicky & Norman, 1989; Nakutnyy & Sterzuk, 2018; Severinsen et al., 2018). Freire (1970/2000) agrees that "the starting point" for educational content "must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (p. 95). From this perspective, content is not a collection of knowledges that a teacher simply presents to their students but rather, "the organized, systematized, and developed 're-presentation' to individuals of the things about which they want to know more" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 93). Additionally, because such content reflects students' worldviews, it is constantly changing (Freire, 1970/2000). One study of adult ESL literacy students found that learners developed more basic reading skills when their instructors made "outside" connections – for example, through "field trips, speakers, and real-life materials" (Condelli et al., 2002, p. 2). In another study, adult students used more knowledge-based strategies when reading familiar language materials rather than those less familiar and less predictable (Malicky & Norman, 1989). This is likely because adult students struggle to find the relevance and, therefore, the meaning of language if it is not contextualized with real-world connections. As Davidson and Wheat (1989) write: "…methods stemming from a bottom-up instructional model cause many adults to look upon learning as fragmented, confusing, and meaningless" (p. 343). Similarly, Huang (2013) suggests that adult learners feel more motivated when their learning is relevant to their lives.

Larrotta and Chung (2020) hypothesized that a pen pal program would be an effective way for adult students to make real-world connections while also improving their reading and writing skills. Over a 10-week period, adult students exchanged letters with ESL instructors in which they shared intimate details about their lives and experiences; at the end of the ten weeks, their ability to negotiate the flow of conversation, choose appropriate words and read carefully showed considerable improvement. In fact, Huang (2013) argues that "…adults have advantages over children in that they can make meaningful connections more easily between their life experiences and the language they are learning" (p. 11). It is important for teachers to give students space to make these meaningful connections so that they are invested in their learning. Especially for students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) who may lose motivation more easily, instructors should prioritize what's meaningful to learners when planning lessons (Severinsen et al., 2018).

Learning Assessments

Teachers might struggle with the question of how to assess adult students' English literacy learning in a fair and productive way. Unsurprisingly, there is little consensus among instructors when it comes to their preferred assessment strategies. A survey of adult literacy instructors in Australia supports this fact – results showed that teachers used a variety of different strategies including ongoing informal assessments, "learning to learn" assessments, participation assessments, and even no assessments at all (Moore, 2007, p. 28). Furthermore, most of the surveyed instructors reported using a variety of these strategies depending on the particular class and students they teach. Those that advocated for a lack of assessments argued that, at the pre-literacy and beginning literacy levels, "teaching and learning were far more pressing issues than assessment" (Moore, 2007, p. 29). However, Croydon (2005) maintains that it is important to track students' progress even at the pre-literacy level. The instructors in Moore's (2007) study suggest that informal assessments and continual feedback may be more appropriate for beginning literacy adult learners than end

assessments, likely because improvements in literacy skills are difficult to measure at the beginning

levels. Davidson and Wheat (1989) argue that adult learners should engage in self-assessments so

that they can monitor their own progress. At the beginning level of literacy this might mean

recording their handwriting and keeping track of how their word identification and spelling improve

over time. At the higher levels, adult students might record the number of pages or books they read

or keep journals to track their progress. In general, assessments in the form of projects rather than

standardized tests may be preferable because they "bring about a more humanistic and qualitative

perspective…which in turn motivates learners stuck in quantitative assessments dichotomy of pass or

fail" (Çekiç, 2010, p. 228). Alternatively, instructors may opt to ask their adult students how they

would like to be assessed, although not all students will feel comfortable giving feedback on this

topic. One focus group in Australia found that most adult learners preferred to defer to their

instructors in deciding assessment types (Moore, 2007). Especially if they have only been exposed to

teacher-student hierarchical classrooms in the past, some learners may view requests for student

input as a sign of incompetency on the instructor's part (Auerbach, 1990). This aligns with my

personal experience as an adult English instructor, as my attempts to survey low-level students on

their preferences for instruction in the past have yielded few constructive results.

<div align="center">**Approaches to English Literacy Learning**</div>

The Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) is a commonly used strategy for reading

development that "builds upon a learner's oral language skills and experiences in the world as the

foundation for reading and writing" (Huang, 2013, p. 11). Although this approach targets reading

skills most directly, it's also a powerful tool for students to develop skills in speaking, listening and

writing (Taylor et al., 1992). LEA is unique in that it "emphasizes writing as a social rather than

individual process" in which students work collaboratively to communicate meaning in written form

(Auerbach, 1990, p. 170). In LEA, students generate their own texts by discussing a topic orally –
oftentimes an experience shared in class – which is then transcribed by instructor. There are three
basic stages in LEA: before creating the text, during creation of the text, and after creating the text
(Nessel & Dixon, 2008). Before the text is generated, students spend time talking about a shared
experience such as a classroom activity or field trip. In this stage students speak and listen freely
without any assessment; the goal is to voice their ideas and opinions. When creating the account,
students work collaboratively to synthesize their thoughts into a succinct text. As students orate the
text, the instructor records it in written form. The instructor should read it back to the students so that
they can make any changes until a finalized text is decided upon. After the text is generated, students
will read it both chorally and individually as they begin to associate the written text with their oral
account. In subsequent lessons, students should engage in activities that encourage them to use the
text and the vocabulary wherein in a wide range of contexts.

In LEA, the instructor's role is more similar to a facilitator or co-learner rather than the
traditional "teacher." Since texts are student-generated, the instructor should defer to students'
interests, motivations and life experiences when considering the content of the course and the nature
of the shared experiences. I would recommend conducting needs assessments – informal or otherwise
– and that instructors involve students in the decision-making process about which field trips and
class experiences they would like. Once an activity or experience has been decided, instructors can
assist students in identifying and clarifying any new vocabulary. They can also facilitate the text
generation process by asking prompting questions (Huang, 2013) or by providing photographs or
other visual clues (Auerbach, 1990). Traditionally, teachers will record students' words verbatim as
they dictate the text, regardless of any potential errors. The idea behind this technique is that students
can focus on content while creating the text and self-correct any errors later (Taylor et al., 1992).
Additionally, these un-corrected texts serve as a useful tool for students to monitor their own

progress over time. However, in some cases it may be appropriate to correct grammatical errors in real time. Wurr (2002) notes that students who come from educational backgrounds in which grammatical accuracy is prioritized may be resistant to the idea of leaving errors uncorrected. Additionally, newcomer immigrants and refugees might be "more amiable to corrections from the teacher or fellow students" because they have invested less time in developing their English language skills; in contrast, students who have lived in the U.S. for an extended period of time "have years of experience successfully using nonstandard but intelligible forms with native speakers" (Wurr, 2002, p. 4). After the text has been generated, instructors should organize post-text activities that encourage learners to use the text and the accompanying new vocabulary and grammatical structures so as to cement their learning. Possible activities include, but are certainly not limited to: cloze activities with the text, categorizing vocabulary by letter or sound, and organizing scrambled sentences (Huang, 2013); creating a word bank of flash cards with new vocabulary (D'Annunzio, 1990); and composing a "word wall" of all relevant vocabulary including sight words (Oldrieve, 2012, p. 30).

Apart from their role as a facilitator and co-learner, an LEA instructor's main concern should be to create a supportive and agentic learning environment. Wurr (2002) asserts that this can be achieved by "actively listening and responding to ideas in a nonjudgmental way, and fostering an environment where mistakes can be made without an accompanying sense of failure" (p. 6). Encouraging students to take initiative and engage in "nondirective" learning is of utmost importance (D'Annunzio, 1990). Ideally, LEA instructors will support their students to take action and create change both on an individual and collective scale. Auerbach (1990) outlines numerous examples of this, including one learner who "became more active in her school's PTA" after writing about a similar topic in class, and a group of students that developed a newsletter for their housing project (p. 189).

Although LEA is often used with English literacy learners who can speak English at a foundational level, it can also be adapted for adult learners with little to no spoken English proficiency. Student-generated texts don't need to be long or structurally complex; even a collection of phrases or short sentences can make for adequate learning material. Still, instructors should be careful that the text is simple in structure but not in content "so as not to insult the intelligence of adult learners" (Wurr, 2002, p. 4). LEA can also be modified so that beginning English learners can create rich and meaningful texts despite their limited English proficiency. One option is to have bilingual instructors who can translate texts generated by students in one of their higher-proficiency languages (D'Annunzio, 1990). Once students have built up their vocabulary they can begin to generate texts in English. Fortunately, LEA can be highly effective in group learning environments (Wurr, 2002) where students can support each other and pool their knowledge while creating texts. Another way LEA can be modified for low-level students is by incorporating digital storytelling (DST) when generating texts (Pappamihiel & Knight, 2016). The resulting technique, coined the Digital Language Experience Approach (DLEA) by Pappamihiel and Knight (2016), uses images in conjunction with students' oral dictations and "provides the combination of visual and linguistic input that can help scaffold…their English language development" (p. 280). However, in some cases it may prove beneficial to spend time developing oral English abilities before introducing the written form (Croydon, 2005). Condelli et al. (2002) found that adult students with higher oral English skills saw more improvement in basic reading skills than those with less oral proficiency.

LEA is unique in the way it puts students' experiences and prior knowledge at the forefront of their learning. By encouraging students to create their own texts, LEA centers students' stories – therefore working to undo the Western influence inherent in most forms of English literacy instruction. Additionally, this approach challenges deficit theories that view English literacy learners as lacking in knowledge or intelligence (Huang, 2013). Especially for adult learners, it is essential to

employ approaches to teaching and learning that motivate students and build their confidence by validating their life experiences. Student-generated texts are key to accomplishing this as they are comprehensible in complexity and relevant to students' personal lives (Taylor et al., 1992). As Wurr (2002) states, "Students gain a sense of accomplishment since they are reading material that is self-generated and thus easily comprehended, as well as a sense of satisfaction working with materials that are personally meaningful" (p. 5). Additionally, adults with limited literacy skills may experience feelings of failure or insecurity around learning (Wurr, 2002). Fortunately, LEA can work to combat these feelings because "learners' self-worth is reinforced when they see their own language in print" (Nessel & Dixon, 2008, p. 14). This approach also puts students in charge of their own learning when they decide the class content and materials, thus encouraging them to take agency in the classroom.

An added benefit of LEA is that it allows students to see how whole texts are formed rather than trying to understand decontextualized reading and writing skills (Huang, 2013). Student-generated texts should be written for "real purposes and audiences" and communicate meaning in the form of "semantically whole texts" (Auerbach, 1990, p. 170). As opposed to the decontextualized texts associated with many language classes, contextualized language is often preferred by learners. As evidence of this, a case study in Canada identified field trips and other learning activities that were relevant, contextualized and group-focused as a priority for one Sudanese mother (Nakutnyy & Sterzuk, 2018). LEA includes all of these aspects, which suggests that this approach might be uniquely appropriate for adult refugee and immigrant learners. Furthermore, LEA is an effective approach that can result in improved learning outcomes; one study showed a dramatic increase in test scores after only a few months of LEA instruction (D'Annunzio, 1990).

The Whole Language Approach

The Whole Language Approach (WLA) is a broad philosophy to language learning that includes more specific techniques such as LEA. As the name would suggest, WLA is based on the idea that language should be taught as a whole (Çekiç, 2010). On the surface, this means that the four skills are of equal importance and therefore should be learned simultaneously; that is, learning is not linear. However, the idea of a whole language goes much farther than that. WLA places notable value on meaning, the development of learning strategies, authentic materials and social interaction in learning. As in LEA, WLA encourages student leadership in the classroom in an effort to move away from the banking model of education criticized by Paulo Freire. Çekiç (2010) describes it as such: "The principle of knowledge in the WLA is that it is socially constructed rather than received or discovered, in this way the WLA emphasizes on students choice and collaboration" (p. 227). WLA also avoids the immediate correction of errors so as not to interrupt fluency and meaning (Çekiç, 2010).

Malicky and Norman (1989) concluded that the Whole Language Approach is viable after their study of adult learners at the beginning literacy level in Canada. Croydon (2005) also makes an argument for the use the meaning-based approaches described in WLA; however, she makes it clear that English literacy students learn best when they are introduced to a mix of meaning-based and parts-to-whole approaches. This balance will be unique to each student and should be decided according to their learning preferences. Parts-to-whole approaches differ from WLA because they break down language into letters, sounds, etc. (Croydon, 2005). Nessel and Dixon (2008) support the use of meaning-based approaches before introducing students to "systematic reading instruction" so that they can build a foundational familiarity with the English language and its print form (p. 29).

Suggestions for Teaching

General Suggestions

- Exposure is key to English literacy learning. Students need to hear, see and practice with new language in a range of contexts and over an extended period of time (Croydon, 2005). Vocabulary and other language structures should be recycled into many different activities as a way to review until students can easily recall them.

- It's important to teach basic reading skills along with specific language features (Huang, 2013). Reading skills, whether introduced explicitly or implicitly, equip students with the resources to understand the meaning of texts beyond the surface level and further develop their language skills.

- Realia, or tangible objects, are a strong tool in the English literacy classroom. They can be used to scaffold learning and also to give context to what students are discussing in class. For example, teachers can present students with images or objects and then ask them prompting questions such as Who, What, Where, When, and Why questions (Wurr, 2002). The responses to these questions can be used as a student-generated text or simply as a conversational activity to review vocabulary.

- Nessel and Dixon (2008) recommend that students interact in small groups at "activity centers" that instructors set up in the classroom (p. 11). These activity centers might include a collection of images, songs and other audio tapes, videos, reading materials such as magazines or books, or other objects that students may choose from to spark conversation and serve as the basis for a reading or writing activity.

Specific Needs of Beginning Literacy Students

- Croydon (2005) differentiates between pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate and non-Roman alphabet literate students. Pre-literate students speak an oral language with no written form,

whereas non-literate and semi-literate students speak a language for which there is a written form but they have no or limited familiarity with it. Non-Roman alphabet literate students are literate in a language that uses a writing system other than the Roman alphabet. It may be useful to familiarize yourself with the category that each student falls into, as the specific needs of each differ. In this paper, all of these learners are generally referred to as beginning literacy students.

- Beginning literacy students may be unfamiliar with graphic organizers commonly used in the classroom such as graphs, maps, and charts, and therefore may struggle to understand them (Croydon, 2005). In this case, it will be necessary for the instructor to teach students how to read such schematics; in the meantime, instructors should consider using other tools to support literacy learning. However, once students understand how to make sense of them, simple grids can be very useful in beginning literacy instruction. For example, students might choose from slips of paper with vocabulary words and place them in the correct position in a grid, effectively practicing literacy without actually having to write.

- Beginning literacy students may need to learn basic literacy skills such as holding a pen or pencil, making shapes, tracing, reading from left to right and from bottom to top in English (even students literate in non-Roman alphabet languages may need help with this), and other organizational and study skills (Croydon, 2005).

- It can be helpful to incorporate Total Physical Response (TPR) and tactile-kinesthetic activities into instruction. For example, students who are learning the Roman alphabet sometimes benefit from using physical letters such as blocks, magnets or foam to identify letters and spell out words.

- Label everything! If students cannot yet write their own labels, instructors can assist them. As Nessel and Dixon (2008) assert, "The intent is not to teach recognition of the written words

but rather to familiarize students with the look of English. Seeing the labels, students can acquire the concept of a written language in a natural manner, just as native English speakers often acquire the concept of reading through noting signs and labels around them" (p. 23). Labelling objects so that students become familiar with the way written English looks is not the same as teaching new vocabulary with the aim of students understanding and remembering the meaning; as such, instructors should not be concerned about over-labelling. Eventually, the labels can be used for vocabulary practice as well.

- Literacy learning requires consistency and practice. It may help to integrate a number of classroom routines that encourage students to practice simple reading and writing tasks every day (Croydon, 2005). For example, students might sign in by checking off their names on an attendance sheet, select their name tags out of a pile each day, or write their names and the date on every assignment.

  o Before students can write out their own personal information, instructors can write them on slips of paper so that students can become familiar with how they look. Students can ask each other bits of personal information and hold up the slips of paper with the correct response. Eventually, students can practice tracing the words and then writing them on their own.

- When teaching literacy at the beginning level, it's important to include a mix of meaning-based approaches and systemic reading instruction. Generally, parts-to-whole instruction such as sounds, syllables, parts of speech, and more, should be introduced after students are able to readily identify a selection of written words (Nessel & Dixon, 2008).

Building Vocabulary

- Instructors should help learners establish a personalized vocabulary list based on the words that students are curious about or know will be helpful in their lives (Nessel & Dixon, 2008).

Consider including some sight words (i.e. common words that readers should be able to recognize instantly) in that list so that students will be able to read longer phrases later on. In-class activities and at-home assignments can be organized so that students can identify the words they want to add to their vocabulary list. For example, students might point out objects in the classroom or their home that they want to learn, or they could take pictures during a class field trip to add labels and captions later on.

- Once students have a foundational vocabulary list, they will need to practice using these words over and over and in a multitude of contexts (Nessel & Dixon, 2008). For example, students can search for the words in other texts such as magazines and online posts or use these words to label an image and/or generate their own texts. In order to become familiar with how these words sound in the context of full sentences, teachers can read a story using students' vocabulary lists and point out the key words as they read. Students can also play games such as Go Fish or Bingo with their vocabulary lists (Croydon, 2005). These games can be modified to be more or less difficult – for example, instead of crossing out specific words on a Bingo card, students might be asked to cross out words that begin with a certain letter or sound.

- Croydon (2005) outlines some of the main types of vocabulary practice activities such as sorting, categorizing, ordering, sequencing and matching. These activities can be done individually or in groups and have nearly infinite variations. For example, if students want to practice listening with their new vocabulary, they can circle the words their partner says from a list. As an added challenge, students might choose from minimal pairs in order to practice sound discrimination.

- For students at the beginning literacy level, instructors can support them in generating their own texts by modelling simple grammatical structures that students can replicate with words

in their vocabulary list. Once students understand the grammatical pattern, they can create

their own phrases and sentences (Nessel & Dixon, 2008). Huang (2013) recommends asking

learners to reorganize scrambled sentences from student-generated texts so that they can

continue practicing these language patterns.

- In order to move away from the deficit model, consider asking students to practice

  vocabulary by identifying the words they *do* know rather than those they don't. Provide

  opportunities for self-directed learning and collaboration by encouraging students to share

  their personalized vocabulary lists with one another when working on activities

  (D'Annunzio, 1990).

- Oldrieve (2012) suggests that teachers compose a "word wall" for the classroom with all

  relevant vocabulary and sight words that students can add to and refer back to.

Instructional Goals and Example Lesson Plans

As an English language instructor, I feel that it's essential to guide adult learners in the

development of their literacy skills in a way that is not only effective but also intentionally disruptive

to the colonial structures of power that work to uphold the English language and whiteness as

superior to other languages, ethnicities and funds of knowledge. However, it's important to note that

I am a white, Western-born woman and therefore not in the position to create "a liberating education"

on behalf of my students (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 54). For these reasons, I have designed the following

lessons plans in such a way that the content is determined by students' unique needs and interests,

and that the instructor subordinates their knowledge to that of their students. It is not my expectation

for these lessons plans to be suitable as-is for all classes of learners; rather, instructors should

understand that the content and their approach should be modified and personalized to each group of

students, with priority given to input and preferences provided by said students.

The main considerations I have taken into account in this teaching plan are as follows:

1. Expose students to content (e.g. vocabulary and reading texts) that is uniquely relevant and engaging to them. Relevant content should be of immediate interest to and practical for the student, as well as both age- and level-appropriate. The most relevant content is often student-generated.

2. Provide students with ample opportunities to share their own stories, perspectives and experiences in the classroom and beyond. The goal of equipping students with English literacy skills is so that they can communicate their own thinking, not regurgitate information that has been fed to them.

3. Focus on those activities which are highly participatory and collaborative in nature. Activities that incorporate tactile and kinesthetic learning can help students acquire and retain literacy skills.

4. Create a learning environment in which students not only are allowed agency but feel encouraged to actively take agency for themselves. Students should have decision-making power in all areas of their learning and feel that this agency can extend outside of the classroom as well. The instructor's role is that of a co-learner or guide rather than an expert or authority figure. As such, teachers should support their students in building the skills they need to engage in self-directed learning.

5. As the instructor, take time to explore the funds of knowledge and beliefs around teaching and learning specific to your students and their cultural backgrounds. Engage in discussion with students and use these findings to inform your teaching as much as possible.

I've outlined a number of activities below, geared towards adult immigrant and refugee students ranging from the pre-beginner to high beginner levels. Please note that most of these activities will need to be covered over a period of days or even weeks in order for students to retain the material.

The same material will need to be recycled over time and in a variety of contexts while slowly

adding new information. Check in with students to determine whether they need to continue

reviewing material or if they're losing interest and are ready to move on to the next thing – there is

no standard or ideal time frame for learning.

Activity 1: Learning the Alphabet with Names

Level: Pre-Beginner	
Description	**Rationale**
Introduce letters of the alphabet – capital letters followed by lowercase letters. Ss can trace letters while saying them, then choose the appropriate letter from foam cutouts or magnets, then play bingo. *Note: When tracing, take time to explain to Ss that in English we write from top to bottom and left to right. Demonstrate the hand motions they can use to write letters with ease.*	Ss retain more info when they use the same information in a variety of contexts and by participating in a combination of activities. Tracing, foam cutouts and bingo help with tactile-kinesthetic learning.
Once both capital and lowercase are introduced, play matching memory game to match capital letters to their lowercase equivalents.	Memory game can be either on an electronic device or with slips of paper. Uses technology to support learning.
Show Ss how to write their names. Point to each letter in their name while saying the letter, have students pick that same letter from foam or magnetic alphabet until their entire first name is spelled out. Ss then write their names on their own.	Start with words that are most familiar to Ss (ex: their name). Continue practicing differentiating, listening to, and writing letters to reinforce learning.
Ss introduce themselves to the class by saying their name and spelling it aloud (if appropriate, Ss can practice the phrase "My name is ___" while introducing themselves). Other Ss practice spelling the speaking S's name by listening, then the speaking S can spell their name on the board for other Ss to check.	Encourages direct S to S interaction and teaches a common spoken phrase ("My name is ____.") Even if students aren't learning to write the entire phrase yet, learning the spoken form of this phrase can help put them in a better position to learn how to write it later. Ss continue practicing listening to and writing letters while learning each other's names.
Once all names are written, Ss practice grouping them by letter. Ss can work in small groups to organize them alphabetically or match names to others that begin with the same letter, have the same number of total letters, or any other similarities they can identify.	Using the new information (classmates' names) in a range of different contexts helps cement their learning of letters and start matching these combinations of letters to how they sound. Ss remain engaged because they are working with the same material but by doing new things.

	Group work leverages all Ss' knowledges and strength so that they learn from each other. Leave activities open ended so that Ss can take charge of how they learn and what they notice about the written language.
Ss create name tags for themselves to wear in class. Ss walk around introducing themselves to their classmates, helping each other connect the pronunciation of their names with the spelling in English.	The goal of seeing each other's name tags is not to learn how to *read* the names, but rather become familiar with the look of written English and start to associate certain letters and letter combinations with their corresponding sounds. Learning classmates' names is also important for creating a sense of community between Ss. By teaching each other how to pronounce their names, Ss get used to playing the role of the teacher in the classroom.
Once Ss are comfortable spelling their own names, ask them to sign themselves in on an attendance list each day (if appropriate) and/or write their names at the top of each paper they write on. Eventually, this can include writing the date, other personal information, how they feel that day (for example, after a lesson on emotions Ss might write 1-2 words to describe how they are feeling each class as a way for the T to check in with them), etc.	Basic literacy routines help Ss practice scanning for information and writing using material that they are most familiar with. Regular routines like this can also serve as a record of Ss' learning over time – you can see how their handwriting, spelling, etc. improves each class.

Activity 2: Basic Vocabulary

Level: Pre-Beginner	
Description	**Rationale**
Assist Ss in writing post-it note labels for key items in their classroom, home or outside environment. Ss choose which words they'd like to learn, but limit it to ~15 new words.	Students point out which items they would like to learn how to say/spell. Start to develop key vocab and sight words.
Ss stick foam letters under labels, matching the letters and differentiating between capital and lowercase.	Matching letters in a contextual scenario helps cement learning and engages Ss; boosts confidence and interest to see how learning these letters translates into words.
Ss stand next to an item that starts with/contains the letter "a," etc. or any other feature. Then have Ss walk around in pairs, saying the words for different objects aloud.	Ss continue to differentiate letters and associate the written letter with its name in English. Standing up and walking over to objects rather than just reading written words on slips of paper increases engagement with the vocabulary. Pair work is useful so that Ss can help each other if

	they get stuck on a word. Ss begin to associate the written words with how they sound.
Once Ss feel fairly comfortable with the new words, write them on a list on the board. Ss can use this as a reference as they write the words on a piece of paper. Ask Ss to circle the words they remember how to read.	This serves as a kind of pre-assessment to see how many words Ss can remember so far. Boost Ss' confidence by circling the words they do recognize as opposed to those they don't.
T takes pictures of the objects to use in a PowerPoint presentation in the following class. T writes a short story or series of short sentences using the vocabulary Ss identified. T reads the text aloud for Ss while displaying a labeled picture of each vocabulary word. T points out the picture/spelling as they say the story aloud.	Ss start to hear and see the vocabulary words in context of longer phrases/sentences. This helps them contextualize what they're learning and familiarize themselves with the sound of English grammar. Images serve as a visual clue to support their learning.
Ss work in small groups to match pictures to the written words – could be made into a game such as bingo or the memory game. Pictures could be posted on the wall and students stick the correct labels to each image. If Ss feel confident enough, they can write out the labels on their own from memory.	More practice with the vocabulary in different contexts, Ss have an opportunity to write as well as read. Games increase engagement.
Like before, Ss write the same list of words on a new piece of paper and circle the ones they can read.	Ss can visualize their progress by comparing the number of words they recognize after additional practice. Encourages Ss to self-monitor their progress. Ss will be more motivated if their improvement is evident.

Activity 3: Grocery Store 1

Level: Beginner	
Description	**Rationale**
Class walks to a nearby grocery store to learn English words for common foods. Ss walk around the store in pairs, pointing out foods they already know in English, saying them aloud and writing them in a notebook (if they know how to spell them).	Ss are able to contextualize the language by seeing the physical food items in the grocery store. Hopefully, going on a small field trip is more engaging than sitting in class and learning from a textbook. Asking Ss to identify the words they already know works against the deficiency model by encouraging Ss to see how much they already know about the topic. This also serves as a warm-up activity before getting into new material.

Ss walk around the store again, this time collecting the food items they are unfamiliar with and want to learn in a basket (maybe put a max on this – for example, 5-10 new foods per pair). Once each pair of Ss has 5-10 items, they bring them to the T and T tells Ss the names for these items in English. Ss write them down in their notebooks and then return the items to their place in the store, saying the name of each item aloud to their partner as they do so. T should also write down these new words for the next activity.

Ss get to identify which new vocabulary they are interested in learning most. Because each pair of Ss picks a number of new words that is then incorporated into a larger vocabulary list for the whole class, all Ss' interests are represented. Working in pairs also helps shyer Ss feel comfortable expressing the words they want to learn.

For the next class period, T prepares printed photos of the new words that Ss learned at the grocery store. Note that some Ss' new words may be already familiar to other Ss. That's okay. Ss walk around matching the words in their notebooks to the corresponding images, and also may write down any additional food items they are unfamiliar with.

Ss see the words they were exposed to in the previous lesson, thus reinforcing their learning. They also have an opportunity to add additional new words to this vocabulary list. By re-reading the words they wrote down last class, they start to match the spoken words to their written form.

Ss work in pairs again. Each pair receives printed pictures of each food item and written labels. Ss work together to match labels with the picture, then write the English word for the food on each picture (like a caption).

As Ss are still becoming familiar with the written form of new food items, they begin by matching the written form with the picture. Then, they further their learning by spelling and writing out the captions themselves.

T introduces the difference between a fruit, vegetable, grain, meat, or any other food category relevant to the food items Ss chose at the grocery store. In pairs, Ss organize the labeled pictures into categories.

Ss learn food-related vocabulary that they can use to continue reinforcing these new food items. Categorizing the items cements learning by using the language in new contexts.

T writes the word for each category on a whiteboard. Each pair of Ss places all the pictures of food items for one category under the word written on the board (for example, one pair puts up all the vegetables, another fruits, etc.). Once all the pictures are up on the board, T points to each picture in each category asking, What is this? Is it a fruit/vegetable/etc.?

Ss have done a lot of pair work at this point. Switching to work as a whole class helps make sure that more Ss learning preferences are met. T asking questions aloud to the class helps Ss become familiar with how this food vocabulary might be used in the context of complete sentences. Ss start to hear common grammar structures.

T introduces the statements, I like / I don't like ____. T demonstrates by telling Ss some foods from the list that they do / do not like. Then, Ss pair up and tell each other which foods they do / do not like. Ss can point to the picture of the

Again, Ss are introduced to full sentences and simple grammatical concepts. Ss use the same food vocabulary in another context. Working on spoken fluency first should help Ss feel more

food they're talking about as they make these statements.	comfortable practicing the written form of these sentences later.
Finally, Ss work individually to write a list of 3-5 food items they do and do not like. Ss practice writing out whole sentences.	Ss practice writing out the phrases that they have been using in class.

Activity 4: Grocery Store 2

Level: Beginner	
Description	**Rationale**
T brings one of their favorite dishes for the class to share. T describes the dish and all necessary ingredients, then Ss try the dish. T asks, Do you like it? Elicit from students whether they liked the dish or not.	T starts by sharing about themselves, therefore establishing a level of trust with Ss. This also serves as a way to introduce Ss to the lesson. By asking whether Ss like the dish, T is reviewing a grammar concept covered in the previous lesson.
T asks Ss about their favorite dishes to cook. Ss have a few minutes to think of their favorite dish and the ingredients needed to prepare it. Then, they share out loud – they should say the ingredients they know in English in English, but any others can be said in their home language. Other Ss and T work together to translate these words. T writes the dish and ingredients for each S on the board; Ss should write down the ingredients for their own dishes in their notebooks.	Ss get to share about themselves and aspects of their home culture. Ss have an opportunity to share what they already know by using some English, but should also feel comfortable not knowing some of the ingredients in English. Working together to translate any other ingredients puts Ss in charge of their own learning / in the role of the teacher. This also signals that their home languages are welcome in the classroom if it will help them communicate. Ss get a chance to see these ingredients in written form and write the words themselves.
T introduces the sentence, I need ____. Ss work in pairs, telling their partners which ingredients they need to make their dish. Then, Ss write the full sentences in their notebook. T asks each S to share aloud with the class which ingredients they need.	Ss learn a new verb – *to need*. Ss continue practicing the new vocabulary in the context of a full sentence. Ss become familiar speaking the sentences aloud before attempting to write them down. Sharing what they wrote aloud encourages Ss to read sentences that should be very familiar at this point.
Class goes to a grocery store and Ss collect all the ingredients from their list in a shopping basket. When they've found all the necessary ingredients, Ss bring their baskets to the T and point out each ingredient, saying it aloud in English. T purchases all Ss' ingredients.* *This part of the lesson requires that the English literacy program and/or instructor has*	Ss continue practicing the new vocabulary by reading their shopping list and picking out the appropriate items at a store. In the case of packaged items and spices, being at the store will give Ss a chance to become even more familiar with these words in their written form. They may have to match what's written in their notebooks with what's written on a package.

access to funding in order to purchase supplies. However, the lesson can be modified so that it doesn't include grocery shopping.	
Back in class, Ss write the names of all the ingredients they purchased at the store. Ss organize their ingredients in alphabetical order, then group together those ingredients with the same number of letters.	Continued practice writing the same vocabulary. Use a wide variety of activities to further cement learning.
T asks Ss, Who has a/n _____? Ss with that ingredient in front of them raise their hands.	Spoken practice.
Ss take their ingredients home to prepare their favorite dish to share with the class – potluck!	Ss get to share their culture and their food preferences with the class. Builds community.
After sharing the food their classmates have created, Ss write about the dishes they liked. T demonstrates the possessive *'s* first: I like [student name]'s dish. Then Ss write this same sentence with the dishes they liked, and share aloud with the class.	This acts as a review of language Ss learned in a past lesson: I like _____. However, it also builds on this knowledge by introducing a new grammar concept, the possessive *'s*. Ss see how languages builds on itself to create meaning.
Note: For more advanced Ss or as additional practice, T can teach the difference between count and noncount nouns, and/or ask Ss to write the quantity of each ingredient they need. Ss can also learn the difference between I need *and* I have *so that they can talk and write about the ingredients in full sentences after they've been purchased.*	

Activity 5: Take a Walk (Language Experience Approach in Action)

Level: High Beginner	
Description	**Rationale**
Go on a walk with Ss – this could be to a destination such as a park, or just around the neighborhood. Ask S what they are seeing as you walk. Have Ss either draw a picture or take a photo of something that grabs their attention.	Walking is an active form of learning that may engage some Ss more than sitting in a classroom. Asking Ss about what they see as they walk serves as a kind of needs assessment to determine what vocabulary they already know and what they want to learn. Ss take a picture of something that interests them, so they get to choose the focus of the lesson's content.
Back in the classroom, discuss the photos with the Ss. What do they see? Describe the photos. Why did they want to take a picture of it? As	Ss generate reading materials based on what they say to the T. By working with S-generated texts that should be familiar to them, Ss' energy

the Ss are talking, write down some key sentences (3-5) and read them back to them – is this what they said? Is it a good summary of what they see in the picture?	is focused on the new info (letters and sounds) rather than trying to understand the text itself. Reading back their sentences and asking if it's true to how they feel gives a sense of agency – T not speaking for them (could misinterpret what they said).
If yes, write the first sentence on the board so the Ss can see. Ask Ss to read the sentence, assisting them as needed. Ss writes down each word on slips of paper, shuffles them, and then puts them in the correct order – reading aloud as they do so. Repeat all of the above for each sentence (most likely over the course of multiple class sessions). Once all sentences have been reviewed, Ss write each sentence on slips of paper and organize them in the correct order.	Using the same text in a variety of ways and using a combination of different learning styles helps new info stick. Scaffolding learning so that Ss continue to add to their learning until they've produced the final text. Each smaller segment should be fully understood by Ss before moving on to the next thing and adding complexity.
Ss and T read the entire passage to each other a number of times and work through any tricky sound combinations, spelling exceptions, etc. together. Once Ss feel very comfortable reading the passage, they write the paragraph in its entirety under the drawing or photo from their walk and keep it to refer back to.	Ss and T are co-learners in this process. Work through all questions at Ss' pace and allow Ss to lead the direction of the instruction; Ss are in control of their own learning. Ss keep their final product not only to use in later lessons, but also as a record of what they've learned and achieved → boost confidence.
If appropriate, this passage can be used to learn aspects of grammar in addition to spelling and sounds. Ss can make revisions to what they initially said if they notice grammatical errors.	Ss self-correct and make own revisions (can do peer reviews if there is more than one S); the process of noticing and self-correcting cements learning.

Conclusion

Although many organizations in the Bay Area offer free English classes to refugees and immigrants at a variety of levels, very few offer beginning *literacy* classes targeted at those students who are not familiar with the English alphabet. Students whose language(s) use a different writing system and/or those who are not literate in their own language(s) are at a particular disadvantage. At my last teaching position in the San Francisco Bay Area, our beginning class included a brief review of the alphabet in the first one or two class sessions but did not focus on literacy from the beginning stages; instead, the curriculum assumed that learners are familiar with the English alphabet. For

many students, this was true; however, each term there were a number of interested students who would be left out of our course offerings because our classes did not account for those who are unfamiliar with the English alphabet.

Unfortunately, I found it difficult to find any organization in the Bay Area that offers such a class free of charge. Due to limited funding, many ESL programs are not able to hold separate beginning literacy classes for the minority of interested students who need them. This is concerning because it means that these potential students, who already face additional barriers due to their limited English literacy, do not have the opportunity to participate in classes and overcome some of these barriers. Aside from feelings of rejection, being excluded from ESL classes may impact their ability to secure employment, navigate processes such as submitting housing applications and opening bank accounts, become citizens and participate in their communities in a number of other ways. For these reasons, I think it's important that ESL programs begin to prioritize beginning literacy classes for adult immigrants and refugees who would benefit from them – but how?

From what I've learned in my past position at a Bay Area nonprofit organization, funding is the main issue. Organizations can't justify holding classes for a small handful of students on such a tight budget. Additionally, ESL teachers often aren't adequately trained on how to teach the alphabet and the basics of reading and writing to adults. Creating a successful beginning literacy program in the Bay Area would likely require a collaborative effort on the part of multiple organizations who serve low-income refugees and immigrants. A plan of action might look like this:

1. Coordinate across multiple organizations to determine the true number of clients and/or students who would benefit from a beginning-level English literacy course catered toward those students who are not yet familiar with the English alphabet. Conduct surveys to illustrate why there is a need and how this kind of course offering would be uniquely valuable.

2. Request additional funding to cover the costs of the course.

    a. It might make sense to propose a collaborative project between several agencies, as mentioned in #1. This would help solve the issue of low enrollment numbers since there would be access to multiple networks of clients (i.e. potential students) and individual donors. Agencies would also be able to share best practices, support each other to meet students' needs outside of ESL instruction, and pool resources.

    b. Part of the funds might come from public funding sources focused on civics education and/or citizenship preparation, since the ability to read and write in English is a requirement of the U.S. citizenship test.

    c. Private funders might be ideal since they are less likely to request as much "proof" of students' learning outcomes. Most public sources of funding use standardized tests to determine learning achievements, but learning to read and write in a new language can be a very slow process that does not necessarily follow standardized benchmarks.

3. Create and offer in-depth training for instructors around beginning English literacy instruction for adult refugees and immigrants. Training should include not only practical suggestions for teaching, but also a self-reflective aspect in which instructors examine their preconceptions about written literacy and beginning literacy students.

My hope is that this paper might serve as a general guide for the trainings mentioned in #3, as well as inform the creation of curriculum for beginning level English literacy courses. Because of the Western values implicit in written literacy instruction – values that view oral language as less than written language – and the history of English as a tool to force Western beliefs on and oppress others, I feel it's our responsibility as English literacy instructors to recognize this history and actively work to avoid perpetuating these harmful impacts in our own instruction. Additionally, I feel we have a lot to learn about learning from our students themselves – another reason to shift the Western teacher-

student hierarchy to a co-learner relationship where students exercise a high level of agency and decision-making power in the classroom. In an effort to move towards instruction that is both more effective and less problematic, instructors should place value on learners' prior knowledge and co-create materials informed by their cultural backgrounds and motivations for learning. Of course, this is just the start – I don't intend to imply that the sample lesson plans in this paper represent a fully decolonized form of English literacy instruction. However, for those white and Western-born instructors who want to start to move away from teaching models that uphold Western values and colonial power structures, I hope this paper provides some insight into how we might be able to take those first steps. As you continue to explore this topic, I encourage you to read articles by non-white and non-Western researchers and philosophers and engage in discussion with students and fellow instructors from these backgrounds, as they can provide much more insight than I ever can.

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