



# LESLLA

Literacy Education and  
Second Language Learning for Adults  
(LESLLA): Bridging Theory and Practice

Nicole Pettitt, Raichle Farrelly, and Allegra Elson (Eds.)

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

LESLLA – Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults – is an international forum of researchers and practitioners who share an interest in the second language (L2) and literacy development of immigrant- and refugee-background adults who are at emergent stages of reading and writing – in any language, including their first language(s). Many have experienced interruptions in formal, school-based learning in their home countries, or have been denied access to such opportunities altogether. Since 2005, LESLLA has gathered each year to share multidisciplinary, multilingual research, pedagogical practices, and education and language policy papers related to this population of L2 adult emergent readers and writers.

The 2019 convening, hosted by Literacy Pittsburgh, marked an important milestone: the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual LESLLA Symposium. From August 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> 2019, 150 LESLLA researchers and practitioners from ten countries gathered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (U.S.) to continue this important work. Countries represented included Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Finland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Somalia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Symposium organizing committee included Allegra Elson (Chair), Maria Polinsky (Co-Chair), Lori Como, Sara Cole, Cheryl Garcia, Nicole Pettitt, and Mary Tremonte. We also acknowledge the support of 21 volunteers, six proposal reviewers, the Mayor of Pittsburgh (who declared August 28, 2019 “Literacy education and second language learning for adults day”), as well as Burlington English, University of Michigan Press, the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy (Penn State), and Immigrant Services and Connections, whose support made this symposium possible. Thirty papers, 12 posters, 12 workshops, and two plenaries were presented.

Here, we are pleased to present the proceedings from the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual LESLLA Symposium. These seven double-blind peer-reviewed papers represent a broad range of LESLLA questions and issues, with myriad implications for practice, policy, and future scholarship. Several authors provide explicit guidance for LESLLA classroom practice: DeCapua and Marshall address teaching the academic language of *defining* in English—an important academic skill for making

knowledge claims; Marderness provides multiple strategies for facilitating multi-level collaboration in classrooms with LESLLA learners; and Slakk and Peyton delineate a seven-step approach to workplace literacy development for LESLLA learners.

Other authors share scholarship with implications for educational programming and/or classroom practice: Herrera Pentón's qualitative case study on Spanish L1 literacy programming for Latinx LESLLA learners in the U.S. and Tammelin-Laine, Vaarala, Savolainen and Bogdanoff's case studies on LESLLA learners' digital literacy practices in Finland.

Finally, Hauber-Özer and Ramos's action research at a university-based teacher education program in the U.S. provides insights on preparing preservice teachers to work with refugee-background language learners, and Kaiper-Marquez's multi-year critical ethnographic study with domestic workers in South Africa asks readers to (re)consider how discourses across contexts (work, home, media, etc.) create and reinforce the notions of "education" as "*English* education," and "literacy" as "*English* literacy," thus erasing the multilingual and multiliteracies competencies of learners in her study.

We are grateful to the authors and blind reviewers for their time and abundant dedication to seeing these proceedings through to completion, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are confident that teachers, teacher-educators, researchers, and the LESLLA populations they serve will benefit from these authors' work, and we look forward to further dialogue at the next LESLLA symposium.

Nicole Pettitt, Raichle Farrelly, Allegra Elson, Co-Editors

## TO DEFINE IS TO KNOW

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### **Abstract**

Educators are immediately aware of the linguistic, literacy, and workplace or course material challenges that LESLLA learners face. Less readily apparent are the challenges such learners face when encountering school-based tasks and their associated ways of thinking. Because familiarity with such tasks and ways of thinking are built from an early age in formal education, teachers frequently do not realize that the tasks themselves, as well as the ways of thinking, are bewildering to LESLLA learners. To take one example, when a teacher or standardized test question asks in one form or another, “What is X?”, learners are expected to provide salient characteristics, functions, and categories appropriate to the given term or concept. However, questions that ask for explicit definitions are not common in informal settings. LESLLA learners come from backgrounds of informal learning and often struggle to engage in age-appropriate formal education. Thus, school-based tasks and ways of thinking, such as defining, are largely unfamiliar to them and must be explicitly taught, just like language and emergent literacy skills. In this paper, we explore how to do so, using the teaching of defining as an extended example. Once LESLLA learners have developed this skill, they can apply it across classroom, workplace training and, licensing preparation settings, all of which require them to define terms and concepts specific to their training or course work.

LESLLA learners have been receiving growing attention over the last decade or so (e.g., Kurvers, 2015; Pettitt & Tarone, 2015; Shapiro, Farrelly, & Curry, 2018). Nevertheless, research-based recommendations for effective pedagogy remain minimal. In addition, most research on pedagogical practices has focused on two major areas: (1) developing LESLLA learners' alphabetic print literacy skills, as found, for instance, in the annual proceedings published by LESLLA; and (2) developing work-related content knowledge in tandem with proficiency in the language of the host country (e.g., Thomas & Grünhage-Monetti, 2019). As this paper illustrates, there is another key avenue for inquiry that has been overlooked.

When educators encounter LESLLA learners, they quickly realize the linguistic, literacy, and workplace challenges that these learners face. Less readily apparent are the challenges LESLLA learners face when attempting to engage in school-based tasks and their associated ways of thinking. These constitute new habits of mind for LESLLA learners, habits that are developed through full participation in Western-style formal education (Berry et al., 2011; Flynn, 2007; Gauvain & Munroe, 2009).

### Background

We have argued previously in our work that these decontextualized, school-based tasks and associated ways of thinking are a major hurdle LESLLA learners confront in formal classrooms and in training settings that prepare them for certifying or qualifying for vocational professions (DeCapua, Marshall, & Tang, 2020; DeCapua, 2018; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). The structured development of print literacy and participation in formal education develops certain types of cognitive pathways (Cole, 2005; Deheane, 2013; Gauvain et al., 2011), or “academic ways of thinking.” These ways of thinking are essential to classroom success and are becoming increasingly pervasive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace as well as in everyday, contemporary life (Duran & Şendağ, 2012; Parrish & Johnson, 2010). Because familiarity with such tasks and academic ways of thinking are built from an early age in formal education, teachers frequently do not realize that the tasks as well as the ways of thinking are bewildering to LESLLA learners.

What do we mean when we talk about decontextualized school-based tasks and associated ways of thinking? These tasks range from highly structured, close-ended questions, such as multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank, to less structured open-ended ones, such as short answer questions or prompts or table completion (DeCapua, Marshall, & Tang, 2020). In essence, decontextualized school tasks are literacy-based tasks with associated academic ways of thinking that in the classroom are expected to build and demonstrate knowledge. They require specific habits of mind to organize and present information and the ability to think abstractly versus based on personal experience and concrete facts in students' lives (Abadzi, 2003). The tasks, the surface manifestation of academic ways of thinking, demand literacy beyond basic decoding skills; instead these tasks require the ability to interpret the two-dimensional world of print and representation as well as the ability to present information and knowledge in specific prescribed ways.

Although empirical studies are limited, one study of an A2 (Common European Framework) level class of LESLLA learners revealed that, despite extensive pre-practice, learners still had difficulty understanding the culminating task, not because of a lack of language proficiency or alphabetic literacy skills, but because the task required a way of thinking, namely abstraction, that LESLLA learners were unused to (DeCapua & Triulzi, in press).

Scaffolds suggested to help learners are often in and of themselves part of this hidden challenge. Typically, visuals are considered a valuable aid in language learning. Yet, drawings themselves require the ability to interpret abstract representations of the real world. When LESLLA learners are given worksheets with drawings, they often have no idea what the drawings are supposed to represent because they have not developed the ability to understand representational text, even those which can be regarded as “culture neutral” (Cornwall, 1992; Hvitfeldt, 1985). Altherr Flores (2017), for instance, found that the clip art drawing of a pen on a worksheet was variously interpreted by the learners as either a fish or insect, or not at all, in instances where the learners responded that they didn't know what the drawing represented.

Likewise, in many widely-used language textbook series (e.g., *Ventures* by Cambridge), drawings are used not to represent the object itself, but to be a placeholder for another object – an iconic

representation – which can cause another layer of confusion, as noted by Altherr Flores (2017). For example, a teacher who participated in the authors’ professional development, recounted to the other participants how some of his students did not know what a stamp, postage or post office were. Yet in the textbook the students were using, they were expected to do a language exercise based on reading maps of places in an imaginary neighborhood where the picture of a stamp was meant to illustrate a post office and the picture of a shopping cart, a supermarket. The students were asked about the locations of these buildings with no other information to help them relate the images to the buildings they stood for. These textbook visuals are supposedly iconic images and drawings, yet these representations of buildings, places, and activities are not necessarily recognizable to LESLLA learners, similar to the findings in Altherr Flores’ study (2017). Overall, evidence indicates that these semiotic symbols and drawings are likely to be misinterpreted by those with emergent print literacy, irrespective of native language or new language proficiency (Arbuckle, 2004; Dowse & Ehlers, 2003). Visual representations, in so far as they are not photos, are abstract interpretations of the real world, and like an alphabet or other form of writing, must be learned.

Another widely used type of scaffolding, graphic organizers, are visual displays that show relationships between information, ideas, and concepts. For example, if an activity is to evaluate similarities and differences, the teacher may begin by having learners complete Venn Diagrams. This type of graphic organizer consists of two intersecting circles. In one side of one circle, learners enter the similarities; in the other side of the second circle, learners enter the differences. Where the two circles intersect, the learners enter information applicable to both items being examined. The decontextualized task is completing Venn Diagrams and the associated academic way of thinking is comparison and contrast. Graphic organizers such as a Venn Diagram are not intuitive, but rather schematic educational tools that students, beginning in elementary school, learn to make sense of and use to organize a specific way of thinking associated with any given type of graphic organizer.

Other graphic organizers may require learners to complete tables, circles, or boxes – the decontextualized tasks – according to certain characteristics. Food, for instance, can be classified as salty, sweet, or

sour; tools by function, indoor or outdoor, hand or electric. In this case, the associated way of thinking is scientific classification according to specific attributes (Flynn, 2007). This is the same academic way of thinking that leads those with age-appropriate formal education to differentiate mammals from reptiles or fiction from non-fiction.

These examples underscore the difficulties LESLLA learners have in accessing knowledge and information in Western-style formal educational and workplace training settings. They must learn to abstract and distance themselves from personal lived experiences and the three-dimensional real world to knowledge based on different ways of understanding and interpreting the world and to the two-dimensional world of print and visual representations.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

In this paper, we explore how to teach decontextualized tasks and ways of thinking, using the skill of defining as an extended example.

Research on child first language acquisition informs us on concept development and its relationship to defining. When babies first encounter a “bottle,” it is a “baby bottle.” As babies see other types of bottles, such as water bottles, wine bottles, or medicine bottles, they may not identify them as bottles because they are not “their” bottles. Conversely, there is an early tendency to see all containers for liquids, such as jugs or covered mugs, as “bottles,” even when they are not members of that category. Over time, young children intuit the concept of bottle and the specific types of bottles, one of which is a baby bottle, and more specifically, their individual bottles. This intuitive grasp of categories occurs gradually so that concept formation around “bottle” grows. Once children enter Western-style formal educational settings, these concepts become formalized as part of the process of schooling. The development of semantic categorizations occurs through such classroom procedures as explicitly defined new concepts in textbooks and teacher-student question answer sessions, including the most common classroom question, “What is a/an X?” (Keil, 1989; Litowitz, 1977; Marinellie, 2010; Walker, 2002). Over time, in school, students learn the technique of defining through participation in a variety of literacy and language development activities, such as reading increasingly challenging texts and looking up definitions for words they do not know and reflecting on and applying

appropriate dictionary definitions (Benelli et al., 2006; Snow, 1990). Acquiring vocabulary in the real world is highly based on context and experience as opposed to formally defined vocabulary learned in school that follows a prescribed formula, i.e., the classic dictionary definition of a word.

For LESLLA learners, this transition from informal learning and concept formation to a more formal approach of explicitly defining an object has not necessarily taken place, so that the seemingly simple question, “What is a bottle?” may elicit questioning stares, pointing to a bottle in the immediate environs, or, perhaps an explanation of what a bottle is used for. Those who have participated in age-appropriate Western-style formal education will understand that the teacher is asking for characteristics that describe what a bottle is as opposed to something that would not be considered a bottle. LESLLA learners will not have had the benefit of activities leading to the ability to define words and will, for the most part, demonstrate intuitive understanding but be unable to articulate the type of facts required in a formal definition.

A common classroom activity is matching a vocabulary word or picture with the correct definition. On the one hand, this is a language and early print literacy activity requiring learners to recognize a word and its meaning. However, when learners must not merely match but produce their own definition or use their understanding of the definition to do something with words, more than memorization is required. From the perspective of LESLLA learners, who have primarily experienced informal ways of learning, it would be sufficient to memorize the dictionary definition, give an example, or simply point to the object in order to define it. In Western-style formal school settings, on the other hand, when learners must define a word, they are expected to know and be able to provide salient characteristics, functions, and categories appropriate to the given term or concept (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). Compare, for instance, three learner responses to this question:

**What is a tree?**

Learner 1: “A **tree** is a tall, woody plant with roots, a trunk, branches and leaves that can live for many years.”

Learner 2: “Tree for make house, fire.”

Learner 3: (Stands up, walks to the window, points, and says) “That tree.”

Only Learner 1’s response would be considered acceptable in a school setting because it is a dictionary-like, scientific definition. Learner 2’s response, while not inaccurate, is unacceptable in formal educational settings, where students are taught to distinguish between formal, scientific versus functional or everyday definitions (Webb, 2009). Learner 3 has misinterpreted the task as one of identification or comprehension of vocabulary, rather than one of defining.

On standardized tests, including licensing exams, similar types of questions can be found, and test-takers must either choose or provide the definition, again based on the same criteria. These criteria, i.e., characteristics, functions, and categories, entail an abstract conceptualization of the world. Such a conceptualization is based on reason, utilizing specific types of logical, rational, scientific ways of thinking grounded in observable and generalizable facts from which the individual and personal experience are removed and generally discounted or seen as invalid or extraneous (Brownie et al., 2015; Flynn, 2007). This is at variance with the habits of mind LESLLA learners have developed through their prior experiences with informal ways of learning rather than through Western-style formal education and extensive print literacy development (Cole & Packer, 2016).

The key differentiating factor in the sample learner responses to the question, “What is X?” is the concept of decontextualization. LESLLA learners, when they do provide a definition, seek to place the term into some meaningful context and relate it to their experience. The example above about using wood from a tree to build a fire, is such a definition. Formal education requires the opposite, in other words, responses that are decontextualized from life. “Correct” responses must align with prevailing modes of abstraction and logical modes of thinking. The term must be removed from context in order to grasp its (universal) essence. These two ways of approaching the act of defining are contradictory. LESLLA learners hoping to succeed in formal educational or workplace training settings must learn to remove themselves and their lived experiences in the real world to accept the prevailing norms of abstraction and decontextualization.

This challenge is a “hidden challenge.” Many educators are not aware that LESLLA learners’ difficulties making progress may well stem from the nature of the tasks and associated ways of thinking themselves. Even those who become aware do not necessarily realize

that these, like language, emergent print literacy skills, and content or work knowledge, must be explicitly taught. Here we show how LESLLA learners can be guided through the process of making their intuitive understanding become the foundation for formulating definitions using school-based ways of thinking and academic language required for constructing formal definitions.

### Teaching Tip

One useful technique for helping LESLLA learners make the transition to producing formal definitions is the Collections Project. Here the class amasses many examples of the same item, each very different in many minor respects, but each nonetheless belonging to the larger classification into which the item falls (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). By seeing all of the items in the “collection,” the class can begin to conceptualize what it would mean to compose a description of the item in its prototypical form that would then apply to each and every individual iteration in their class’s collection. One class of LESLLA learners collected plants. As one might imagine, they varied greatly in size, material, function, and other characteristics, but were all, of course, the same type of item – plants.

In this technique, which also serves to develop relevant and meaningful vocabulary, the learners as a whole class share words that can be used to describe the various items. In one version of this activity, each learner has one plant and individually describes it, or alternatively partners can do this together. Some of the words are specific to the individual plant, while others may apply to all plants. In this way, learners begin to see what will be used for the formal definition. For example, words to describe size will not be relevant since plants come in all sizes; however, words that describe leaves would include every item in the collection since nearly all plants have these, and therefore would become part of the definition.

As in teaching any new procedure, the teacher can break this activity down into steps. The four steps to follow in constructing a definition are:

### Guidelines for Building Definitions for Nouns

#### STEP ONE

The basic sentence frame that the class learns to define nouns is:

A/An \_\_\_\_\_ (the item in the collection) is a \_\_\_\_\_ (in which the second blank refers to a category) with \_\_\_\_\_ (characteristics common to all of the items).

#### STEP TWO

A slightly more difficult version replaces “with” (a prepositional phrase) by “that has” (a relative clause)

A \_\_\_\_\_ (the item in the collection) is a \_\_\_\_\_ (in which the second blank refers to a category) that has \_\_\_\_\_ (characteristics common to all of the items).

For the plant collection, the learners work with their teacher to define a plant as follows:

A plant is a living thing with a stem, leaves or flowers, and roots.

A plant is a living thing that has a stem, leaves or flowers, and roots.

#### STEP THREE

The teacher chooses a post-nominal structure and posts the sentence frame

- Prepositional phrase “*with...*”
- Relative clause “*that...*”

A more complex sentence frame includes a more advanced relative clause as the post-modifier of the noun, thereby introducing more information.

A plant is a living thing with a stem, leaves or flowers, and roots, *that grows in the ground and needs sun and water to survive.*

## STEP FOUR

As they become more familiar with the concept of categories, the learners analyze the collection of plants and compose definitions of individual plants. In such this case, for instance, the definition begins this way:

A/An \_\_\_\_\_ is a plant with/that has...

Now the learners supply the specific characteristics of the plant they have from the class collection. Examples:

- My plant is a kalanchoe. A kalanchoe is a short, tropical plant with a long stem, thick, wide green leaves, and small groups of flowers.
- My plant is ivy. Ivy is a climbing evergreen plant with shiny, green, five- pointed leaves.
- My plant is a daisy. A daisy is a small plant with flowers that have a yellow middle and white petals.

**Expansion Activities**

Collections can be used in many additional ways to build LESLLA learners' emergent print literacy skills, language, content, and ways of thinking.

**Adjective Word Order (in English)**

For one, the learners' definitions can become part of lessons on adjective word order, so that LESLLA learners know which adjectives to put first, next, and so on. The order of adjectives can be taught and placed on a teacher or student-made poster for the classroom:

1. Opinion
2. Size
3. Shape
4. Condition
5. Age
6. Color
7. Origin (*where from*)
8. Material (*made of*)
9. Function (*used for*)

Since LESLLA learners must develop new habits of mind, as a next step, the class collection can be used to practice comparing and contrasting, a new way of thinking. The collection itself provides a realistic context for LESLLA learners to practice this new way of thinking. Working with a partner for example, they examine ways in which their individual plants are similar and/or different. Then, by rotating partners, the learners will have other responses as they compare and contrast different plants from the collection. As this activity unfolds, the teacher provides the typical vocabulary and syntactic structures that accompany comparison and contrast, ranging from the most basic to the more complex. (See DeCapua, Marshall, & Tang, 2020, for a discussion of the language of comparison/contrast.)

**Mystery Bag**

Another activity that can be used to introduce defining is the Mystery Bag Activity, discussed in detail in DeCapua & Marshall, 2011. In this activity, each learner receives one item in a closed paper bag. Only that learner can open and look at what is inside while initially keeping the item hidden from the rest of the class. In every bag, there is an item that is shaped like an apple (or any other object) but that is not actually that item and has an everyday function, such as a basket, candle, soap, magnet. Only later in the activity do the learners realize that all the items share an essential characteristic, i.e., representing an apple, but that each item has a significantly different function. The idea is to build the concept of abstraction as learners develop defining skills. Since each object represents an "apple," yet is not an apple, this activity helps LESLLA learners understand how objects may be similar in representation but nevertheless be different in that each item has a separate function. This activity becomes even more engaging if one student has the actual item in the mystery bag as a surprise, such as a real apple, when everyone reveals what is inside the mystery bag.

This activity can lead to describing the objects with sentence frames, such as:

My apple is a/an magnet.

It is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (predicate adjectives)

It is a/an \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ magnet. (prenominal adjectives)

Learners can practice using both predicate adjectives and prenominal adjectives, again, referring to the poster on Adjective Word Order. They can expand their vocabulary as they identify the distinguishing features of their individual, apple-shaped object.

Once learners have completed lessons on defining as part of their English instruction, they will be better prepared for providing definitions in their other classes or in preparing for taking licensing exams. Having developed this skill, they can apply it across learning settings. The most useful type of definition is the one for nouns, as discussed here, as it is the most commonly occurring in classrooms. However, a similar unit can be included that expands defining into activities and sentence frames for other parts of speech.

### ***Semantic Feature Analysis***

A more challenging activity is to introduce Semantic Feature Analysis (See Table 1: Plant Characteristics). This will expose LESLLA learners to the type of classification that is common in Western-style formal education and workplace training settings, where they are preparing for qualification or licensure exams. In this activity, learners identify the distinguishing features of the various plants in the class collection and specify whether or not a given plant has that particular feature. This is yet another way to define. In this case, the learners must engage in analysis and then place the results of that analysis onto a table, which is itself a decontextualized way of looking at the plant collection.

Table 1

#### *Plant Characteristics*

NAME OF PLANT	TROPICAL?	FLOWERS?	SUCCULENT?	LEAVES?
Kalanchoe	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ivy	NO	NO	NO	YES
Daisy	NO	YES	NO	YES

(See Marshall & DeCapua, 2013 for more on semantic feature analysis.)

### **Discussion**

The key to teaching school-based ways of thinking and introducing and practicing decontextualized tasks is to use meaningful context. The Collections Project does this by avoiding traditional lessons on defining or comparison/contrast and substituting an experiential approach that is hands-on, concrete, and collaborative, and therefore familiar to LESLLA learners. At the same time, this approach fosters their transition to Western-style formal learning settings. Because in such settings, “to define is to know,” we have focused on this most basic of skills to highlight the need for instruction in school-based tasks and academic ways of thinking.

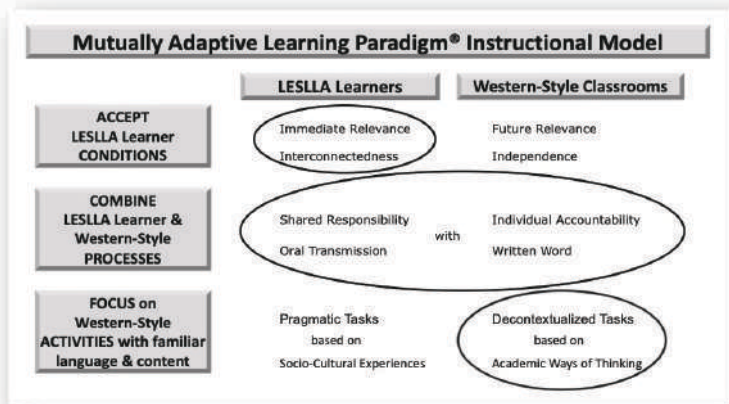
In implementing these activities, it is important to begin with items that are already familiar to the learner, so that they can focus on learning how to define, how to describe precisely, and how to compare and contrast similar items. Although the plants they collect in their classroom may be unfamiliar to them, they are very likely familiar with plants from their home country, and the project could include photos and videos of their native plants. They can even produce a theme booklet with plants from their home countries with detailed descriptions and definitions of each type of plant. (See Marshall & DeCapua, 2013, for a detailed explanation of Theme Booklets).

While the many commercially available materials for LESLLA learners understandably focus on language and content instruction, it is equally important for these learners to develop a deep understanding and comfortable familiarity with the type of thinking and the kinds of activities and learning tasks that are conducted in Western-style formal educational and many workplace training settings. Although non-LESLLA language learners, with age-appropriate prior education and deep experience in formal ways of learning, will also find differences in the system of education and formal workplace training in their new country, they will more easily make the transition than will LESLLA learners who must make a major leap to form new habits of mind. Until there are materials that address this hidden curriculum directly, teachers will need to develop projects, such as the Collections Project, to teach LESLLA learners this often-neglected material so essential to their ultimate success in any program where they are attempting to demonstrate new mastery of English, content, and skills knowledge.

**The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®)**

The Collections Project presented here follows the guidelines of an instructional model developed for LESLLA learners that can be used to generate additional projects that focus on the formal schemata of school, i.e., familiarity with decontextualized tasks and associated school-based ways of thinking (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) takes the learning paradigm of LESLLA learners and juxtaposes it with the learning paradigm that is generally assumed and expected in most Western-style educational and workplace training settings. Then, selected features of each paradigm are combined to create a mutually adaptive paradigm that recognizes the priorities for learning of LESLLA learners, while at the same time recognizes the necessities of the classroom and workplace training, so that LESLLA learners can experience success. Figure 1 shows how MALP draws from both paradigms. MALP accepts learners' conditions for learning, namely, for the material to be immediately relevant to learners and for the activities to foster interconnectedness among the learners and with the teacher. MALP combines processes for learning from both paradigms, so that both the LESLLA learners' cultural norm of sharing of responsibility and the teacher's need to ensure individual accountability are honored. Lastly, as discussed here in detail, MALP focuses on new tasks and new ways of thinking, but with activities that incorporate familiar language and content, so that any new schemata will be accompanied by familiar schemata as a support for learning.

Figure 1  
*Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm* (DeCapua, Marshall, & Tang, 2020; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013)



Based on this new paradigm, teachers can use the MALP Teacher Planning Checklist to analyze their projects and see how they include all the elements of MALP. Figure 2 shows the filled-in checklist for the Collections Project.

Figure 2  
*MALP Teacher Planning Checklist* (DeCapua, Marshall, & Tang, 2020; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013)

**MALP Teacher Planning Checklist®**  
available at [www.malpeducation.com](http://www.malpeducation.com)

<b>A. Accept Conditions for Learning</b>
<p><b>A1. I am making this lesson/project immediately relevant to my students' lives.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The collection item itself – a plant – is something familiar to them.</li> <li>• Learners may have owned, seen, or used plants like those in the collection.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A2. I am helping students develop and maintain interconnectedness with each other.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners and teacher learn more about each other's interests, likes and dislikes.</li> <li>• Learners can learn how to refer to the plants in each other's languages.</li> </ul>
<b>B. Combine Processes for Learning</b>
<p><b>B1. I am incorporating both shared responsibility and individual accountability.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class collectively creates sentences from sentence frames.</li> <li>• Pairs work together to generate additional sentences.</li> <li>• Each person adds information related to own object.</li> <li>• Learners write their sentences in their notebooks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B2. I am scaffolding the written word through oral interaction.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners share answers to questions about the objects orally.</li> <li>• The teacher writes their descriptive words – object characteristics – on the board.</li> <li>• The teacher elicits information about their objects and writes this on the board.</li> <li>• Learners read sentences back orally and later write them in their notebooks.</li> </ul>
<b>C. Focus on New Activities for Learning</b>
<p><b>C1. I am developing school-based ways of thinking using familiar language and content.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The activity is making the abstract – classification – concrete, by using real-world objects.</li> <li>• Learners use translanguaging, nonverbal communication, and sentence frames as linguistic scaffolds.</li> <li>• The familiarity of the collection objects provides content scaffolding.</li> </ul>
<p><b>C2. I am teaching learners how to engage in decontextualized tasks to demonstrate their mastery of these new ways of thinking.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners write formal definitions of nouns using both prenominal and postnominal structures.</li> <li>• Learners represent information in abstract visual formats, such as tables.</li> </ul>

Using MALP, teachers can supplement their regular curriculum with projects that develop LESLLA learners' ability to thrive in Western-style formal educational and workplace training settings. These projects complement and enhance their emergent print literacy development, their language proficiency, and the content they are

learning in their programs. Without this essential instruction in decontextualized tasks and associated school-based ways of thinking, LESLLA learners will have more difficulty and take a longer time to master new knowledge and develop essential classroom and workplace skills. This extended example of defining has provided a template for teachers seeking to implement MALP for other projects. To define is to know, but that is just the beginning. The pathway to success continues.

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## LEARNER COLLABORATION IN A MULTILEVEL REFUGEE-BACKGROUND CLASSROOM

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### Abstract

When refugees come together in a classroom to learn a new language, they bring vastly different backgrounds in formal, school-based educational settings. Some are emergent readers learning foundational skills, while others have higher levels of literacy in other languages. Meeting the needs of learners with widely different experiences is key. The teaching context for this paper is a refugee education program at a community college. Two activities are presented that have led to success in meeting different needs in a multilevel English classroom. One activity is creating a graph as a whole class and the other is telling a story in pairs. Experience-based reflections are shared to demonstrate how activities are implemented and how learners responded in this class. Adding to the growing bank of resources for teaching people who are learning to read and write for the first time in a new language, this exploration of activities is applicable to any context with a diverse group of language learners.

In 2019, I taught a multilevel English class for refugee-background students, most of whom had no prior formal, school-based education. For a long time, I noticed some of the students trying very hard to complete school-based tasks, while it was effortless for others. The former group could spell a word, but after, did not know how to fill in the missing letters to the word on blank lines. As adults with years of experience, they were not beginning learners, but they were beginners in a formal, school-based educational setting. The majority of the students in the classroom described in this paper were learning "how to be in school." I had to quickly learn how to support those students, especially since this class could be the only place where they were in the majority and had the opportunity to receive instruction geared toward their needs.

In a multilevel classroom, it is difficult to balance using effective practices for adult second language emergent readers and fostering collaboration with other class members who are also second language learners but have prior experience with print literacy in their first languages. Differentiated Instruction, that is, planning strategically to meet the needs of all learners (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy Center [TEAL Center] 2017), is a cornerstone approach in this type of classroom. At the time I began taking up the pedagogies described in this paper, I had been teaching the emergent reader level in a refugee English program at a community college for two years. I became interested in multi-level teaching models due to my experiences in my K-8 school growing up, which was an intentional experiment in multi-grade teaching and learning. That was my first experience with an intentionally multilevel classroom and possibly led to my exploration of the multilevel design of the classroom described in this paper.

In this paper, I present two activities that support Differentiated Instruction in a multilevel classroom drawing on procedures that I originally learned from other teachers of emergent readers. I expanded upon what I had learned from others to reflect the levels of learners in my classroom and respond to their unique needs. The first activity describes a whole-class bar graph, which emphasizes background knowledge and requires contributions from all students. The second is a sequencing activity that uses collaborative partner work to differentiate for different literacy levels. I selected these activities because of how valuable I found them in prioritizing collaborative work and thus in supporting all students in a multilevel classroom. I will also discuss my classroom experiences with the activities and offer considerations for instruction.

### **Background and Context**

In this section, I will describe the classroom context and the learners I worked with. The adults in the emergent reader level English class highlighted in this paper mainly came to the United States as refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Pakistan and South Sudan. They were linguistically diverse, as well, representing even more languages than countries. Worldwide, enrollment of refugees in primary school is 63 percent, in secondary school is 24 percent, and in higher education is 3 percent (UNHCR,

2018). Students in the introductory class in the program where I worked had backgrounds ranging from no formal, school-based learning to several years of high school. Most of the students reported never having gone to school before.

While most students had not had any formal, school-based learning experiences prior to this English class, some had, indeed, arrived in the United States with high literacy levels in their L1 through such experiences. They progressed rapidly since they were already familiar with skills acquired in formal, school-based learning, such as pencil-holding and book-handling. They may have also been familiar with many Western norms of formal schooling, such as student-directed instruction, less emphasis on explicit grammar teaching, and left-right text directionality (Dooley, 2009). Students with fewer of these experiences were learning school structures and classroom routines at the same time as the language (Wrigley, 2009). In addition to the students who reported “no school” and those who had started middle school, some of the learners in the class understood that print carries meaning but were not yet able to decode. In other words, their experiences are similar to those described by Bigelow & Vinogradov (2011), “This is a heterogenous population with a unique set of strengths and needs that require a range of educational approaches” (p. 122). The Adult Emergent Readers (AERs) were not all the same, much like no two learners are the same.

The students’ varying experiences with student-directed instruction, and other Western norms, shaped the group structures that I chose for the activities. One of the experiences they brought as adults was some familiarity with school. This is especially true since some had been to school. Whether students had been to school previously or not, they had expectations for school. Those expectations are partly why I used whole-class structures and carefully structured pair work. These formats reflected their beliefs about how they were going to learn in the classroom, which I valued.

### **Prior Formal, School-Based Education and Classroom Learning**

Some ways of supporting AERs are keeping language learning in context, using top-down and bottom-up processes, drawing from multiple approaches, tapping into strengths, and nurturing learners’ confidence (Vinogradov, 2009; Bigelow & Vinogradov 2011). Tapping into strengths has a different meaning for learners with more formal,

school-based learning experiences than learners with fewer such experiences. Brod (1999) compares “literate vs. non-literate learners” (p. 9), descriptors used in the past. (I am using asset-oriented descriptors, such as emergent readers, so please note that *non-literate* means AER, or “adult emergent reader”).

For example, in general, experienced readers have been found to make lists to remember, while emergent readers are more likely to repeat to remember (Brod, 1999). Many emergent readers in the class described in this paper remembered the order of events in sequencing activities. They benefited from practicing listening to the words and repeating them with the teacher or a partner. Sometimes they were able to recount a four-word sentence more quickly than the experienced readers could. Meanwhile, the students who were able to write the complete sequence in words and read it benefited from hearing emergent reader classmates repeat the words.

### Collaboration in Differentiated Instruction

The pedagogical strategies shared in this paper draw on collaboration and Differentiated Instruction (DI). Specifically, collaboration in mixed-level pairs and groups can turn regular activities into differentiated work for learners. Vinogradov’s (2013) research with LESLLA instructors documented this. One instructor, Mike, commented about independent reading time in a LESLLA classroom,

A pairing that I wouldn’t have thought of worked out really well. A Somali high-oral, low-literacy learner paired up with a newcomer low-oral, logographic reader. They happened upon a numbers page in a picture dictionary and were practicing together. The high-oral learner could read most of the numbers and the low-oral learner was trying to help sound out the spellings of some of the harder numbers (Vinogradov, 2013, p. 138).

Intentionally setting up different learners to work together to achieve their respective goals is one of the strategies of Differentiated Instruction (DI), “an approach that enables instructors to plan strategically to meet the needs of every learner” (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy Center [TEAL Center], 2017). Although the example above centers on differing literacy experiences, varied interests are also a primary way that learners differ (TEAL Center, 2017). In order to

differentiate for learners’ interests, instructors can modify content, process, and product (TEAL Center, 2017). In the description of experiences later in this paper, I focus on how I modified process and product to teach the same content to learners with a variety of interests and literacy levels.

### Group Work

#### *Challenges and benefits of group work*

Although DI guides teachers toward effective teaching, it is not easy to implement. Danzi et al.’s (2008) research in U.S.-based third, fifth, and eighth grade classrooms describes a common experience of teachers with mixed ability classrooms, specifically, that it “leaves some teachers feeling as if they are teaching multiple grades simultaneously” (p. 31). In other words, often without a co-teacher or a teaching assistant, DI is difficult and takes effort to design carefully ahead of time.

Despite the challenges to teachers, researchers and teachers who explore multi-grade K-12 classrooms have found that such arrangements are associated with social-emotional and developmental benefits, although no difference in achievement or absences has been found (Proehl et. Al, 2013; Miller, 1991). Positive affective impacts are critical in an environment where students may feel a lack of confidence in their learning abilities (Brod, 1999).

To nurture learners’ confidence, teachers also have to consider the potential challenges of groups and pairs across levels. In Wismath and Or’s (2015) research with university students, one of the respondents explained that they didn’t want to work with unfamiliar people for fear of looking “dumb” or “incompetent” (p. 7). This is a reminder to teachers that putting learners in groups should be mindful, allowing learners to work with classmates with whom they are comfortable.

Wismath & Or (2015) further noticed that learning styles possibly influenced collaborative behavior. For instance, one student in their study reported that working with a variety of learning styles was challenging if the group did not all think the same way. Working with others who liked to read and write silently could get the work done efficiently. One consequence of always grouping together students of the same learning style was that he missed out on working with partners who initiated conversation so they could all start sharing ideas.

Similarly, I have observed that some learners are willing to work with anybody while others are reluctant to work with a classmate of a very different level. Besides the clear differences in level related to the tasks, there are certainly social factors at play, as well as the learning styles that Wismath and Or (2015) delineate. Some learners prefer to start their work quietly and consult each other intermittently while others prefer to talk it through from the beginning. In an introductory English class where learners may have sparse vocabulary, different ways of solving problems are still part of peer interactions.

### ***Flexible grouping***

Differentiated Instruction involves flexible grouping, which uses collaborative structures to respond to the various English levels of learners. Another way to describe flexible grouping is rotating between whole-class, individual, pair, and group work (Schneiderová, 2018). Flexible grouping breaks apart habitual seating arrangements, so students can interact with classmates they might not otherwise (TEAL Center, 2017). Additionally, flexible grouping permits learners to sit with speakers of other languages, if they typically sit by language groups (TEAL Center, 2017).

Teachers should be aware that, in implementing flexible grouping, there is a risk of unintentionally creating ability grouping, which is a controversial practice amongst some scholars (Steenbergen-Hu et. al, 2016). For instance, in Kim's (2012) study of Korean middle schools with ability grouping, beginner learners expressed low self-confidence and reported unfair treatment from teachers. However, Corley (2005) reminds teachers of adult literacy learners that flexible grouping reduces the chance that some learners will be labeled as fast or slow. Corley further describes how learners can form groups as they choose an activity and work with others who chose the same activity. Based on these recommendations, sometimes I placed learners in groups based on their ability and gave them different tasks which required different processes to learn the same content.

My main strategy for encouraging learner collaboration was pair work, but I also had to decide how to organize the pairs. In Mozaffari (2017), teacher-assigned pairs stayed more on-task than student-selected pairs. Most pairs showed a collaborative pattern of interaction, regardless of whether they were teacher-assigned or learner-selected. I chose a mixture of these options, since I usually did not ask more than

one student to move. Students worked with whomever they had chosen to sit next to that day, which varied since attendance was inconsistent for most students. However, I did choose some pairs to intentionally match more experienced readers with less experienced readers.

### **Challenges of Applying Differentiated Instruction Research**

Despite the focus on collaboration described above, there were times when I purposely chose individual work for students. I did this while still seeking to differentiate the process for every student, which I accomplished by giving the students individual materials and stopping after at least some students had completed an activity. I told students that their work was finished once I felt that they had pushed themselves a little past what I knew them to be capable of doing. I also sometimes gave some students fewer tasks (e.g., fewer words to sort), knowing that it would take them as much effort.

However, notably, my attempts to establish different expectations did not lead to students completing their own work individually at their own pace, in most cases. Students at beginning levels were resistant to the expectation that sorting, for instance, four vocabulary words was enough when other students sorted six. They noticed that they were expected to do less work, as they saw it, than others. I observed students working together, without my prompting, to sort all the words, allowing the more experienced readers to complete the activity when they could not go any further. It became clear to me that the students wanted to assist each other and, if I continued with my plan, I would have been in the position of discouraging them. I would rather guide them toward collaborative habits that supported each other without giving away answers.

As I considered how to continue planning for DI, I hoped to draw on the ways that I saw students collaborate with each other. The structures that I delineate in the following activities utilize both whole-class and pair work, with flexible grouping to differentiate the process and the product (TEAL Center, 2017). The whole-class work eased students into working together by modeling each activity the way I envisioned it. The pair work made space for student-driven

collaboration, a format that I expected would feel familiar to students based on their interactions with classmates.

### Classroom Activities

#### Activity 1: Bar Graph of Student Modes of Transportation

I adapted this from the grid activity in *Making It Real: Teaching Pre-literate Adult Refugee Students* by Croydon, Treat, & Bell (2005), which appears in Appendix A. This whole-class activity allows students with more experience with abstract tasks that are common to formal schooling environments to exercise their knowledge of graphic organizers. Further, it makes the contributions of all students necessary to complete the task and provides opportunities for practicing more foundational skills, such as counting and understanding **X** as a representation of counting a person. Most importantly, this activity includes tasks that are at the appropriate level for students with less experience with abstract tasks, while allowing all students to work on the same product together. For this activity, students will be able to:

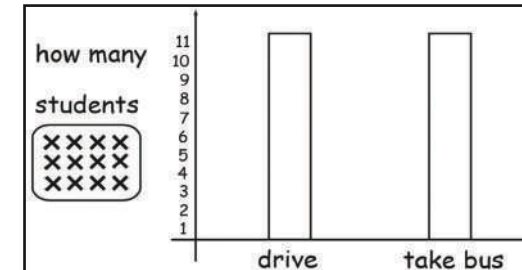
- Collaborate to create a bar graph using personal information from every student.
- Use transportation vocabulary to exchange information with a classmate.
- Mark a graph with their personal information or follow the examples of classmates.
- Respond to questions about the graph.

#### Creating a Graph Description

Procedures:

1. Before class, create a blank graph as shown in Figure 1, with vocabulary modified as appropriate for your class, or use a SMART Board template (see Appendix B).

Figure 1  
Transportation Graph Template

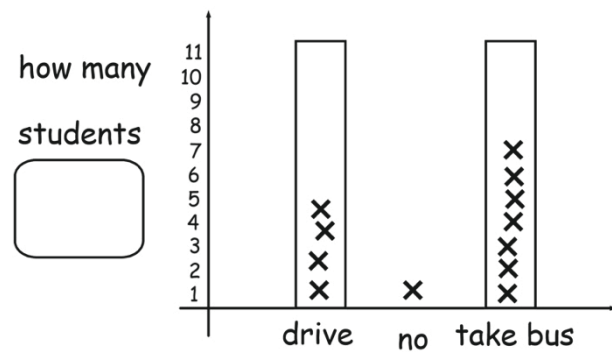


2. Introduce the topic or vocabulary set.
  - a. Share how you got to school and ask some students how they got to school. Use images of cars and local buses as needed.
3. Pose the question. Ask a student if they took a bus or drove a car to school today. Provide as much support as needed to communicate the question, keeping in mind that *today*, *car*, and *take a bus* are all words that students at most English levels commonly know. This activity is at the appropriate level if at least a few students can respond to this question with support.
4. Invite the student to place an **X** in the correct place on the bar graph. For teachers with SMART Boards in class, the student can practice dragging the **X**. On a white board, the student can practice writing or placing a magnet. Placing the **X** requires attention to lines and space, so this step builds spatial literacies no matter what tools are available.
5. Help the student choose a classmate and take on the role of “teacher.” They have the same exchange as in step 4.
6. Continue until every student has taken a turn being the “teacher” and there is an **X** for every student on the board.
7. Count the **X**'s and ask questions, such as: “How many students?” “How many students take a bus?”, “How many students (drive a) car?”, and “What is more students, take a bus or car?”

**Experiences with Creating Graphs in the Classroom**

In the previous example, every student has to contribute to complete a graph of student information. The teacher can step back and allow students to complete the activity together until asking analytical questions about the graph (Step 7) or even after. While creating graphs such as these in my own classroom, I observed that students truly collaborated once they were familiar with the activity. Also, there were always some students who could teach others where the X's must be placed. In one class, a student suggested adding a category, as seen in Figure 2.

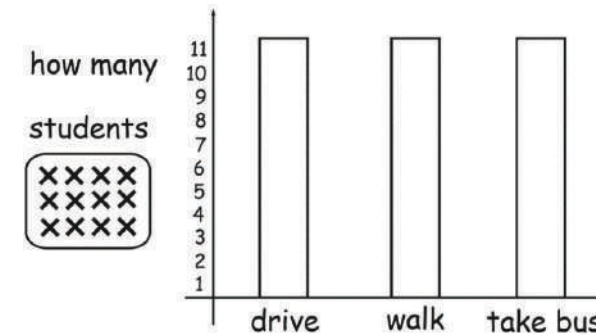
Figure 2  
*Transportation Graph with "no"*



In this way, the student gave me the opportunity to show that I welcome suggestions about how to structure the graph. They pointed to the middle of the graph on the SMART Board and said "no." I changed the graph on the computer and they dragged the X to the "no" category. This aligns with Vinogradov (2008), who describes how student-generated materials facilitate a memorable and engaging lesson. She writes, "The advantage of using student-generated texts is that the text is already comprehensible, meaningful, and interesting to the learner. Since the learner created it...he/she has ownership over those words and that story" (p. 6). The process of co-creation expands the collaboration from student-student interaction to student-student-teacher interaction, allowing teachers to take input from students. Drawing on student input, teachers can set up the same problem again

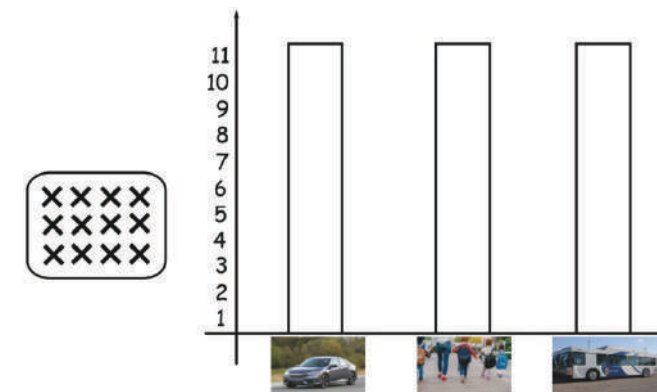
(e.g., one where students' experiences aren't all represented in the graph) and allow students to fix it. Teachers can also show students how their input was incorporated and transformed the graph, such as in Figure 3.

Figure 3  
*Transportation Graph with Modified Vocabulary*



It can be difficult for emergent readers to learn what a graph represents when they are first looking at one; it is simply a series of lines and words arranged in a certain way. While translation can be helpful, if it is not available, I have found that students understand graphs and other abstract visual representations through repetition and simplified target language explanations. Supplemental images, such as those in Figure 4, also help.

Figure 4  
*Transportation Graph with Images*



## Activity 2: Collaborative Storytelling

This is adapted from an activity from the CommonBond Communities Literacy Curriculum, a resource from the Elder Literacy Initiative in Minnesota (Young & Vogl, 2014). The activity invites students to arrange photos to tell a story in their own words. Students are given four or five photos and a blank, numbered graphic organizer (see Appendices C and D). Students are encouraged to put the photos in any order that makes sense to them. Differentiation is built into the design of the original activity, but I emphasize how it can be used with the whole class and pair work to bring about collaboration across levels.

For this activity, students will be able to:

- Arrange a series of pictures in sequence.
- Use top-down or left-right directionality to position photos in order.
- Write numbers 1 - 5.
- Retell a simple story, placing events in sequence.
- Agree on an order and descriptions for the photos with a group or partner.

Procedures:

1. The teacher guides students in the following (or similar) steps, taking photos at each step:
  - Turn on hot water kettle.
  - Pour water in cup, as seen in Image A.
  - Put tea bag in cup, as seen in Image B.
  - Add honey/sugar.
  - Drink. (Step suggested by students.)

Image A

*Students pouring water in cup*



Image B

*Students putting tea bag in water*



2. Modify the specific target vocabulary to fit your classroom's needs. The task should produce about four photos, but the number of steps described above (five) was adjusted upon a student's suggestion to add *drink* to the sequence.
3. The next day or after a break, pairs of students receive printed photos and a blank graphic organizer.
4. Ask the whole class, "Number 1, what photo? Number 2? Number 3?" encouraging students to arrange the photos in a sequence from top to bottom or left to right. Glue or tape them in place.
5. Students write descriptions for each photo in pairs. Encourage students to reference the board or their notebooks.
6. Share students' work either by swapping papers or showing on a document camera. Sharing work allows students to see that all students' responses are acceptable answers.

### *Experiences with Collaborative Storytelling in the Classroom*

I have used story organizers such as the one described above in class and gained some insights into how to facilitate collaborations and contributions across language proficiency levels. Story organizers help emergent reader learners develop left-to-right and top-to-bottom print directionality, and all learners can use this activity to practice reading and writing language that is familiar to them. Following, I offer some suggestions to better facilitate the activity.

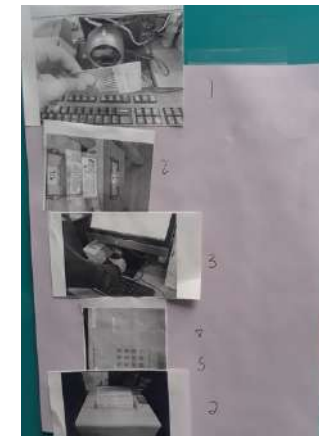
**Flexible sequencing and building toward independent writing.** To make sure instructions are clear, I recommend starting out using story organizers as a whole class, rearranging the photos together on a SMART Board. This is an important step because there may be students who are able to put the photos in order on their own but can only describe the photos if they have a model to copy from, despite that the story organizer allows students to write as little as a number per photo or as much as a sentence. By the second time using the task in my own classes, I encourage at least one-word responses and do not prescribe photo captions.

**Considerations for paired sequencing activities.** While I was teaching the class where I developed these practices, I shifted from using photo sequencing as an individual task to using it as a partnered task. First, we would do this activity as a whole class together, without me providing answers. Then the students sat with a partner and one

set of photos. They used a list of vocabulary words in the room or in their notebook to find the words that they chose to write for each number on the graphic organizer. After the shift, I noticed that the descriptions were usually as complex as I would expect from the more experienced writer in the pair; I interpreted this to mean that the more advanced writers in each pair were supporting the more novice writers. The following student work samples demonstrate additional ways that students may support one another, or that teachers can provide additional support in collaborative storytelling. In the activity shown in Figures 5, 6, and 7, students were tasked with sequencing photos of checking out items at the library. Students wrote words or numbers next to each corresponding picture, depending on which skill they were focusing on at the time. Figure 5 shows a sample from a pair that was working on correctly writing numbers.

Figure 5

*Story Organizer Student Work Sample 1*



To support emergent readers, the Elder Literacy Initiative's original worksheet is very useful because it includes the numbers 1 through 4 nearby to copy, or boxes in which to place the photos. A format that allows the photos to fit neatly on a page aids the students to organize photos, numbering, and writing; both Figures 6 and 7 show how I attempted that with a piece of paper, but I could have given students larger pieces of paper so the photos didn't dangle off the page.

Figure 6  
*Story Organizer Student Work Sample 2*

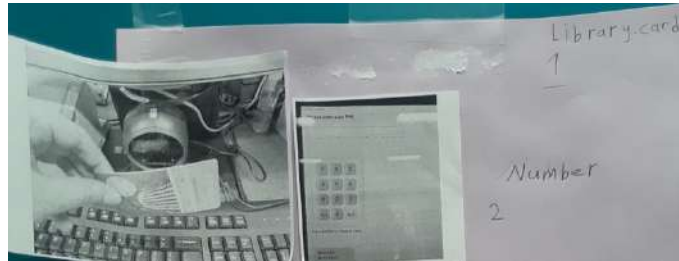
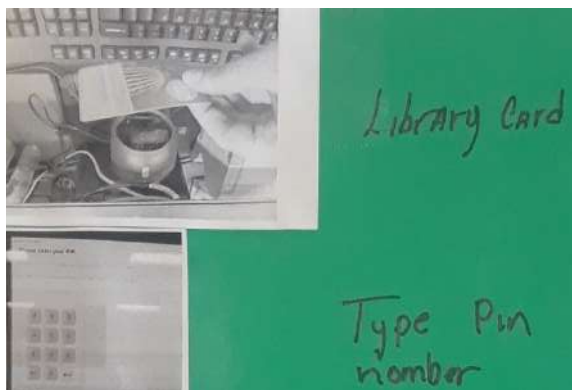


Figure 7  
*Story Organizer Student Work Sample 3*



When pairing students at very different levels of experience with print literacy, the student with more experience may choose to write many words that the other student does not know. Regardless, both students have can learn something from the activity. Emergent readers can learn about the placement of objects from their partner, thus receiving literacy support. For instance, as shown in Figure 7, a student with more experience with alphabetic print literacy had turned the first photo upside down, which I saw their partner correct afterward. This is evidence of how both students can contribute, including the one learning about text directionality.

In collaborative storytelling, every student writes slightly different descriptions. The students with less experience in formal school settings appear to react more positively to a completed story organizer than to the product of working individually (with few or no supports) and attempting to produce as much language as possible. Such activities can cause frustration for emergent readers when they don't finish describing all the photos as quickly as others or write shorter descriptions. The spectrum of successful finished work for this activity helps students to see that they are all at different places in terms of language development, rather than two distinct groups.

### Recommendations for Implementation

Each of the activities described above has its own strengths in supporting literacy development for adult emergent readers. Creating a graph engages emergent readers and more experienced readers alike through collaborative tasks. The process includes flexibility for student roles--from less complex tasks like writing numbers, to more complex ones like writing complete sentences. Instructors of multilevel classes can ask higher-level students to create a graph template by modeling graph creation on the board, erasing and inviting them to take a turn. After completing these activities multiple times, students in my classes knew what to do when I handed out photos and asked them, "Photo one? Photo two? Three? Four?" They also knew what to do with a graph and what tasks they could challenge themselves with. At the same time, these activities are not routine; they are adaptable for a wide range of topics in multilevel classrooms.

Additionally, teachers can use graphs to ask students what country they are from, what language they speak, if they live in an apartment or a house, or if they have been to a hospital. These are all questions that I have posed with graphs in emergent reader classrooms. Before and after creating graphs, I have also invited students to stand in a circle and toss a ball around asking a target question to one other and answering. While a graph is an abstract task, a ball toss reinforces the fact that students learn to ask questions. The ball toss is a common routine for question-and-answer practice in classrooms. Teachers can identify other familiar routines in their classrooms that can serve to introduce or review a question posed on a graph.

Similarly, story organizers are also a tool for teaching a range of topics. The Elder Literacy Initiative (2014) has story organizer photo

sets in units for Money/Shopping, Food, and Health/Appointments. To support all students, it is vital to choose a sequence that is already familiar. For instance, I created a photo set of checking out an item at the library and, while the students with the most experience in formal educational settings were able to put the photos in the correct sequence, others struggled since they were learning two things simultaneously: how to check an item out of the library and how to use English vocabulary to complete an abstract task. In contrast, making tea was familiar for all students so they could focus on the language needed to complete the task.

### Conclusion

Teachers in multilevel classrooms with adult emergent readers can use collaborative activities with differentiation built in. Students often help those around them when they finish their own work and push themselves to achieve more when they see their classmates have harder tasks to accomplish. For instance, for the students in the classroom described above, part of the definition of school may have been standardization: that is, a belief that “all students work on the same assignments.” It was never my goal for students to change their expectations of what they could or should do. However, for teachers who encounter this belief as I did, one option is to leverage students’ tendencies toward peer mentorship and their desires to complete the same work. It worked well for this particular group of students. Based on my experiences with this class (and others like it), I recommend for teachers to experiment with matching students by similar level *and* to pair them across levels—any method to get them working together. However, every class is different and, overall, it is best to learn from your own students what works by trying different activities.

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## Appendix A





### Grid of Student Likes and Dislikes Croydon, Treat, & Bell, 2005

**Model** the new language. Grids most naturally lend themselves to questions and answer format, but statements also work well.

*Do you like pizza?*  
*Do you like tea?*  
*Do you like ice cream?*  
*Do you like crab?*

**Mark** the student's answers on the grid.

**Repeat** for the next student.

				
Mohamed	✓	✓	X	X
Hawa	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kadijah	✓	X	✓	✓
Abdi	✓	✓	X	✓

### Appendix B

Transportation graph templates for teachers to use in class  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oeGsr34nBxhWQUI2Fq7U8mVJSCkifvBd?usp=sharing>

This Google Drive folder contains a preview of the transportation activity described in this paper, as carried out on a SMART Board. As such, the document provides a template for creating your own SMART Notebook file. (Note that the X's cannot be moved because they are permanent images.)

### Appendix C

Blank Story Organizer  
(Young & Vogl, 2014)

1	<hr/>
2	<hr/>
3	<hr/>
4	<hr/>

## Appendix D

Story Organizer Health Photo Set  
(Young & Vogl, 2014)



## PREPARING TEACHERS TO WORK WITH REFUGEE-BACKGROUND STUDENTS: TEACHER EDUCATOR ACTION RESEARCH

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### Abstract

Working effectively with refugee-background students requires an understanding of their personal, educational, linguistic, cultural, and migration backgrounds in order to meet their learning and psychosocial needs. In other words, teachers need to be equipped with awareness, strategies and tools that can help support learning and adaptation. This paper describes an action research (Carr & Kemmis, 2005) project in which the authors incorporated a focus on the needs of refugee-background students into an asynchronous, online graduate-level teacher education course for current or future teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The primary goal of this study was to foster educators' awareness of the typical backgrounds of refugee-background students by sharing some useful research, professional development resources, and instructional tools addressing the unique needs of this population. The paper describes the learning experiences incorporated into the course and reports the graduate students' reflections on the content and its relevance to their present and future teaching contexts.

There are currently an unprecedented 26 million refugees worldwide recognized by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with millions more internally displaced or seeking asylum (UNHCR, 2019a). As a result, growing numbers of refugee-

background students are arriving in classrooms around the world. Due to the difficulties they face during conflict and displacement, many have experienced interrupted schooling and psychosocial challenges, which can impact how they learn and adapt to the school environment (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; McBrien, Dooley, & Birman, 2017). Educators need to become familiar with the personal, linguistic, cultural, and migration backgrounds of these learners to understand the unique challenges they may experience in the classroom as well as the practical knowledge, proficiency in multiple languages, resourcefulness, and adaptability they possess (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). In many cases, educators may not know which students in their classes come from refugee backgrounds, as this information is not always shared with teachers, but all educators – second language teachers in particular – should be equipped with awareness, strategies, and tools to support these learners.

This paper describes an action research project in which the authors incorporated a focus on the needs of refugee students into an asynchronous, online graduate-level teacher education course for current or future teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The primary goal in this study was to foster awareness of typical experiences of refugee-background students by sharing some useful research, professional development resources, and instructional tools addressing the unique needs of this population. While most graduate students in the course were current or future teachers of children and youth with varied migration backgrounds, the broad aim was to cultivate teacher candidates' dispositions for and confidence in working with refugee-background students across the lifespan. In the following section, a brief review of current literature about refugee-background students' identities and experiences sets the context for the study.

### Literature Review

Globally, more than half of refugees have fled conflict in just three countries, Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2019a), but they represent numerous ethnic identities, religions, and languages. In the United States, the majority of recent asylum seekers are from Central America, led by Venezuela, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico, and speak Spanish and/or a variety of indigenous languages

(DHS, 2019). Across these diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities, refugee-background students experience two primary types of barriers: interrupted education and psychosocial challenges (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Shapiro, 2018).

### Interrupted Education

Many refugees experience interrupted formal schooling due to conflict in their countries of origin or protracted displacement; in fact, out of the 7.1 million refugee children in the world today, more than half are out of school (UNHCR, 2019b). Access to formal schooling becomes more difficult as students grow older, with 63% of elementary-age refugee children enrolled in school (compared to 91% of children globally) but only 24% of refugee youth enrolled in secondary school (84% globally) (UNHCR, 2019b). Proficiency in the language of instruction, economic barriers, safety concerns, cultural differences, discrimination, host nation policies, and capacity limitations impede access to school for many refugee students in displacement settings (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2012).

The capacity to provide access to formal schooling is a serious concern in the nations hosting the majority of the world's refugees (UNHCR, 2019a). Many host countries, including Pakistan and Uganda, have made progress in including refugee students in the national schooling system, but numerous challenges remain, particularly helping these students learn the language of instruction, catch up on missed years of schooling, and overcome psychosocial effects of displacement (Hos, 2020; UNHCR, 2019b). In other cases, like that of Turkey during the early years of the Syrian civil war, parallel systems are established to educate students in their mother tongue using the home country's curriculum to prepare for repatriation that may never occur (Tezel McCarthy, 2018). Other host countries, like Bangladesh, exclude refugee students from national schooling systems, so the only option is non-formal education provided in refugee camps or settlements by NGOs or community initiatives (UNHCR, 2019b). As a result, refugee students may have gaps in formal schooling and background knowledge, literacy, and academic skills and may not have proficiency in the language of instruction (Hos, 2020).

The financial strain of displacement also limits refugee students' schooling. Even where schooling is tuition-free, mandatory fees for books and supplies, uniforms, and transportation can exceed family

resources (UNHCR, 2019b). In addition, students often must contribute to the family by working or taking on household tasks (Erden, 2019; UNHCR, 2019b). In some cases, refugee girls are married early in order to reduce the family's economic burden and in hopes that they will be better provided for; this often means the end of a girl's education, as returning to school after marriage is rare (Bartolomei, Eckert, & Pittaway, 2014; Canefe, 2018; UNHCR, 2018).

### **Psychosocial Challenges**

In addition to these logistical barriers, refugee-background students often face psychosocial challenges which can affect their adaptation and progress in school (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018). Particularly for children, experiences of conflict or persecution can have deep psychological effects, as can harsh conditions and family separation during displacement and difficult cultural adjustment or discrimination in the displacement or resettlement context (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). This stress and trauma can affect students' behavior, learning, and overall wellbeing (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018). For example, students who have experienced conflict display higher rates of anxiety, lower academic performance, and more behavioral difficulties than those who have not (Patel et al., 2017). Students suffering from traumatic stress may withdraw or act out and may display signs of depression, hyper-arousal, impaired memory and attention, or avoidance behavior (Schmidt, 2018). It is crucial for educators to be prepared to identify these psychosocial difficulties and support the development of healthy coping strategies and resilience through trauma-informed pedagogy and referrals to appropriate service providers (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

### **Teacher Education**

Teachers serving refugee-background students need to be aware of these typical educational and psychosocial challenges (Anders, 2012; Shapiro, 2018). Recent research has documented the efforts of teachers, schools, and school districts to meet the distinct needs of resettled refugee students through, for example, holistic wrap-around services for newcomer immigrant and refugee youth (Bajaj & Suresh, 2018), academic and extracurricular support to bolster refugee students' adjustment (Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018), and a critical

literacy framework to enhance language instruction for elementary Somali Bantu refugee students (Roy, 2017). Educators play a significant role in creating ways to meaningfully connect communities, schools, and refugees to foster adaptation (Duran, 2020).

This current research speaks volumes about the urgency of supporting educators at all levels in meeting the psychosocial and academic needs of refugee students. Teacher preparation programs must consider meaningful ways to include attention to refugee students' and families' stories; however, little attention has been given to addressing this reality in teacher education and professional development (Ficarra, 2017; Anders, 2012). For instance, based on research about the intersectional barriers of language, racialization, discrimination, and Islamophobia Somali refugee youth in Minnesota schools and communities experience, Bigelow (2010) argues for educators to learn about the educational and social lives of refugees. Gagné, Schmidt, and Markus (2017) suggest that opportunities to engage in critically oriented tasks supported teacher education students in Canada in recognizing and responding to refugee students' needs through culturally responsive pedagogy. Clearly, teacher educators have a critical responsibility to ensure that preservice and in-service teachers are prepared to work effectively with refugee students and families. This paper describes one US teacher educator's attempt to better prepare teacher candidates to understand and meet the needs of refugee-background students.

### **Method**

This study took an action research (AR) approach (Carr & Kemmis, 2005), a cyclical, reflective method intended to devise and implement practical solutions for real-world problems that is frequently employed by teachers to improve their practice. The second author, Dr. Kathleen Ramos, is a teacher educator at a large state university in the eastern US who teaches preservice and in-service teachers enrolled in a master's in curriculum and instruction program in the ESOL concentration. In this AR project, she sought to shift her instructional practices to better prepare her graduate students to teach for global competence (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018), focusing specifically on fostering awareness and introducing pedagogical strategies for inclusive teaching of refugee-background students.

### Study Context

Kathleen was selected as a Longview Foundation Global Teacher Education Fellow for the 2018-2019 academic year, during which she had the opportunity to redesign an existing course to incorporate global learning outcomes, pedagogical strategies, content, assessments, and technology. Because of her previous experience teaching refugee-background students at the secondary level, Kathleen decided to focus the modifications on strengthening teachers' preparedness and commitment for inclusive teaching of this population. She selected a teacher education course designed to introduce graduate students to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, which she taught as an online, asynchronous class in both the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. The central research question was: in what ways may learning experiences embedded in an online, asynchronous teacher education graduate course affect in-service teachers' and teacher candidates' knowledge, dispositions, and skills around teaching for global competence in PK-12 (primary and secondary) schools?

In the fall of 2018, Kathleen revised a portion of the course to incorporate the Teaching for Global Competence (TfGC) framework<sup>1</sup> (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018), which seeks to aid teachers in fostering learners' knowledge, skills, and inspiration to address issues of global significance in their local communities and beyond. The TfGC framework comprises four domains: practicing an inquiry stance, considering multiple perspectives, engaging in respectful dialogue, and taking appropriate, responsible action. Consistent with teacher AR, Kathleen sought to model these aspects in her own teaching by introducing resources, learning activities, and assessments structured to foster awareness among her graduate students about the experiences of refugee-background students. In other words, she designed the modules to exemplify learning activities that the graduate students could adapt for their future classrooms to help students develop global competence.

As the AR method takes a cyclical approach, Kathleen repeated the process in the following semester with adjustments based on her observations from the first iteration. For this second iteration in spring 2019, Kathleen invited the first author, Melissa Hauber-Özer, to co-

<sup>1</sup> Developed by the Asia Society Center for Global Education in partnership with the OECD.

teach the course to fulfill an internship requirement for the PhD program and to gain experience in teacher education. Melissa assisted in incorporating an even stronger focus on common learning needs and valuable instructional practices and resources for refugee-background students. This paper focuses on the outcomes of the spring 2019 iteration because of this more in-depth engagement with the topic of interest.

### Course Overview

The course was delivered via the Blackboard learning management system. The core texts (Banks & Banks, 2016; Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2015) were supplemented by a variety of journal articles and web-based materials, including news articles, videos, photos, and padlets (online bulletin boards for collaboratively displaying information, pictures, and links). Graduate students participated in weekly online discussions of the module material, fulfilled 20 hours of field experience in a local school or out-of-school program, and completed two performance-based assessment projects.

The course followed a 15-week semester format, split into thematic weekly modules. The first six weeks introduced graduate students to critical multicultural education and guided them in considering how their students' cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, and ethnic identities may impact their educational experiences, including critical perspectives on equity issues in US schooling. The next five weeks focused on pedagogical strategies and tools for more equitably addressing refugee-background students' identities and experiences, rooted in TfGC (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018). During the final four weeks, the graduate students examined equity issues related to gender, sexual orientation, and ability and applied their learning in a culminating course project.

### Participants

There were a total of 46 graduate students enrolled in the course during the two semesters of the project, which included both pre-service and in-service teachers working or planning to work in schools across the local region of the US as well as internationally. Most took the course as requirement for the master's degree in curriculum and instruction with ESOL certification, although a handful planned to teach world languages or become literacy specialists. Prior to beginning

the modules focused on TfGC (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018), all graduate students enrolled in the course during these semesters were invited to participate in the study. Kathleen's graduate research assistant sent a recruitment email, gathered participant data, and maintained confidentiality during the course to alleviate concerns about participation affecting their grades.<sup>2</sup>

Nine graduate students provided informed consent: four in fall 2018 and five in spring 2019; as mentioned above, this paper focuses on the data from the second iteration of the course. Four participants in spring 2019 identified as White females and one as an Asian female. Three were native English speakers, and two were immigrants to the US, one from South Korea and one from Macedonia, who both spoke English as an additional language (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Background
Ashley	Had lived in Russia and Kazakhstan, bilingual in Russian; had volunteered as an ESOL teacher, currently working as a program coordinator for an adult ESL program in the Mid-Atlantic US
Carly	Married to a Colombian immigrant and bilingual in Spanish; currently teaching adult ESOL in the Mid-Atlantic U.S, including refugee-background students and seeking MA with licensure to teach ESOL in primary/secondary grades.
Katie	From Macedonia, married to a US citizen, and multilingual in several European languages; had taught second grade in an international school in Macedonia before moving to the US for her graduate studies.
Lisa	Had worked for the US state department before changing careers; currently teaching in a local public school in the Mid-Atlantic U.S; had experience working with resettled refugees in the US
So-Hyun	Immigrated as an adult from South Korea and married to a US citizen; pursuing an MA with licensure for Korean language; planned to become a Korean-English immersion program specialist; experience with other immigrant families and students.

<sup>2</sup> Those who did not participate were not asked for their reasons, and all students completed the same tasks in each module. In this paper, the term *graduate students* refers to all students enrolled in the course while *participants* refers to those consenting to have their work collected as data. All participant names are pseudonyms.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Kathleen's graduate research assistant collected participants' discussion board posts and ungraded assignments until analysis could take place after Kathleen posted final course grades. Participants' questionnaire responses, discussion board posts, and assignments were analyzed using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Authors 1 and 2, along with Kathleen's graduate research assistant, looked specifically for responses in the data related to participants' knowledge, dispositions, and skills for TfGC around the issue of inclusion of refugee-background students.

### Researcher Positionality

Melissa is a PhD candidate in international education at the university where Kathleen teaches; she has a background in teaching ESOL and literacy to adult learners in both community and university settings in the United States. She now conducts research on language learning and educational access for refugees in Turkey and plans to become a teacher educator. Before becoming a teacher educator, Kathleen was an experienced teacher of Spanish and ESOL at the secondary level, working with many adolescent refugees in that capacity. Because of their professional backgrounds, both authors identify as strong advocates for refugee and immigrant learners.

### Findings

As the focus of this paper is on participants' learning through the instructional tools and learning experiences incorporated in the course for the AR project, the findings are presented following brief descriptions of the pedagogical strategies and resources employed<sup>3</sup>. This approach is meant to aid our own reflection as (future) teacher educators and to encourage readers to consider the types of learning activities they could incorporate into their own teaching.

### Texts and Discussion Board

The graduate students began the modules focused on TfGC by reading core texts for building their awareness and competences (e.g., Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016;

<sup>3</sup> An etic thematic approach has been taken in a separate paper (Ramos et al., 2020) to examine the data using the domains of the TfGC framework as a priori themes.

OECD/Asia Society, 2018). In preparation for each of the following weekly modules, the graduate students also selected from a variety of supplementary journal articles (3-5 each week) focused on common instructional needs of refugee students and useful strategies (e.g., Dryden-Peterson, 2017; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014; Benseman, 2014). Together, these texts aimed to spark students' thinking about what TfGC is, why it matters, and how they might incorporate it in their current or future teaching contexts. During each weekly module, the graduate students wrote brief, reflective posts and interacted with classmates on the course discussion board, thinking critically about, responding to, and applying the concepts from the readings to their current or anticipated teaching contexts.

### Global Thinking Routines

During each weekly module focused on the needs of refugee-background students, the graduate students also tried out Global Thinking Routines (GTRs), experiential learning tools designed to foster global awareness and competences across content areas (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; Boix Mansilla et al., 2017). Each GTR began with a provocation, such as a photograph or news story selected to prompt thinking and curiosity about the topic, followed by a series of questions, readings, online resources, and writing tasks to fill in gaps, challenge preconceptions, and provide an opportunity for application. Graduate students shared their completed GTR worksheets on the course discussion boards and responded to their classmates' work. Participants' assignments and comments were gathered as data. The goal was to model instructional strategies that graduate students could use with their own students in the future.

During the second week of the modules focused on TfGC, the graduate students tried two GTRs. The first, "The 3Ys," guided students through a series of materials and three reflective questions ("3Ys" refers to these "why" questions) to consider forced migration in the US context. Students were offered a choice of two topics from US history, a) the forced repatriation of Mexican American families in the 1930's and b) the internment of Japanese American families in relocation camps during World War II. The provocation for each topic included photographs, articles, and videos providing an overview of the policy and impact on individuals. Graduate students then

responded to the three "Y" (why) questions (listed below) and posted their responses in a discussion board.

1. Why might this topic matter to me?
2. Why might it matter to people around me (family, friends, city, nation)?
3. Why might it matter to the world?

In their posts, several participants expressed concern about current trends towards policies targeting minority groups such as Muslims and undocumented immigrants in the US, Uyghurs in China, and LGBTQ individuals in Brazil. They felt that this GTR would be a good way to foster awareness, critical thinking, perspective taking, and difficult conversations about these kinds of global issues of injustice among their own students. Like other participants, Carly expressed her belief that students must learn about historical injustices and "take action to prevent them by advocating for those who are most vulnerable" (3Ys attachment, 3/29/2019). Lisa stated her conviction that it is important to familiarize students with these shameful events of the past because "It could happen again" (3Ys attachment, 3/30/2019).

The second GTR in week 10, called "Step-in, Step-out, Step-back" (Boix Mansilla et al., 2017), also offered a choice between two news articles examining personal impact of global migration movements and policies. One story reported on a mixed-immigration status family (undocumented parents and citizen children) in the US living in fear of deportation<sup>4</sup>; the other described experiences of asylum seekers in Norway. After viewing a photograph and caption from the chosen news article, graduate students practiced perspective-taking and question generation using the following prompts:

1. Step-in: Given what you see and know at this time, what do you think this person might experience, feel, believe, or know?
2. Step-out: What else would you like (or need) to learn in order to understand this person's perspective better?

Then graduate students read the article and completed the process by reflecting on their own perspectives:

3. Step-back: Given your exploration of this perspective so far, what do you notice about your own perspective and what it takes to take somebody else's?

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<sup>4</sup> Although different in migration status from refugees, many undocumented immigrants in the US experience significant challenges; for this reason, Kathleen decided to include the topic.

Participants found this GTR a simple but powerful process to “reflect on your own biases and misunderstandings” (Lisa, discussion board post, 3/31/2019), “lead students down a path that pushes them to consider diverse human experiences with empathy” (Ashley, discussion board post, 3/30/2019), and stimulate the development of “intercultural sophistication and sensitivity to others’ experiences” (Katie, discussion board post, 3/29/2019).

Specifically related to the project focus, Carly reflected that this GTR could help teachers to understand the stress and uncertainty that their refugee-background students might have experienced and how this might affect their behavior and “cognitive and emotional well-being” (Step-in, Step-out, Step-back attachment, 3/29/2019). So-Hyun shared:

I believe it is essential for people to consider refugees’ perspectives in order to make them feel welcome and provide safe environments for them to settle... I think it is important for us to listen to their stories and to gain more in-depth understanding of their perspectives to make them feel safe and welcome in a new country. The article and picture about refugees in Norway gave me insights into how the world can remove prejudice and judgments while building compassion toward refugees to preserve their safety and support for their new opportunities and possibilities in a new country. (Step-in, Step-out, Step-back attachment, 3/31/2019).

This GTR seemed to prompt deep reflection and inspire ideas about potential use in participants’ future classrooms.

The next weekly module included two more GTRs (Boix Mansilla et al., 2017). The first, “Beauty and Truth,” was designed to stimulate critical thinking, perspective taking, and global awareness, this time focusing on the backgrounds and needs of refugee students. After viewing three photographs of smiling Syrian children in a refugee camp, the graduate students responded to the following questions:

1. Can you find beauty in these images?
2. Can you find truth in these images?

Then, they read a series of short news stories and watched videos detailing the challenges that many Syrian refugees endure. The graduate students responded to the following questions in writing to reflect on what they had read:

1. How might beauty reveal truth?
2. How might beauty conceal truth?

They also viewed a padlet that Kathleen had created titled “Reading the World of Refugees,” which displayed books about refugees for different ages. To apply their learning, the graduate students shared ideas on the discussion board for using this GTR with their future students, contextualizing the topic, provocation, and content related to their current or anticipated teaching contexts, grades, and subject areas.

Participants reported finding this activity powerful for taking perspectives and fostering empathy and critical thinking as well as being adaptable for various issues and content areas and with students across grade levels. Ashley wrote that the photographs helped her recognize both the human dignity and resilience of refugees and the “very real consequences” of displacement (Beauty and Truth attachment, 4/6/2019). So-Hyun stated, “I was able to make connections to refugee children and teens while paying attention to increasing refugee issues and think about ways to support their safety and opportunities to better their future” (Discussion board post, 4/6/2019). Along the same lines, Carly reflected that:

Beauty can also distract us from the underlying truth about the tragedies that these people have suffered... But we must remind ourselves that behind these smiles, there may be some dark thoughts or traumatic memories, which can manifest themselves in a number of ways. Some people may have trouble sleeping or concentrating, while others may be scared of loud noises. Happiness in a particular moment does not negate the emotional, psychological, and perhaps physical scars that these refugees are dealing with. (Beauty and Truth attachment, 4/6/2019)

Carly anticipated using this GTR with her future students to build critical media literacy as well as awareness and to motivate them to take action on global issues.

The last GTR, “Circles of Action,” prompted the graduate students to consider concrete ways they could incorporate this increased awareness into their practice as educators. The provocation guided them through a series of videos, websites, and articles about the unique educational challenges that refugee-background students experience as well as several strategies and models in use at schools around the world. They responded to the following questions to reflect on practical actions they could take in their circles of influence and difficulties they might encounter:

1. What can I do to contribute to supporting refugee students in my future classroom?
2. What can I do to contribute to supporting refugee students in my community (in my school, neighborhood, place of worship)?
3. What can I do to contribute to responding to the refugee students in the world (beyond my immediate environment)?
4. Is it important for me to consider taking action in responding to the needs of refugee students on a personal, local, and global level? Why or why not? What barriers might I face to taking productive action at various levels?

Drawing on her experience as an adult educator who had worked with many refugee learners, Ashley shared practical ways to address learning and practical needs and to support cultural adaptation, belonging, and agency with her classmates. Carly voiced a desire to “foster a supportive learning environment and let my students know that I am always available if they need someone to talk to” (Circles of Action attachment, 4/6/2019) while also communicating with parents and watching for possible cognitive or behavioral difficulties related to previous experiences. Katie expressed that awareness and sensitivity would be crucial for working with refugee students, writing that:

offering opportunities for them to share their stories to the extent to which they are willing to share, helping them raise awareness of the situations in their home countries, and helping them create friendships with other students will be a priority for me as a teacher. (Circles of Action attachment, 4/7/2019)

Regarding actions they could take outside of the classroom, participants mentioned volunteering to welcome newcomers, increasing awareness among their social networks, fundraising for non-profits that serve refugees, and advocating for compassionate policy and practice at the school, community, and national level.

### Idea Sketch

The graduate students concluded the unit by creating an “Idea Sketch” of a classroom lesson incorporating a global issue, an “I can” statement or performance outcome (Asia Society, 2013), one of the GTRs they had tried out, resources from the weekly modules, and

reflection on their learning. They shared these lesson ideas via a discussion board and provided peer feedback. The idea sketches targeted a variety of age groups, from kindergarten to high school, and addressed an array of current global issues, from bullying of students with disabilities to the defection crisis in North Korea.

The lessons, reflections, and subsequent exchange of peer feedback indicated that the participants had found the TfGC modules useful for designing instruction that helps students “make a meaningful connection to global issues and to think critically to take actions” (So-Hyun, discussion board post, 4/22/2019). The participants admitted the difficulty of identifying age-appropriate issues and matching them to content area objectives; as Lisa confessed, “this is not yet something that feels natural” (Idea Sketch attachment, 4/24/2019). However, they expressed a desire to continue to improve their own capacity to help future PK-12 learners to “gain meaningful attachments to issues, remove negative stereotyping toward others, [and] work toward bettering the world that they are living [in]” (So-Hyun, Idea Sketch attachment, 4/22/2019).

### Discussion

By engaging with a variety of carefully selected texts and pedagogical tools, participants in this AR project seemed to gain awareness about the experiences and needs of refugee-background students. In turn, these current and future teachers explored ways to foster awareness among their PK-12 learners about global issues like the current worldwide refugee crisis. This project suggests that the presentation of real-world experiences of today’s refugee-background students through structured, scaffolded learning experiences can be a powerful and effective way to engage pre- and in-service educators in delving into this global issue and recognizing its threads across time and contexts. At the same time, these graduate students gained experience with instructional strategies that they could apply in their own teaching now or in the future to encourage PK-12 learners to inquire about the world, consider multiple perspectives, engage in respectful dialog, and take responsible action (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013). We believe these perspectives and strategies are also valuable for those who teach adult refugee-background learners, as they and their children will have experienced similar challenges.

Given the ever-rising numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, it is crucial for educators to be informed about the impact of forced migration on students and to be prepared to respond. This AR project aimed to begin fostering this awareness, share some practical tools, and point participants toward additional resources to continue developing their skills for inclusive teaching of refugee and immigrant students. Current research suggests the urgency of this work (Duran, 2020; Gagné, Schmidt, & Markus, 2017). As Ficarra (2017) emphasizes, it is teachers who “often have the most personal interaction with refugee students. Therefore, their training around issues of multiculturalism but specifically on the refugee experiences is essential to their ability to support students with these backgrounds” (p. 79). Although its scope may be small, we hope that this project may inspire other teacher educators and teacher trainers to seek ways to foster teacher candidates’ confidence in and commitment to teaching for global competence, particularly around the pressing need for knowing and responding to refugee-background students’ experiences.

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## TEACHING SPANISH LITERACY TO ADULT LATINX LEARNERS: EXPLORING INTEREST, IMPACT, AND SUSTAINABILITY

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### Abstract

Non-profit organizations are frequently safe havens in the community where immigrants can find support during their transitional period of adaptation and adjustment to their new environment in the United States (Hung, 2007; Wilson, 2013). Many of these organizations have educational programs that focus on teaching English as a second language and on preparing immigrants to take the citizenship exam. However, offering literacy classes in the adult learners' native languages occurs with less frequency (Tamassia, Lennon, Yamamoto, & Kirsch, 2007). This qualitative case study explored the effectiveness of a U.S.-based pilot Spanish literacy program from the participants' experiences while developing first language (Spanish) literacy and learning some English, their second language. In addition, the implications for this program's continuance are shared and analyzed. Findings shed light on potential challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating first language literacy programs at non-profit organizations for adult learners who have experienced interruptions in formal school-based learning.

The Sunshine Center (pseudonym) is a comprehensive immigrant resource center offering hope and essential services to people who are new to the United States. As such, this Center is dedicated to providing immigrant families with support in immigration services, healthcare, and education. Currently, the Sunshine Center offers English as a second language (ESL) classes, citizenship preparation courses, and Spanish classes to non-Spanish speaking adults learning Spanish as a new language. The majority of the population served at the Sunshine

Center is Latinx<sup>1</sup> and, although they are learning to speak and understand spoken English, many of them do not know how to read or write in their native language (Spanish). The ESL classes taught at the Center focus on spoken literacy and oral communication. During the ESL classes, writing is only used to support pronunciation and provide a visual representation of challenging sounds. Volunteers teach some of the ESL classes and, because the target is for students to understand spoken English and communicate orally, first language (L1) literacy is rarely addressed in their sessions.

For this study, a Spanish literacy program was created specifically for the Sunshine Center's Latinx adult learners and implemented as a pilot L1 literacy program. This pilot program invited all native Spanish speakers at the Center who had received six years or less of formal schooling back in their native countries. It is important to note that some of the adult learners being served at the Center had never participated in formal schooling during their formative years in their countries of origin. The purpose of creating and incorporating a Spanish reading and writing literacy program into the Sunshine Center's services was to provide adult Latinx learners who experienced interruptions in formal school-based learning with the basic skills they need in their L1 to successfully build English literacy (Jiang & Kuehn, 2001; Ortega, 2009). The Spanish literacy program's curriculum was designed to be sensitive to the adult learners' social and personal needs in the United States and to provide relevant information they could use when learning English (see Appendix). The idea behind incorporating such an interdisciplinary literacy program was to promote L1 literacy while cultivating literacy in English and developing content knowledge that impacted the adult learners' lives. The Spanish literacy program was created to empower adult learners and expedite English language learning.

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<sup>1</sup> In this manuscript, I use the term Latinx over Latino or Latina to "be inclusive of all genders and sexual orientation as well as to embrace a term generated and deployed by new generations of Latinx in the US" (Aldama, & González, 2019, p. viii)

## Literature Review

Extensive research and publications on second language acquisition agree on the importance of strengthening L1 literacy to be successful in learning and acquiring a new language (Fitzgerald, 2006; Guo, 2018; Robinson & Altarriba, 2018). When learning a new language, individuals—consciously or unconsciously—compare second language (L2) content with information from their L1 in an attempt to find similarities and making learning easier. It is natural for English learners (ELs) to make mistakes when learning English, but, oftentimes, these mistakes can be clarified when similar concepts or ideologies are explained in the L1 (Rebuck, 2011). However, when students have not received formal schooling in their L1, it is difficult for them to make connections between the two languages, and learning English becomes an even more difficult process (Wojtowicz, 2006). Furthermore, learners who have emerging literacy in their L1 are likely to mainly learn English that is necessary for social communication.

The Latinx adult population served at the Sunshine Center mostly fall under the literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) umbrella. As such, these students are emergent readers and writers in both English and Spanish due to experiencing interruptions in formal school-based learning. Such interruptions can, in many instances, shape their access to 21st-century literacy skills, such as technology for educational and professional purposes specifically. Research by Campos Morán and Orantes (2010) explains the impact technology and other social factors are having on adolescent and adult learners in developing countries. As technology becomes more advanced globally, individuals in developing countries experience growing challenges to fully participate in highly print-literate societies because they have to learn (alphabetic) print literacy, numeracy, and also technology.

A consequence of increasing inequality surrounding access to education in developing countries is that adult learners do not have many choices of employment and cannot afford the increasingly higher demands of accessing reading and writing instruction in the 21st century. In a sense, Campos Morán and Orantes' (2010) idea of educational inequality aligns with what Freire (2014) calls oppression. For the majority of these LESLLA learners, technology, print-dependent societies, and learning the host country's language(s) as

adults are obstacles that can result in permanent exclusion from full participation in their new communities. For this reason, the Spanish literacy program was created in an initial attempt to prevent permanent social exclusion (due to inequitable access to literacy instruction) in this community.

The benefits associated with the program align with the extensive publications and seminal work on L2 acquisition that agree on the importance of strengthening L1 literacy to be successful in learning a new language (i.e., Fitzgerald, 2006; Guo, 2018; Krashen, 1984). Although oral English proficiency is critical for newcomers in the U.S., the demands placed by the text-driven American society requires these learners to also develop print literacy skills. For this reason, the Spanish literacy program focuses on developing and improving writing and reading abilities in the learners' L1 while promoting language skills transference in English. Importantly, this inquiry's primary concern was to explore the effectiveness of the Spanish literacy program from the participants' experiences while developing L1 literacy and learning some English, as well as the opportunities of this program in the future. Thus, two research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do participants describe their L1 development and L2 language acquisition in the Spanish literacy program?
2. How does the learning community (students and facilitator) describe their experiences in the Spanish literacy program?

## Methods

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the effectiveness of the Spanish literacy program implemented at the Sunshine Center from the participants' perspectives and identify opportunities for the future. In this study, the literacy teaching practices were defined as the didactic approaches focused on providing this population of students with the ability to read and write in their L1 (Spanish) with the vision of better preparing them with the skills needed to learn English as a second language. The creation and implementation of this program sought to improve Spanish literacy and enhance English language learning among this vulnerable population of adult learners. In addition, this program and study had the vision of allowing interdisciplinary efforts among the Spanish and ESL instructors teaching Latinx LESLLA learners.

### Design

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), the qualitative case study approach facilitates the examination of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. In this inquiry, a variety of data sources included the triangulation of three data sources: face-to-face interviews, observations, and a focus group, which also increases the validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This contextually-based, diverse design and data collection process maximize the chances of exploring the issue through a variety of lenses allowing for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. Thus, the goal of case study inquiries is to conduct “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., the activity or event, the process, amount of time, and/or individuals) based on extensive data collection” (Creswell, 2015, p. 469). In this specific research inquiry, a case study was used to conduct an in-depth exploration of the implementation of the Spanish literacy program (event and process) as well as its impact on participants and the organization.

### Researcher’s Positionality

In this inquiry, my roles shifted between researcher and class instructor/volunteer. As a qualitative researcher, doctoral candidate, and volunteer at this organization, I understood the potential ethical concerns these roles could raise. As such, I took three steps to minimize those ethical concerns as much as possible. First, I met with all the participants before the study began and explained to them that their participation or withdrawal would not affect them in any way. Second, while grappling with the hopes of wanting this program to be helpful and successful for the organization and the participants, I decided to keep a researcher’s journal to reflect on my experiences. Last, I also maintained continuous communication and debriefings with the Sunshine Center’s Director of Education and my university professor to ensure my interpretations and actions remained as unbiased as possible throughout the study. All of the steps I took to minimize bias in the study complied with Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016)’ recommendations to minimize potential ethical conflicts or concerns in qualitative research.

This research project received ethical approval by the Sunshine Center’s ethics review board, and the agency approved, in its totality, the implementation of this study. In addition, all the participants in this

study signed a consent form (in Spanish) stating they understood the study, acknowledging they had the option to withdraw at any time without repercussions, and that it was their choice to participate. I provided a copy of the findings to the agency for future use and to be shared, at the agency’s discretion, with the participants. Furthermore, this study was conducted as part of one of my courses in my doctoral studies. My university institutional review board (IRB) also approved of this research project.

### Context

This inquiry was conducted in a non-profit organization in the state of Maryland. The Sunshine Center is located in a highly populated urban setting in Baltimore. The Sunshine Center serves a large number of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers—mainly from Spanish-speaking countries—in the Baltimore area and its surroundings. During weekdays, the first floor of its three-story building is divided into two spaces for teaching. The smallest space is an enclosed classroom used by a paid instructor who teaches advanced ESL students. The largest space is an open area for newcomers and beginners, where volunteers are assigned to different learners to primarily teach them conversational English. For this study, the cafeteria was offered as a space for implementing the Spanish literacy program and gathering data from the participants. The cafeteria, a small space located next to the open area, had a table, six chairs, and a standard-size whiteboard.

The Spanish literacy program’s curriculum follows the principles and linguistics foundations of an adult literacy program named ¡Yo, sí puedo! (Yes, I can!). The ¡Yo, sí puedo! methodology teaches knowledge about Spanish linguistics and print literacy according to the students’ learning needs using visual support and sound systems that promote self-discovery (Relys Díaz, 2005). Theoretical concepts are introduced in practical and meaningful ways to ensure that learners can access the information through their L1 and apply them in English. At this level, it is important to pay attention to common misunderstandings and misuses in the learners’ L1 through interactive activities that present real challenges where students can use that knowledge in a real-life context. In addition, each class introduces new topics of interest that motivate students and raise expectations about new relevant topics to come in future classes (Relys Díaz, 2005). The

continuous goal of the Spanish literacy curriculum, which aligns with the ¡Yo, sí puedo! program is to promote literacy through motivation, active engagement, and self-realization.

The Spanish literacy program was designed to meet the literacy demands of this population using cultural elements with the vision of making learning a relevant process. Parlakian and Sánchez (2006) explain in their study the importance of using culture in programs promoting early language and literacy learning and acquisition. According to them, teaching strategies for introducing language and literacy skills must “take into account issues of culture” (Parlakian & Sánchez, 2006, p. 55). As such, the components of this program are tailored-made for Latinx LESLLA learners and incorporate different activities focusing on proficiency demands as these pertains to reading and writing in the L1. At the same time, this program was also designed with the vision of teaching necessary skills required to be successful in the American society that go beyond language learning. Thus, materials were created to integrate topics such as American customs and traditions, politeness norms, the educational system in the United States, and content related to government and geography, to give learners necessary information they will need in the United States. The ideas of cultural and linguistic literacy are present in this program and align with the UNESCO’s vision of educating literate and global adults and societies (UNESCO, 2019) around the world.

### Participants

The number of students in the Spanish literacy program fluctuated throughout the eight weeks because the tutoring services offered in The Sunshine Center are cataloged as “drop-in” services where students attend whenever they have time throughout the week. Although different students participated in the Spanish class at different times, only four adult learners (two females and two males), who attended consistently, agreed to participate in the study. All participants were adults who spoke Spanish as their L1 and were also ELs from El Salvador or Honduras. All names used in this study are pseudonyms; see Table 1 for more information about the participants, the levels of proficiency in their L1 and English, and their formal schooling background.

Table 1  
*Participants’ Information*

Name	Age	Country of Origin	Proficiency in Spanish	Proficiency in English	Formal schooling background
Telma	30	El Salvador	Proficient in listening and speaking. Emergent proficiency in reading and writing.	Emergent proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	Six years of formal school in native country.
Tomás	32	El Salvador	Proficient in listening and speaking. Cannot read or write.	Newcomer, little to no proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	Did not attend formal school in native country.
Miguel	23	Honduras	Proficient in listening and speaking. Emergent proficiency in reading and writing.	Emergent proficiency in listening, speaking. Cannot read or write.	Three years of formal school in native country.
Elena	52	Honduras	Proficient in listening and speaking. Emergent proficiency in reading and writing.	Newcomer, little to no proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	Six years of formal school in native country.

### Data Collection

The data were collected through one face-to-face interview (30-40 minutes), classroom observations (two hours each week for eight weeks, which equals to a total of 16 hours), and a focus group activity (two hours). All interactions and data-gathering processes in this study were conducted in Spanish. Observations took place throughout the

course and were guided by Levine, Gallimore, Weisner, and Turner's (1980) strategies for participant-observers, which will be further discussed in the observations section below. Questions for the interviews and the focus group activity focused on how relevant participants found this program and how they are going to use these skills in their future personal and professional lives. During the interviews and the focus group activity, data (audio) were recorded in the researcher's cellphone, and additional information, including observations, was written down in the researcher's journal.

### **Interviews**

For this inquiry, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted consisting of five open-ended questions in Spanish. Semi-structured interview questions were used because they offered more flexibility and provided the researcher opportunities to explore the topic at a greater depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant was interviewed individually for a duration of 30-40 minutes with the vision of exploring their views, experiences, and motivations while participating in the Spanish literacy program. In addition, these five questions sought to gain knowledge of how meaningful this program was for students and their personal perception of the impact this program had on their lives.

### **Observations**

As my roles in the study include both researcher and instructor, I conducted participant observations in this study. According to Levine, Gallimore, Weisner, and Turner (1980), the term participant observation "refers to naturalistic, qualitative research in which the investigator obtains information through relatively intense, prolonged interaction with those being studied and firsthand involvement in the relevant activities of their lives" (p. 38). In this research, participant observations allowed me to be the researcher while also participating and volunteering at the Sunshine Center during registration week and as an instructor in the Spanish literacy program project.

### **Focus Group Activity**

In this research study, the final class (two hours) for the Spanish literacy program took the form of a final activity consisting of an open discussion where participants shared their comments to five questions

(different from the interview questions). The focus group activity was audio-recorded using the researcher's cellphone. The focus group activity generated information on collective views of the participants' experiences and beliefs about the Spanish literacy program. Thus, the focus group was used as a supplementary source of data maximizing information gathered during observations and individual interviews (Morgan, 1997).

### **Data Analysis**

Inductive analysis was used to identify frequent patterns across participants' responses (Mitton-Kukner, 2015) from observations, interviews, and the focus group to extrapolate unknown concepts from the phenomenon studied. These patterns provided an insight into the participants' realities as they pertain to how important they consider literacy in their L1, the applicability of skills learned in this course to L2 acquisition, and the information they found to be the most relevant in the entire program. The steps used in the analysis followed Yin's (2018) construct validity approach where multiple sources of evidence are used, chain of evidence is established, specific key concepts about the research are defined, and operational measures that match the concepts were identified. Following this logic, multiple sources of evidence took the form of interviews, participant observations, and focus group activity. Chain of evidence was established and defined by connecting the findings or themes identified to valid sources of data acquired from the study. Lastly, emerging concepts from the data were identified by citing published works with similar findings to maximize the chances of validity, measurability, and trustworthiness (Yin, 2018).

During the data analysis, the three steps for conducting inductive analysis were followed: (1) data reduction, (2) establishing clear links, (3) share findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, on the first step raw data was examined individually to identify relevant patterns, themes, or trends and condense text into brief, summary formats. During the second step, links were established in the data by following the five features guiding the categorization of inductive coding: (a) category label, (b) category description, (c) text or data associated with the category, (d) links found among categories, and (d) type of model in which the category is embedded (Thomas, 2006). The three categories of interest, impact, and sustainability described in the

findings section, emerged during the second step of the inductive coding. Lastly, on the third step, findings are shared.

### Findings

For the purpose of this study, findings were divided into three sections: (1) interest, (2) impact, and (3) sustainability. These three emerging themes were identified through inductive analysis from the data collected and also answer the study's research questions.

#### Interest

During this study, participants did not want to initially participate or be part of the Spanish literacy program because they did not understand the implications of L1 literacy when learning an L2. The majority of the students felt initially apprehensive about being part of the Spanish literacy program because they did not think print literacy in Spanish was important or necessary for their immediate lives in the United States. However, I took the time to explain that learning to read and write in Spanish could impact their abilities to learn English, and that part of our classes would have a Spanish-English component. After listening to my explanation, students became interested in the program. In my explanation, I purposefully placed the biggest emphasis on the Spanish-English component of our program and on how print literacy in Spanish would help them learn English and in their lives in the United States. To appeal to the participants' interest, I found that it was important to incorporate in this L1 literacy program opportunities where they could connect the knowledge learned in Spanish to concepts in the English language. For example, in one of our classes, we went over the difference between *ala* [wing] and *a la* [to the]. I explained this concept in Spanish, and I gave examples in English: (1) *El pájaro tiene dos alas* [The bird has two wings] and (2) *Yo voy a la tienda* [I go to the store]. Activities and examples like the one shared above—explained in Spanish, but integrating English—kept participants engaged and motivated to continue learning reading and writing in Spanish.

Tomás, one of the participants, explained in his response during our interview the reason why he decided to join this program after learning how it could also benefit English language learning:

*“Yo he tratado de aprender inglés en diferentes programas pero es difícil. Cuando me dijo que el programa de español podría ayudarme a aprender inglés empecé a venir porque yo nunca pude ir a la escuela en El Salvador. Me da tristeza que no puedo escribir ni leer mi idioma. Aquí [en Estados Unidos] muchas veces trato de escribir cosas, pero me doy cuenta que no puedo, pero no me interesa mucho porque es que tengo que aprender inglés para trabajar.”*

[I have tried to learn English in different programs (institutions), but it is difficult. When you told me that the Spanish program could help me learn English I started coming because I could never go to school in El Salvador. I feel sad that I cannot write or read in my language. Here (in the United States) I often try to write things but I realize that I am not able to, but I do not care very much about it (learning how to read or write in Spanish) because I have to learn English to (be able to) work].

Tomás was a very quiet participant for most of the program; he was always observant and smiling. He came to the program not knowing how to write his own name but, throughout the weeks, he became more confident and would participate when asked to. For Tomás, learning Spanish was important at a personal level because he wanted to be able to read and write in his L1. When sharing his reflections and comments, Tomás showed sadness in his eyes when he talked about not being able to read nor write in Spanish. However, due to life circumstances, since he arrived in the United States, he had to focus on working and keeping his family in the United States and in El Salvador financially stable. In addition, as shared above, he has tried several times to learn English at other institutions, but not knowing how to read or write has become a barrier to understanding/learning. As a result, Tomás keeps dropping from ESL programs and keeps enrolling in new ones hoping one of these programs will help him learn English. Tomás felt the Spanish literacy program was important because it helped him read and write in his L1, but also because it gave him the opportunity to learn English while learning Spanish.

Another participant, Miguel, felt that Spanish reading and writing was not important to his immediate reality in the United States and only chose to join our study after his mother shared with him that he would also be learning some English while learning Spanish. In Miguel's words:

*“Bueno, yo empecé a venir a las clases de español porque mi mamá (Elena) me dijo que viniera; que era bueno para aprender cosas de Estados Unidos y un poco de inglés. Leer y escribir es un poco difícil para mí y entonces pensé que era bueno aprender un poco más de español. Yo estoy trabajando en la construcción y de verdad que no necesito leer y escribir en español allá porque sólo hablamos en español, pero si me gustaría aprender inglés porque aquí en Estados Unidos el inglés es más importante que el español”.*

[Well, I started coming to the Spanish classes because my mom (Elena) told me to come here; that it was a good opportunity for me to learn things about the United States and a little English. Reading and writing (in Spanish) is a bit difficult for me [so] I thought it was good to learn a little more Spanish. I am working in construction, and I really do not need to read and write in Spanish there because we only speak in Spanish there, but I would like to learn English because here in the United States English is more important than Spanish].

Elena is another participant in the study and Miguel is her son. Initially, Miguel was skeptical about the Spanish literacy program because he did not think it would help him meaningfully or be impactful for his immediate life in the United States. However, because of Elena’s advice, Miguel joined our group during our second week and completed the program with perfect attendance. In class, Miguel was enthusiastic and active in answering questions and participating. He was the youngest amongst the four participants, but that fact did not seem to matter when working together in the class. His mother, Elena, would often correct his writing before he showed it to me and would also correct his oral projection when we were practicing presentations/speeches. Similarly, Elena would also make side notes for Miguel when we were talking about English and how they could use their proficiency in Spanish to learn English. Elena and Miguel’s interaction throughout the class evidenced that mothers’ educational self-improvement and involvement in their children’s educational career—regardless of age—have an impact on the overall literacy development of both (Pentón Herrera & Toledo-López, 2017).

Similar to Miguel, Elena was not interested in joining the program initially. Elena shared:

*“Le voy a ser sincera profesor, yo no estaba interesada en la clase de español porque para trabajar aquí lo que necesito es aprender inglés, pero cuando usted*

*me dijo que podía aprender algo de inglés en esta clase entonces vine. Yo sé que mi español no es muy bueno porque solo recibí 6 años en mi país, pero me puedo comunicar en español, pero en inglés no puedo comunicarme y me hace falta. Cuando vi que estábamos aprendiendo también información de aquí de Estados Unidos me gustó mucho porque había cosas que no sabía. También me gustó que mi hijo Miguel pudo aprender más español. Allá en Honduras él nada más pudo ir a la escuela hasta el grado 3 y pienso que es importante que aprenda a leer y a escribir, pero es que no hemos tenido oportunidad de aprender más español”.*

[I am going to be truthful to you, teacher. I was not interested in the Spanish class because to work here (in the United States) what I need is to learn English, but when you told me that I could learn some English in this class I decided to come. I know my Spanish is not very good because I only received (went to school for) 6 years in my country but I can communicate in Spanish, but in English I cannot communicate and I need it. When I saw that we were also learning information about here (the United States), I liked it a lot because there were things that I did not know. I also liked that my son Miguel could learn more Spanish. In Honduras, he was only able to go to school until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and I think it is important that he learns to read and write (better in Spanish), but (the problem is that) we have not had the opportunity to learn more Spanish].

Elena’s confessions were insightful and heartbreaking. During our conversations and classes, it became apparent she has had to endure many hardships throughout her life in Honduras and here in the United States. Although she was thankful to attend the Spanish program, mostly because she had the opportunity to learn different topics relevant to her life in the United States (i.e., traditions in the United States, states and capitals, hobbies in the United States), she confessed she would not attend another Spanish class in the future because *“yo necesito aprender inglés, es muy importante para mi trabajo”* [I need to learn English, it is very important (that I learn English) for my job]. Since her arrival in the United States, English has become a form of currency for Elena, one that provides job security and ensures economic income. As such, Spanish reading and writing are not immediately relevant for Elena because her L1 does not offer many opportunities for her or her son Miguel beyond being able to use it

orally on their daily activities within the Spanish-speaking community and in their household.

After further analyzing the data, it became apparent other participants were also primarily interested in the Spanish literacy program because they were learning relevant information about the United States (i.e., states in the United States, places around Baltimore, among others) as well as some English (as explained in the activity for “*ald*” and “*a la*” above). However, beyond learning English and information about the United States, participants identified being interested in learning Spanish as a personal goal but did not think of it as an immediate need for their lives. Instead, students explained the urgency to learn English and associated the English language with more (and better) professional opportunities and economic stability. In a way, participants experienced native language nostalgia—although spoken Spanish remains a vital entity for their daily lives within their families and communities, knowing how to read or write in Spanish has more of a sentimental and nostalgic, rather than practical, value. For participants, being fully literate in Spanish represents, above all, a nostalgic, sentimental connection to their native country and culture.

According to Akhter (2017), for immigrants, feelings of nostalgia are thought of as “a debilitating form of escapism and as an inability to adapt to change and mobility” (p. 23). In other published works, immigrants’ feelings of nostalgia are associated with “immigrant memories and imagined returns to the ‘homeland’” (Mannur, 2007, p. 11) or with past-present negotiations and the “loss of something meaningful in another time and, possibly, another place” (Hadžibulić & Manić, 2016, p. 99). In this particular study, the participants’ feelings of native language nostalgia were directly connected with feelings of loss, exchange, and survival. Participants understood that, due to life situations beyond their control, they lost the opportunity to develop L1 literacy during their developmental years. Although L1 literacy may have been vital in their native countries, participants are now faced with the decision of having to shift, or exchange, priorities in which language to learn. In their present reality, the English language is essential for work opportunities, economic security, and survival in the United States. On the other hand, Spanish is only used as medium of communication within their family and friends, which represents sentimental wealth, but does not produce income.

An additional finding emerging under the theme of interest from this study was that participants unconsciously participated in native language depreciation practices. In the United States, Spanish is a language with little cultural and intellectual legitimacy because of its link to immigration and poverty (Bruzos Moro, 2016; Pentón Herrera, 2019). As such, Spanish speakers—especially Spanish-speaking immigrants—are commonly depicted as illiterate, poor, and uneducated (Pentón Herrera, 2020). Through observations and classroom interactions, it became apparent participants believed Spanish to be an inferior language (in comparison to English), and this was one of the elements contributing to prioritizing English over Spanish. Similarly, acquiring reading and writing skills in English was considered more important over acquiring reading and writing competencies in Spanish because of professional opportunities connected with English in their community. One last point is that, data was not sufficient to determine the relationship, if any, between native language nostalgia and native language depreciation.

### Impact

In this program, participants had the opportunity to reflect and come to the realization that as their knowledge in Spanish grammar increased, they started to understand better some elements of the English grammar. Furthermore, participants found the Spanish-English grammar activities useful and stated they felt there was a connection between their improvement in their L1 print skills and how they understood and learned English. Tomás stated, “*conociendo mejor la escritura aprendo mejor inglés. Si sé como se escribe correctamente en español se me hace más fácil entender y escribir en inglés*”. [Knowing how to write better (in Spanish) allows me to learn English better. If I know how to write correctly in Spanish, it will be easier to understand and write in English]. Tomás made a follow-up comment stating the importance of knowing how to correctly spell words in Spanish when using Google translations to get the correct English translation words.

Other participants had similar responses making reference to the importance learning how to read and write in Spanish impacts their English language learning experience as well as their personal lives. For example, as shared by Telma:

*‘Esta clase es importante para mi porque no tomé mis estudios en mi país. Yo ahora tengo una niña y necesito aprender inglés para poder comunicarme en la*

*escuela y poder ayudarla a mi niña con sus tareas; el inglés es muy importante. Pero también el programa de español me ayudó mucho porque aprendí diferentes cosas que también puedo enseñarle a mi niña y para mí también. Por ejemplo, aprendí del sistema de educación de Estados Unidos, los diferentes estados de Estados Unidos, y las comparaciones entre inglés y español, eso es importante también.”*

[This class is important for me because I did not study in my country. I now have a daughter and I need to learn English to be able to communicate at school and be able to help my child with her homework; English is very important. But also, the Spanish program helped me a lot because I learned different things that I can also teach my daughter and for me too. For example, I learned about the education system of the United States, the different states in the United States, and comparing English and Spanish, that is important too].

Telma’s excerpt above makes a direct reference to the impact language education (both in English and Spanish) has for Latinx immigrant women in the United States. Telma is a single mother who is attending The Sunshine Center to learn English with the purpose of helping her daughter in school and communicating with her daughter’s teachers. Telma’s comments and reality agree with Toledo-López and Pentón Herrera’s (2016) conclusion that Latinx immigrant women find in bilingualism (English-Spanish) an empowering tool for social and cultural integration in the United States, as well as a bridge for more opportunities. “This integration formally occurs through education and acquisition of language skills. Communication, thus, becomes a valued tool without which integration will not occur. It is a source of empowerment that creates new spaces for women to participate” (Toledo-López & Pentón Herrera, 2016, p. 45). Hence, for Telma, the Spanish literacy program became an opportunity to learn information in her L1 that she can teach her daughter. Furthermore, learning Spanish literacy gave Telma the opportunity to use her L1 to learn information about the United States’ educational system and also using Spanish as a bridge to learning English.

Telma’s response also refers to the impact the topics included in the Spanish literacy program had for her and fellow classmates, which motivated them to continue coming every week. One of the most well-received aspects of the Spanish literacy program was the topics

discussed every week. As discussed above, the Spanish literacy program was divided into eight relevant topics where students learned Spanish (and some English) while also learning about other important topics such as civics, community, geography, politics, and education. Students shared they did not have many opportunities to learn about these important topics in their daily lives and were thankful the Spanish literacy program included this type of information. The information shared under this category speaks to the importance of including relevant topics for the adult learners’ lives in the curriculum. The relevant, readily-applicable information participants learned in our program is what kept them engaged, motivated, and using language as a vehicle to learn social, cultural, political, geographical (among others) information about the United States and their community.

### Sustainability

Encouraging participation from students to initially join the Spanish literacy program was difficult in the beginning and, although participants enjoyed the experience, they shared they would not be returning for future offerings. In our focus group activity, Elena candidly shared, “*Profesor yo le voy a decir la verdad, yo y mi hijo (Miguel) no regresaremos a otras clases de español en el futuro porque tenemos que enfocarnos en aprender inglés.*” [Teacher, I will tell you the truth, my son (Miguel) and I will not return to future Spanish classes because we have to focus on learning English.] When Elena shared this message with the group, the other students nodded in agreement, “El inglés es muy importante” (English is very important), stated Miguel as a follow up to Elena’s comment. In response to Elena’s comment, Telma shared, “*Lo único que quisiera es no tener que haber escogido entre la clase de inglés y la de español. Me gustaría que las ofrecieran en horas o días diferentes.*” [The only thing that I would not want to do (in the future) is to have to choose between the English and Spanish classes. I would like for these classes to be offered at different times or days.]

After sharing Elena’s and Telma’s comments with the Center’s Director of Education, she explained the only available days and times in the future for the Spanish literacy program would be the same times and days they offer their ESL classes as space is an issue. In other words, future students would have to choose between the Spanish literacy program and ESL classes, as the Center could only offer them at the same time and place; this was conflicting for many students, and

most would gravitate towards ESL classes. The Director shared she had talked to the participants to learn about their experience, and they shared they enjoyed the program, but they will like to focus on attending ESL classes in the future instead.

Another challenge to program sustainability the Director of Education shared was recruiting volunteers to teach in the Spanish program. The Director of Education and I had reached out to different organizations and universities around the area, but it was difficult to find anyone interested in volunteering to teach Spanish literacy. As a result, the Director of Education made the decision to add the Spanish literacy program as remedial support ESL volunteers could use with their adult learners who had experienced interruptions in formal, school-based learning, but not as an individual program offered at their Center. In other words, the Spanish literacy program was consolidated into a folder, and the volunteers and students had the option of using it in their practices as desired.

### Discussion

The findings of this study suggest L1 literacy programs at non-profit organizations have the potential to empower adult Latinx LESLLA learners—and potentially other immigrant populations in similar positions—and support them in learning English. There are some L1 literacy programs already in place throughout the United States with a solid and growing population of literate-emergent Latinx immigrants like California (Masatani, 2013) and Boston, Massachusetts (Smoke, 1998). Although limited data exist about how these or similar programs are designed to be successful, some of the common components that can be found in the literature are the focus on teaching L1 literacy while focusing on the development of life skills. In other words, some of the similarities addressed in the programs shared by Masatani (2013) and Smoke (1998) lie on the need to approach L1 literacy instruction through a lens of equipping adult learners with functional skills they can use in their daily lives by introducing relevant topics such as financial literacy, communicating with teachers in school (for parents), and using technology.

For this reason, it is important for non-profit organizations offering ESL classes to consider the impact L1 literacy programs can have for their adult learners and those learners' family members. Importantly,

as seen in this study's findings, to successfully implement and maintain an L1 literacy program, learners' interest is of utmost importance. To increase participant motivation in this type of program, organizations should educate learners about the benefits associated with learning to read and write in their L1 and also incorporate relevant topics in the L1 literacy program that LESLLA learners can use in their daily lives. At the same time, L1 literacy programs should consider an instructional approach where the focus is to teach L1 literacy by incorporating meaningful, pressing topics learners deal with on a daily basis instead of focusing on teaching L1 literacy by solely focusing on grammar. Similarly, keeping in mind the adult learners' strong desire and necessity to learn English, L1 literacy programs should also dedicate a portion of their classes to explain how the skills learned in the L1 can be used or transferred to English.

As a final note, findings revealed sustaining L1 literacy programs might be a challenge for non-profit organizations with limited resources. In this study, participants were not interested in joining a similar L1 literacy program in the future as their priority is to acquire English as fast as possible. Similarly, because the Sunshine Center relies on volunteers to teach most of their classes, finding a volunteer to teach Spanish literacy classes was an additional obstacle. Thus, organizations considering the implementation of similar programs must take into consideration learners' participation, having a consistent volunteer/instructor for the program, as well as offering L1 literacy programs on times and days where ESL classes are not offered to avoid schedule conflicts.

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## Appendix

### Spanish Literacy Program

Program Objective: To help Latinx LESLLA learners achieve intermediate reading and writing literacy skills in their L1 (Spanish) so they can use that knowledge to learn English.

Topics: The program is divided into eight different sessions and each session introduces new information using diverse topics.

1. Week #1: Introduction to the alphabet. Basic grammatical rules and personal identification.
2. Week #2: Daily life and community. Introduction to *diptongos* (diphthongs), *hiatos* (hiatus), *sujeto* (subject), and *predicado* (predicate).
3. Week #3: Free time and hobbies. Introduction to regular hobbies in the United States. Review of present tense verb conjugations in Spanish.
4. Week #4: Travel. Introduction to all the states in the United States. Review of past tense (preterit and imperfect) verb conjugations in Spanish.
5. Week #5: Education. Introduction to the education system in the United States.
6. Week #6: Foods and drinks. Introduction to American food and drinks traditions.
7. Week #7: The English language. Compare and contrast English and Spanish languages.
8. Week #8: Future plans. Review future tense verbs in Spanish.

## TECHNOLOGY-SUPPORTED L2 LEARNING IN LESLLA CLASSES: TWO CASE STUDIES FROM FINLAND

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### Abstract

Digitalized environments are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, which means that digital literacy is essential for everyone, including LESLLA learners (e.g., Reder, Vanek, & Wrigley, 2012). This paper focuses on two qualitative sub-studies carried out in a Finnish context. The data for this study consist of (a) interviews of ten LESLLA learners, and (b) responses to an online questionnaire with open-ended questions from ten LESLLA teachers. We discuss, for example, the learning opportunities that the use of digital devices and applications, especially the use of smartphones, offers learners, and teachers' thoughts on the use of technology in LESLLA classrooms.

The underlying approach in the sub-studies is sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Overall, we consider how to scaffold the development of the learners' language skills with the support of technology. We also discuss the different social and semiotic digital practices (e.g., Thorne, 2013) used in literacy classes. It is important to teach LESLLA learners digital skills, while considering each learner's specific skill level. Additionally, the existing skills of LESLLA learners in using applications should be connected to formal classroom teaching in a pedagogically reasonable way.

## Literacy Skills and Digitality

Finland is often described as an educational wonderland where literacy and other basic skills are generally mastered. However, according to PIAAC 2012, approximately 11 percent of Finnish adults have emerging basic skills, many of them immigrants (Malin, Sulkunen, & Laine, 2013).

Grabe and Stoller (2011) propose that literacy skills are connected to social practices and a certain time and a place; furthermore, literacy skills change alongside technological advances, and each society has different needs when it comes to literacy. Kupiainen and Sintonen (2009) suggest that in recent decades, most countries have undergone a transformation to become digital information societies, and the role and nature of literacy skills have changed together with the sociocultural reality that surrounds them. Today, for example, using an online service to manage one's personal finance matters is often mandatory.

## Literacy Learners and Literacy Teaching in Finland

According to Official Statistics of Finland (2020), at the end of 2019, the total population of Finland was approximately 5.53 million. The share of foreign-born people was 7.3 percent, a small number when compared to many European countries. Among the six most common foreign languages in Finland are Arabic, Somali, and Kurdish, and many literacy learners are speakers of these. In 2014, Nieminen, Sutela, and Hannula (2015) estimated that approximately 5,000 immigrants living in Finland had a maximum schooling background of three years. This number has presumably increased alongside the number of immigrants. Even though schooling background and literacy skills should not be confounded, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020) shows a clear overlap.

Since 2018, there have been two types of literacy training programs in Finland, each with different aims and target groups. First, there is literacy training organized as a part of basic education for adults, which entails full-time study and aims at the completion of basic education and eligibility for further studies in high school or vocational education. The main target group of this training is young adults.

Second, the target group of literacy training organized by institutions for liberal adult education consists of immigrants who need flexible and/or part-time studying opportunities (e.g., stay-at-home parents and the elderly) or those who may benefit from more activity-based learning (e.g., adults with possible learning problems). For more on literacy training in Finland, see Finnish National Agency for Education (2018).

## Literature Review

### LESLLA Learners as Users of Digital Tools

These days, the use of technology is essential for everyone, including LESLLA learners, as many of the daily life literacy practices and second language learning occur in digital environments instead of printed ones. Because of that, digital literacy must also be seen as an important part of literacy instruction of LESLLA learners (see Reder et al., 2012, p. 48). Since the 1990s, several studies have focused on LESLLA learners as computer users (e.g., Wrigley, 1993; Van Rensburg & Son, 2010; Strube, 2013; Kennedy, 2015). In recent years, LESLLA learners and digital literacy has also been in the focus (Reder et al., 2012; Vanek, 2019), and Smyser (2019) even suggests that digital literacy can help LESLLA learners overcome challenges related to becoming print literate. The following studies, in turn, are examples that discuss the use of mobile devices by LESLLA learners in an L2 learning context, which is even more relevant for this paper.

According to Kananen (2019), LESLLA learners utilize different compensation strategies, such as using the icons to navigate in online banking applications. In Schiepers and Van Nuffel (2017), the focus is on WhatsApp for workplace language learning while Bigelow, Vanek, King, and Abdi (2015) discuss the ways the use of one's native language in Facebook groups supports the development of academic literacy skills in English. Earlier research also shows that, for LESLLA learners, using a mobile device is less challenging than using a computer (Smyser, 2019; Bogdanoff, Vaarala, Törmänen, & Tammelin-Laine, 2018; Bacishoga & Johnston, 2013).

### Digital Skills and Digital Literacy

The existing definitions for digital skills and digital literacy differ significantly according to the source, and many of them have been

created from the perspective of literate users of digital devices. According to UNESCO (2018, p. 6), "Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competences that are variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy." Reder et al. (2012, p. 59) give an important addition to this from the LESLLA perspective by amplifying that "in order to participate in technology infused cultures, all learners need a basic sense of how to access technology, how to navigate a web site and how to defend themselves against the onslaught of unreliable information and unsolicited products and services." Additionally, Vanek (2019) suggests that when LESLLA learners are learning to use digital devices they practice both digital skills, digital literacy, and the useful words and concepts in the second language; language skills become embodied in the process, and they are tightly intertwined with digital skills.

Our views on digital skills and digital literacy are based on the definition suggested by UNESCO (2018), which we have modified according to the suggestions by Reder et al. (2012) and Vanek (2019). In this paper, the ability to access information is seen as basic digital skills such as logging in and out of devices and services as well as knowing how to use a touch screen, while the ability to manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information refers to digital literacy, for instance, for online banking and sending and receiving messages.

Existing research shows that many LESLLA learners have a smartphone and are very skillful users of it (e.g., Smyser, 2019). However, there is a clear need for research-based knowledge on the role of smartphones in teaching and learning digital literacy and L2. This paper addresses this gap in the research field from a Finnish point of view. The first sub-study concentrates on the learning opportunities offered by the use of the voice function in smartphones to LESLLA learners (RQ1), while the focus of the second sub-study is on teachers' views on LESLLA learners' digital literacy and digital skills (RQ2.1) as well as teachers' thoughts about using technology in literacy classrooms (RQ2.2).

## The Present Study

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical background of the sub-studies is founded on sociocultural theory, especially its key concepts of *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) and *scaffolding* (see Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky developed this approach originally for understanding children's cognitive development, which requires taking into account the social and cultural context where the development takes place. ZPD refers to a learner's level of development, on which they can handle a task with the support of a more skilled partner but not independently. Scaffolding, the pedagogical and interactive tool, is strongly related to ZPD.

Another concept related to learning is *affordances*. Affordances are relationships that provide a “match” between something in the environment and the learner (van Lier, 2004, p. 98). Smartphones can function as such affordances in the student's environment: they afford flexibility, on-demand retrieval, and access to resources for language learning. Affordances can then refer to the ways the learner takes advantage of the smartphone platform and, for instance, applications for learning languages.

### Context

Both sub-studies have been implemented in the context of basic education for adults in Finland: the participants in sub-study 1 were students in one institution, while the participants in sub-study 2 were working as teachers all over the country.

### Participants and Data Collection

The data of sub-study 1 consist of ten interviews of adult literacy learners. Five of the interviewees were men and five were women, and they were 22–52 years old. The backgrounds of the participants varied widely: they had lived in Finland from six months to ten years. Some had attended school for several years in their countries of origin and could read in their L1s or in their languages of education, whereas some were learning literacy skills for the first time in their lives. The participants of the first interview had studied in the same literacy class for three months, whereas the students who participated in the second interview had studied together for three weeks.

During the interviews, we asked the participants to tell and show us how they use their smartphones and the applications. We audio recorded the discussions and took photos of the screens and the applications that the participants were using as they explained what they did with their phones. The phones were also in actual use as they received messages and phone calls during the interviews. This took the interviews in a more authentic direction.

The data of the second sub-study is comprised of anonymous responses to an online questionnaire with twelve open-ended questions from ten teachers working in basic education for adults. No background information was collected. The questionnaire was created with the Webropol 3.0 survey and reporting tool (Webropol, 2020) and shared to several Facebook groups aimed at literacy teachers. The Finnish questions and responses have been translated for this paper. The aim of using a questionnaire as a data collection method was to get information about the use of technology in literacy classes from a large number of teachers. Because of the low number of responses, the findings cannot be extrapolated to the general group of literacy teachers, but they give some suggestive ideas.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis method used in these qualitative sub-studies was thematic content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). In sub-study 1, two researchers examined the transcribed interviews and the students' multimodal texts (screenshots, WhatsApp discussions, text messages, photos, edited photos, photos of applications). We focused on the extracts where the interviewee was mentioning the voice function of the application and compared our findings. In addition, we tested the applications they used to see how they functioned and what kinds of activities they were used for. We combined and examined the information from the students' multimodal texts with the interview responses. In doing so, we found contextual cues that helped us to understand better the literacy practices the students had. In this paper, we zero in on the findings related to a single salient literacy practice elucidated in the data – voice functions. At first, we analyze the device preferences of the LESLLA learners (Finding 1). In more detail we focus on the possibilities the use of smart phone offers for problem-solving (Findings 2 and 4) and language learning (Findings 2 and 3).

In sub-study 2, the responses of the online questionnaire were coded and analyzed by one researcher with the help of ATLAS.ti software. First, the responses related to the teachers' views on (a) their student's digital (literacy) skills and (b) the use of technology in the literacy classroom, were separated from the full data and divided under themes (a) and (b). Then, similarities and differences between the responses were identified. Finally, possible effects of the expressed views on literacy teaching in practice were considered.

### Researcher Positionality

In sub-study 1, we had to consider our positions as researchers and questions about research ethics carefully, since the participants were adult literacy learners with whom the only shared language was Finnish. Naturally, the students could opt out of the study at any time, and the group's teacher had discussed the study with the students beforehand, so they would feel comfortable in the interview. Since we did not have a chance to have interpreters present during the interviews, we prepared the research consent forms in easy Finnish to match the language skills of the interviewees. Additionally, we discussed the study with each participant before the interviews to make sure they knew what our purpose was. During the interviews, the cooperation between two researchers helped gain mutual understanding with each interviewee.

As for sub-study 2, the researcher's experience as a literacy teacher supported the data analysis by giving some additional background knowledge from the field. Only a few questionnaire responses were ambiguous, which reduced the possibility of misinterpretation.

## Findings and Discussion

### Sub-Study 1

This sub-study focused on the learning opportunities offered to LESLLA learners by the use of the voice function in smartphone applications. The learner interviews were conducted by two researchers, whose code names are R1 and R2 in the following excerpts. The code name P (e.g., P10) refers to a student-participant, whereas S refers to a smartphone that was used during the interview. The transcription conventions appear in Appendix 1.

### *Finding 1: Device Preference*

Our first and elementary observation was that the students said they mainly used smartphones instead of PCs or tablets. All the interviewees had a smartphone but only one of them had a tablet. Two mentioned that they had a PC at home, but the other one said that only her husband actually used it. In the school, the use of PCs was limited to two hours a week in ICT (information and communications technology) lessons. During some lessons, they also used smartphone applications, but according to the students, the school's slow internet access slowed down the use of them. They also commented that using the smartphone was easy, although writing in Finnish with it was demanding. However, the smartphone and multimodal applications offered the student different possibilities for emergent and experienced writers alike.

### *Finding 2: Use of Voice Commands and Voice-Activated Functions*

The voice is an important element in different applications as well as in social media. Voice-enabled technology reduces the need for reading and writing, since applications can be activated with voice commands (Patel, Ormandjieva, & Pitula, 2020). This kind of technology does not replace literacy skills, but especially at the beginning of learning to read and write, it is useful in everyday practices and it supports language learning.

Different voice commands and voice-activated functions were widely used by the students. For example, the students sent voice messages to each other in the WhatsApp group chat created by the teacher. Voice messages can be recorded and sent directly in the WhatsApp application. During the interviews, the learners showed us applications and webpages based on voice and moving images. The students and their families used YouTube to watch videos and children's programs and listen to music from Finland and from their home countries. These kinds of activities are beneficial in L2 learning (e.g., Chik & Ho, 2017).

One student-participant described their use of Google Translate and its voice-based features for interpreting and writing messages. They said that with the application, it is possible to translate messages written in Finnish and listen to them in their L1, since Google Translate can transform written text into speech. On the other hand, the student is also able to write messages in Finnish by first dictating

the message in the application in their L1 and then allowing the application to transform the message into Finnish text. However, in Excerpt 1 the student (P10) says that they tend to avoid using Google Translate every day, because they have a strong motivation to learn and challenge themselves by not relying on smartphone applications:

Excerpt 1. (January 31, 2019, interview)

R1: do you use translator every day. or

P10: not every day

R1: not every day. yeah

P10: no I want to talk, I want to self-

R1: do it yourself

P10: learn, yes

The use of voice appears to be an important tool in problem-solving for adult language learners. Thus, it is important to practice using different voice recognition translators and online dictionaries in the classroom.

### ***Finding 3: Language Learning Supported with Voice-Enabled Applications***

The student-participants used language learning applications and games on their smartphones. Their teacher was also aware of the learning possibilities of different applications and had created a WhatsApp group for the students. There was variation in how actively the students used the applications.

In Excerpt 2, a student is demonstrating how they use Quizlet (a digital flashcard and learning game application) to learn Finnish:

Excerpt 2 (May 16, 2018, interview)

R1: quizlet okay.

R2: um wait this [is the teaching material.

P4: [mm.

R1: did the teacher put. ((noise from the smartphone))

P4: yeah.

R2: what's on there.

S: ((I am hungry))

P4: I am hungry.

R2: what else have you got there.

P4: I am thir- thiirsty.

R2: listen- can list[en.

P4: [yeah.

S: ((I am thirsty))

R2: all[right.

P4: [it's easy.

R2: that's nice.

P4: I have, the flu.

R1: m[m.

R2: [wow you speak well.

S: ((I have the flu))

P4: [mh.

R2: [right.

P4: I have a clough [sic]. clou- clough yeah.

R2: mhm.

S: ((I have a cough))

P4: cough. I has hot.

S: ((I am hot))

R2: good.

P4: I can.

It is worth noting that the learner said the very practical phrases first in Finnish and then played the recording created with the application. This illustrates that the student had already learned the phrases, although the process is still ongoing, and the language chunks will develop further. Clearly, the learner was pleased to demonstrate their language skills and wanted to let the researchers know the task was simple by saying “it’s easy”, and later shows their satisfaction with their skills by stating “I can”.

However, not all language learners take advantage of the affordances offered by voice-based applications. When discussing the language learning game called Ekapeli, one of the students said that because chores like cooking and cleaning take so much of their time, there is little time left for playing, so they let their children play the game instead. Perhaps some learners do not see games as valuable language learning tools if they believe that learning only occurs in a classroom using more traditional methods.

**Finding 4: The Use of Voice Could Help in Formal Communication**

The LESLLA students had received official messages from their own school, their children’s school (via software used in communication between school and home), and from other government authorities, such as the Immigration Service, and social workers (via text messages). The messages were often difficult to decipher.

In Excerpt 3, the student (P8) is showing the interviewers photos from their smartphone’s gallery. One picture shows a message received from the authorities, which one of the interviewers (R2) reads aloud:

Excerpt 3. (May 16, 2018, interview)

R2: we have here “you have been granted a personal assistant for leisure activities by the disability services. meeting with the interpreter”. date, where, time. wh- what. do you know what this is.

P8: is not

R2: yeah

P8: is not me

In this excerpt, it is clear that the content of the message is urgent and important, but the language is difficult for LESLLA students to understand. Since we interviewed the students in Finnish without the assistance of an interpreter, we cannot be sure what the student’s intention was when they answered the interviewer’s question. One possible way to interpret the answer is that the student is trying to convey that they do not know what the message is about. On the other hand, the student may be trying to say that the message is not theirs. Because a smartphone’s gallery usually also contains photos from messaging applications like WhatsApp, it is possible that the photo of the message is someone else’s. Nevertheless, the message is a perfect example of complex texts of the kind the students have to face in their day-to-day lives.

If LESLLA students could communicate with authorities by voice messaging, official information might be easier to understand. In messages from authorities, it would be preferable to use easy Finnish or some other language the immigrant knows, since in the early stages of learning how to read and write, understanding and producing speech are the strongest subskills in the target language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Smartphones offer language users different modalities, such as speech, symbols, moving images, text and gestures, which they use according to their personal and social importance. LESLLA learners use their smartphones skillfully in their free time, and this can function as an additional language learning resource. These additional resources can also be utilized in the classroom context, but on the learner’s terms, using methods that they find meaningful.

**Sub-Study 2**

The findings of the second sub-study have been divided into two sections. Some of the open-ended questions focused on the teachers’ views on LESLLA learners’ digital literacy and digital skills (RQ 2.1) and the others on their thoughts about using technology in literacy classrooms (RQ 2.2). The letter T with a number in the examples below refers to a particular respondent; the examples are translations of the Finnish responses.

**Technology-Supported Pedagogy and LESLLA Learners**

Based on the teacher responses, Finnish LESLLA learners use various digital applications and software both in the classroom and on their own time, as can be seen in Table 1 (see also Bogdanoff et. al., 2018).

Table 1  
*Applications and software used by LESLLA learners according to the teacher-respondents*

LESLLA students use	
in the classroom	on their own time
Microsoft applications: Word, PowerPoint, OneDrive, Paint; Google applications: Translate, Docs, Slides, Gmail, Classroom; Kahoot!, Quizlet, YouTube, WhatsApp, Wilma, web browsers, Padlet, video editing tools, different online dictionaries and translators, Facebook, applications/websites for language learning (suomitaskussa.eu, Lyricstraining, kotisuomessa.fi, Memrise, Mondlylanguages, Suomipassi, Ekapeli, osaansuomea.fi), E-Ville (for basic mathematics), Moodle, informative web sites (HSL, Yle news in easy Finnish)	Kahoot!, Quizlet, Suomipassi, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Tinder, WhatsApp, Wilma, Google maps, web browsers, different video and game applications, PUBG mobile game, audio recordings for Suomen mestari readers, Microsoft Word, informative websites (Iltalehti, HSL, Yle news in easy Finnish)

Teacher 10 even mentioned that they encourage students to use the same software at home as they do during the lessons. The software that the teachers reported using in the classroom the most often were Microsoft- and Google-based office programs, and Wilma, which are also mentioned in Example 1.

Example 1.

T10: “When we use computers, we write texts with Google docs or Word. All the output is stored in Google Drive. In our institution, we use Wilma, which is used by the students on their smartphones. Messages and homework go through Wilma.”

Wilma is a nationwide web service, (i.e., software that is available over the internet and includes messaging) which is used in communication between home and school. Guardians and teachers can share information about, for instance, attendance and instruction, and students can monitor their own studies. Thus, adult learners with school-aged children use Wilma both in their own studies and when communicating with their children’s teachers. On their own time, according to, for example, Teachers 4 and 6, the learners often use social media but also applications for independent language learning and everyday life.

The most used digital device among the LESLLA learners in question is the smartphone, which is used in the classroom and at home. Teacher 8 even reported that only a couple of their learners own a tablet while hardly any of them have a computer. The same observations have been reported by Rosen and Vanek (2017). Because of the limited resources in the institutions organizing basic education for adults, the learners use their own devices also in the classroom; this can be seen in Example 2.

Example 2.

T1: “During the lessons, the students frequently use their own devices, institution-owned iPads, desktops in the computer lab, and occasionally laptops. Most students use their phone alone in their spare time.”

In the teacher-respondents’ view, for LESLLA learners, the most challenging aspect in using digital tools is logging into devices or

applications. It can be difficult to remember the username and password or a PIN code and type them correctly with a keyboard or a touch screen. This is especially challenging for learners with emerging awareness of the difference between lower case and uppercase letters. These points were mentioned separately in many questionnaire responses, but only Teacher 4 expressed them all (see Example 3).

Example 3.

T4: “Creating passwords and usernames and/or remembering them is almost impossible when distinguishing uppercase and lowercase letters does not yet work.”

However, according to seven out of ten teacher-respondents, it is easy for their learners to use their smartphone for various other purposes, such as taking pictures and using applications.

When the teachers were asked what they found surprising in their students’ IT skills, (Question 6), they brought up the fact that students were at the most beginning levels (Teacher 10), that they had such different levels of competence (Teacher 9), and that progress happened slowly (Teacher 11) (see also Smyser, 2019). Despite the challenges, Teacher 1 expressed that their learners were interested in using digital devices and willing to learn. Moreover, seven out of ten respondents reported that LESLLA learners are much more competent in using smartphones than any other devices, which is also supported by the student interviews discussed above (see sub-study 1) (see also Bogdanoff et al., 2018). According to Teacher 12, one of the downsides is that the curricula, institutions, and practical arrangements do not support the incorporation of technology as an integral part of literacy education (see also Rosen & Vanek, 2017). This is something that should be carefully considered in the future development of curricula, both at the national and the institutional level.

***Technology-Supported Pedagogy and LESLLA Teachers***

As expected, all teacher-respondents reported using a great variety of digital devices and applications on their own time (Question 9) but the descriptions of their pedagogical use (Questions 3 and 7) had variation. Since few of their students had access to a computer at home, Teachers 12 and 13 thought it was important to use computers and laptops in classroom activities. Teachers 3 and 8 emphasized the

importance of computer skills considering the students' future studies and employment opportunities, and Teacher 13 stressed the role of basic computer skills as an equalizer, because they allow citizens to access activities and services available in society (see also Rosen & Vanek, 2017). However, there are challenges related to using computers in the classroom, because of the limited number of devices, large and heterogeneous groups, and student motivation, which can be seen in Examples 4 and 5.

#### Example 4.

T4: "If the classroom assistant is absent, working with computers is a pain for the teacher because you have to advise each one individually... The institution does not provide devices for the students."

#### Example 5.

T11: "The students are quite handy with their smartphones, which makes them less interested in learning to use the computer."

Rosen and Vanek (2017) show that underfunding in adult education is not just a Finnish problem. It is also obvious that, in large classes, it is challenging for the teacher to scaffold each student's learning individually and to tailor the lesson plans to fit everyone's ZPD to secure learning at different levels and with different existing skills (see Vygotsky, 1978).

It was interesting how the respondents described their use of technology in their teaching (Question 3). Three of the responses were from the teacher's perspective and focused on the teacher as a user of digital tools by listing the tools and applications the teacher worked with both in lesson planning and in the classroom. The remaining seven responses focused more on the students and their use of tools and applications during the lessons. The respondents reported that in addition to playing language learning games (Teacher 13), their students used, for instance, WhatsApp or the recorder application in their smartphones to record themselves reading text aloud and to send the recordings to the teacher with WhatsApp or via Google Classroom (Teacher 12). This division in viewpoints may tell us something about how the teachers understood the question, but also how active they consider their students to be as users of technology.

Most of the respondents gave the impression that their digital skills and digital literacy are up to date, but the responses did not provide much information on whether these skills are sufficient for pedagogical use. If we had interviewed them, the respondents could have elaborated on this subject. In Question 8, Teacher 8 wondered how they could integrate computer skills into LESLLA learners' Finnish lessons, which suggests that they might be facing pedagogical challenges. Learners need scaffolding even in skills that might seem, from the teacher's perspective, very basic, which can come as a surprise to some (e.g., Teacher 10, Question 6). Students can also have very different skill levels, and if the teacher is not prepared for this, it can be challenging to find a way to include technology in their lessons.

### Implications

The two sub-studies revealed similar results. First, in terms of digital skills, LESLLA learners seem to be adept at using smartphones but less adept when it comes to using a computer, which emerged clearly in the learner interviews as well as in teacher questionnaire responses. Many LESLLA learners have been using smartphones since childhood in their countries of origin or in refugee camps (for similar findings, see Smyser, 2019), which makes it easier for them to start using one in Finnish as well. Second, another overarching finding was the usefulness of voice-based applications in smartphones for training reading skills and learning the language orally. Pedagogically relevant use of technology can improve language learning, but it can also support the individual's participation in society. However, exposure to technology does not automatically lead to its effective use, and not all learners take advantage of affordances provided by technology.

The role of smartphone applications' voice features is an interesting aspect in literacy learning. As illustrated in our interviews (Excerpt 2), the voice heard from the smartphone is a participant in the communication situation: it contributes to the interactions of the humans around it like a human interlocutor would. However, the role of a smartphone differs from the role of a human, since the smartphone itself cannot (always) decide how to respond to its human interlocutors. In our research, we have shown that smartphone applications' voice functions are a very useful tool in L2 learning, especially for LESLLA learners.

In our data, there is evidence of linguistically complicated messages received from schools or social services that do consider the recipients' language skills. This raises the question of whether the sender's responsibility ends as soon as the complicated message has been delivered. The responsible way to act would be to stop and pay attention to the understandability and clarity of official messages before sending them. The next step would be to ensure that the learner has truly understood the contents of the message.

In addition to teaching students how to read and write, it is important to inform them about the different algorithms that determine what kind of content one sees, hears or reads on social media. A student needs to adopt a critical eye for evaluating content like vlogs or advertisements they see on different social media platforms. In a sea of multimodal text, it is challenging to spot the texts that might have an ulterior motive. The teacher-respondents of this study did not discuss this topic in their questionnaire responses, so perhaps it would be useful to raise awareness on the topic and educate teachers on media literacy.

In Finland, the national-level statistics on the number of LESLLA learners are not openly available for researchers, which means that the allocation of resources to education, teacher training, and equipment for this population lacks transparency. It is important to use technology in ways that are pedagogically relevant in LESLLA classrooms for two reasons. First, the students cannot learn the computer skills that they need in their daily life and studies without regular practice. Second, with the help of technology, it is easier to differentiate teaching in large and heterogeneous classes and scaffold the learning process of the students in their ZPD, both in and outside the classroom (see also Strube, 2014). These perspectives should be carefully considered when allocating resources and designing curricula, as well as in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

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## Appendix A

### Transcription conventions

- , short pause
- . longer pause
- cut off
- [ ] overlapping utterances
- ? questioning intonation
- (( )) author's description

## Appendix B

### Open-ended questions in the questionnaire of sub-study 2

1. What kind of digital devices do your students use (a) at school and (b) on their own time?
2. Which applications and software do your students use (a) at school and (b) on their own time?
3. What kind of technology do you use in your teaching? How?
4. What kind of technology-related matters do you think are difficult for your students?
5. What kind of technology-related matters do you think are easy for your students?
6. What has surprised you with your students' technology skills (in a positive or a negative way)?
7. What do you think is important in teaching ICT skills?
8. What do you think is challenging in teaching ICT skills?
9. Which ICT devices, programs or applications do you use (at work or on your own time)?
10. What is challenging for you in using different devices, programs or applications?
11. What is easy for you in using different devices, programs or applications?
12. Have you been trained in the use of ICT in teaching? If yes, please explain. If you have not been trained, please describe briefly what kind of training you would like.

EDUCATION AND LITERACY AS  
METONYMS FOR ENGLISH:  
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND  
DOMESTIC WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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**Abstract**

This paper centers on the English language learning of South African domestic workers and compares how discourses of adult education parallel individual domestic workers' narratives of education, literacy and English. Namely, the author finds that within individual learner narratives and broader South African language policies, "education" and "literacy" become metonyms (or words that take on a different meaning than their written definition) for "English language education" and "English literacy." This is problematic for although South African domestic workers learning English can often read, write, and speak in multiple South African languages, they are socially identified, and often identify themselves, as "illiterate" and "uneducated," thus reproducing the symbolic power of English (inter)nationally. The author additionally contends that these metonyms not only reflect broader societal notions of these same terms, but also reconstruct the ways in which these women, and other adult English language learners globally, personally think about and use these terms. Findings from this research are linked to policy and practice implications surrounding language and literacy instruction for adult learners.

**Bongi**<sup>1</sup>: I want to go back to school. I want to know how to speak English.

**Kaiper-Marquez**: Why is that important?

**B**: If I talk to the white people, I want to talk nicely.

**KM**: Do you think if you knew more English, would the people treat you differently?

**B**: I think so.

**KM**: Why do you think that?

**B**: Because sometimes when I'm speaking, she (Bongi's employer) doesn't listen to me. She says to me "You must speak nicely. Go to school" (Interview, August 20, 2016).

The presence of English—and its link to education—is a worldwide phenomenon. Discourses about English are tied to everything done "in the name of education, all the exacerbations of inequality that go under the label of globalization, all the linguistic calumnies that denigrate other ways of speaking, all the shamefully racist institutional interactions that occur..." (Pennycook, 2017, p. xv). English's global presence as a lingua franca is a growing issue in policy and research, including adult education research, around the world. And yet, reasons for the global growth of English continue to change and expand based on context, space, and history.

Within this paper, I center my analysis and discussion on the English language learning of South African domestic workers to examine how English is prevalent in discourses connected to literacy and adult education in a South African context. Further, I focus on the individual narratives of these women as they play a crucial role in the history of South Africa and yet remain "among those who have had the least access to education" (Vanqa-Mgijima, Wiid, and duToit, 2013, p. 267). Drawing from the term *metonymy*, in which a word or term is understood to reference a meaning other than its stated definition, I contend that for South African domestic workers taking English language classes, "literacy" and "education" become metonyms for "English language education" and "English literacy." These direct links between being "literate," "educated," and knowing English become problematic for within this research, I reveal that although South African domestic workers often identify themselves as "illiterate" and "uneducated", they concurrently overlook their abilities to speak, read,

<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed to protect privacy.

and write in their native languages. In other words, the strength of these women's multilingualistic repertoires becomes obsolete while the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) that English holds nationally is increasingly (re)produced in the personal and social spaces in which these women live and work.

### A Brief History of English in South Africa

Analyzing the history of English in South Africa is key to understanding the motivations of domestic workers learning English. English was first introduced to South Africa in 1795 when the British arrived in the Cape of Good Hope, now known as Cape Town, to overthrow Dutch rule and control the Cape sea route between Asia and Europe (Lass, 1995). From the end of the 18th century to the mid-20th century, English was used as the main language of education for both Bantu-speaking black South Africans and Dutch-speaking Afrikaners (white settlers and their descendants). In 1910, the Union of South Africa was formed along with a constitution that made both Dutch and English the official languages of the country (Thompson, 2000). In 1925, Afrikaans (a variation of Dutch, Bantu languages, and English) gained status as the other official language of South Africa besides English, and gradually replaced Dutch.

British rule in South Africa was brought to an end in 1948 with the beginning of *apartheid*, a social system of racial segregation. It concurrently brought an end to the dominance of the British colonial legacy of English as one of the official languages of the country. During apartheid, a primary way for Afrikaner leaders to oppress black Africans was through policies on language of instruction. One policy in which this was most evident was with the *Bantu Education Act of 1953*. The main components of the act promoted Afrikaans, reduced the influence of English in schools, and used mother-tongue education to support apartheid's racial and linguistic separatism (Taylor, 2002). As a response to this linguistic oppression, English became the language of protest and freedom against apartheid, while the use of African languages in an educational context began to diminish. And yet, although English was viewed as the language of anti-apartheid protest, it was still associated with British rule and colonization, making its presence in South African education complex (Kamwangamalu, 2002).

The 1994 democratic elections brought the apartheid regime to an end and two years later the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was implemented. The Constitution supported new policies promoting equality for all South Africans. This included the recognition of 11 official languages including nine native African languages, Afrikaans, and English. And yet, after over 20 years of official policies promoting multilingualism in education, a drift to English-medium education persists (Ferguson, 2013).

### Literature Review

Although the history of English in South Africa is important in understanding motivations for adult learners, and in this case, domestic workers, to learn English, just as vital is an awareness of larger theories of English language learning that frame these motivations and history. There are numerous theoretical frameworks for understanding motivations for adults learning English, however, this paper draws primarily from poststructural theories of language identity and power.

While the term 'poststructuralist' does not have one fixed meaning and is applied to a range of theoretical ideas and positions, a common factor in poststructuralist analyses of social systems, individual consciousness, and power, is the concept of language. Though not consistently claimed as a poststructuralist scholar, Bourdieu (1991) asserted that symbolic power is not the power that is often recognizable, but instead, it is a transformed and unrecognizable power that is often legitimated by and carried into other forms of power. One way in which this power becomes recognized is through the legitimation of dominant languages in education.

As Bourdieu (1991) contended, the sociology of language is inseparable from the sociology of education, and "the educational market is strictly dominated by the linguistic products of the dominant class" (p. 62). This linguistic dominance led to Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital as constituted by a linguistic market, which creates the conditions through which legitimization can function. Linguistic capital produces what Bourdieu termed a "profit of distinction" (p. 55), which results from the scarcity of the product. In this case, the profit of distinction is the English language, and is realized with social and verbal exchange. Furthermore, Bourdieu asserted that those least able to accept and adopt the language of school and society are those who

have already faced, and will continue to face, social and educational disparities. In a South African context, while the country recognizes 11 official languages, and promotes policies supporting students' language of choice, English continues to rule South African education and politics, thus acting as the language of legitimation that Bourdieu described. Hence, English becomes a source of symbolic power for both youth and adults, and gives social power that domestic workers are often denied.

Weedon (1997) used similar conceptions of language and power as linked to the construction of identity when discussing feminist poststructuralism. However, while Bourdieu (1991) concentrated primarily on economic class as the site of a language-induced power struggle, Weedon focused on the ways in which poststructuralism can further understandings of how gender is used to construct identities and subjectivities in patriarchal contexts. She found that individuals are the objects of language and a discursive struggle for identity but they are also the site of this same struggle as it takes place within the consciousness and self-making practices of each individual. Therefore, it is the language of conflicting discourses that constitutes individuals, and particularly women, as conscious-thinking beings who give meaning to the world while continuously transforming it.

Drawing from both Bourdieu and Weedon as guides, Norton (1997; 2013) centered her qualitative research on immigrant female domestic workers taking English language classes in both Canada and the United States. She found that female learners' investments in English language learning were complex and must be understood with reference to the construction of identity. For example, when describing one learner who came from an upper-class background in Peru, Norton (2013) found that when the learner's identity as a wealthy educated Peruvian woman was validated, she felt comfortable speaking English in class. Conversely, when she was positioned as an immigrant, she was silenced. Moreover, drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) notion of legitimate language and symbolic power, Norton contended that these women's language learning experiences outside of class were often alienating, as they had difficulty commanding attention of English-speaking listeners and were often regarded as not worthy to speak. Norton concluded her research by asserting that English language learning must be understood in the context of learners' changing identities across time and space.

Employing similar concepts of language and power with a feminist poststructuralist framework, North (2013) focused her research on two female migrant domestic workers taking English literacy classes in England and observed complex relationships between literacy, language, and status in the learners' lives. Further, like Weedon (1997) she discovered literacy practices to be gendered, exhibited by how learners' gender relations at home constrained their abilities to further develop their literacy skills. North's research suggested that literacy learning has the potential for increased economic capital as well as learner empowerment, however, structural inequalities beyond literacy greatly impact these outcomes. Drawing from this scholarship in my own research, I employed qualitative research methods, and particular Critical Ethnographic Narrative Analysis (CENA), to examine the English language learning of South African domestic workers.

### Methodology

This section describes the context of my research, the participants, the methodological choices I made to analyze the data and my own history, and thus, positionality, conducting research with South African domestic workers.

### Context and Participants

The main sources of data for this paper derived from my pre-dissertation and dissertation research<sup>2</sup>, conducted in Johannesburg from 2015 to 2016, that centered on the English language learning of South African domestic workers. Domestic workers, or "the largest single sector of women's employment in South Africa" (Ally, 2011, p. 2), are often black South African women who work for and live with their wealthier, and often white, employers. They have historically been disregarded in discussions regarding South African education, but many women who I met were taking English languages classes in and around Johannesburg.

Within my research, I was interested in a particular conundrum: although eleven official languages were implemented in the post-apartheid democratic constitution, despite the growing role of native language education in South African education, and notwithstanding

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<sup>2</sup> Both my pre-dissertation in 2015 and my dissertation research in 2016 received IRB approval.

the fact that these women both live and work in environments in which English language literacy is not always necessary<sup>3</sup>, many domestic workers continue spending their limited free time attending English language literacy classes. As my broader findings revealed, domestic workers' stories of English language learning, of domestic work during and post-apartheid, and of their educational identities, are complex and nuanced; and yet, these stories are often overlooked in discussions regarding the future of South African education and in broader rhetoric on the role of English language learning on an international scale. My research sought (and continues to seek) to bring to the fore the stories of education and language learning for this influential but often marginalized group of women.

I became interested in the complexity of South African domestic workers' educational and linguistic practices in 2014 while I was staying in Johannesburg to learn isiZulu. While there, I met Emmanuel, a college lecturer and volunteer English language teacher who taught English classes to South African domestic workers in an affluent area outside of Johannesburg, an area where these women worked and lived. He invited me to observe a class and, after meeting the women, I became intrigued with their seemingly complex reasons for learning English. I returned to the class several more times to observe and work with some of the learners on English language concepts. I continued these observations in 2015 when I revisited Johannesburg for another two months and conducted pre-dissertation focus groups, informal interviews, and two recorded semi-structured interviews with two of the learners (Kaiper-Marquez, 2018). I returned to Johannesburg for a third time in 2016 and stayed for five and a half months to continue with my isiZulu language classes while conducting my dissertation research. Thus, the primary data within this research took place in 2015 and 2016 and consisted of: interviews, which often morphed into larger life narratives, with 28 domestic workers (five of whom are highlighted in this paper<sup>4</sup>); observations from the English language courses that these women took part in and that I, at times, helped

<sup>3</sup> Although many of the women in this study lived with families who spoke English, most of these women had effectively communicated with their employers for five to 20+ years. Moreover, some employers spoke languages such as Afrikaans, German, and Greek in the home and thus, a greater knowledge of English was not always necessary in these spaces of work.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix: Table of Research Participants for descriptions of these five women.

teach; and, written observations while talking with, staying with, and helping tutor these women.

### **Critical Ethnographic Narrative Analysis (CENA)**

Throughout my research in South Africa, I noticed certain phrases that the participants frequently employed when discussing their educational and linguistic narratives. For example, many women would often tell me how they were not “educated” and would express discomfort with their lack of “literacy.” They would explain how their English was not “proper” which, in their view, led to an inability to be “successful” and also made people see them as “stupid.” These words would come up in the classroom, in the car, over lunch, and when discussing their life stories, and what became evident from both these conversations and from the data was that they were being used in ways different from their written definitions. “Education” no longer meant the time spent in school, but the ability to speak English. “Literacy” did not connote being literate in any language, but specifically being literate in English. Moreover, as is demonstrated in narratives below, a lack of English language fluency equated a lack of “intelligence.”

In order to closely examine these obvious conceptual links in what the participants verbalized, I used what I am calling Critical Ethnographic Narrative Analysis (CENA) (Kaiper-Marquez, 2019). CENA derives from the methodology of Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) (Souto-Manning, 2014) in which Narrative Inquiry (NI) and Critical Discourses Analysis (CDA) are combined to support the essential nature of exploring individual narratives while also drawing from the more macro critical perspectives of power and language found in CDA. However, I contend that CNA can overlook how the role of the ethnographer inevitably impacts, forms, and (re)shapes these narratives and thus, a more explicit focus on ethnography within this methodology is crucial.

Taking my role as the ethnographer into account when critically analyzing the narratives of South African domestic workers and the broader discourses of language and education within South African policy, I used CENA as my primary tool for examination of these women's narratives. After initially analyzing my data, I began to explore the existence of metonymy in these narratives as I examined how the terms “education” and “literacy” became metonyms for English language education and literacy for the participants. Within

this examination, I found that with the use of these metonyms came delegitimization of the learners' own linguistic knowledge that they already possessed, thus re-creating both the symbolic and tangible power of the English language.

### Findings

#### “Education” and “Literacy”

**Kaiper-Marquez:** Do you consider English a sign of education? Like if someone speaks English well then they're more educated, and if someone doesn't speak English then they're not as educated?

**Zothile:** Yeah, because the people who know English very well, they think the people that don't know English very well- they think they're stupid. They think that she is a useless one because she don't know English (Interview, August 15, 2020).

A main question of this study, a question that is reflected in Brock-Utne's (2001) article “Education for All- In Whose Language?,” is which languages are considered legitimate in the process of becoming an educated being? This question stems from various social and political discourses that suggest an inherent link between education, literacy, and the English language. Similar links were exhibited in many of the interviews with and narratives of the women in this study. Although many whom I interviewed did not have access to formal education, as several had to leave school to begin working at very early ages, even those such as Zothile who did graduate from high school considered themselves uneducated because of their discomfort with speaking English. Moreover, while all of the participants spoke numerous languages, and many could read and write in these languages, they considered themselves “illiterate” if they couldn't read and write in English. Consequently, I found that for these women, being “educated” no longer signified going to school or even matriculating. Instead, it implied being exclusively educated in English. Similarly, “literacy” no longer connoted being able to read and write in any language but referred to reading and writing solely in English. In other words, the terms “education” and “literacy” began taking on a metonymical place in the discourse of these women. In this way, notions of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), and in particular, the symbolic power of English, impacted my participants' views of the

necessity of English and consequently led to experiences in which a lack of English fluency equated a lack of intelligence.

#### “They will call you stupid, and that word stupid, it hurts a lot.”

Verbal and written knowledge of English was closely connected to the participants' notions of “intelligence” and of “stupidity” as well as the direct links they experienced between knowing English and being considered a “smart” human being. In interviews and conversations, participants described frequent links that were made by their employers and by South Africans in general between a lack of English language literacy and notions of “stupidity.” For example, in the following two excerpts, Pula and Margaret describe to me ways in which they have felt a lack of respect because of their emerging English language abilities:

**Kaiper-Marquez:** Do people treat you differently if you don't know English?

**Pula:** Yeah because English, we don't speak perfect in English because it's not our language. Sometimes when you speak to people, they look at you like- maybe you speak to them they don't understand you. They look at you like you are stupid. You feel that thing because you can't speak properly because it's not your language. We don't feel comfortable to speak English, but as I said, it's the language that we are using in Joburg. We have to accept that. You can't do anything (Interview, September 7, 2016).

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**Kaiper-Marquez:** And do you think that she (Margaret's employer) would respect you more if you- like do you think that the more you learn English, do you think that she would treat you better?

**Margaret:** When I can speak English better than this, maybe she will- yes, she will respect me. She will give me respect. I think because maybe I'm thinking this- maybe she's not giving me respect just because she think-she thinks maybe I don't know anything. If I don't know English, she thinks maybe I don't know anything (Interview, September 9, 2016).

Throughout my conversations with Pula, Margaret, and many other women I interviewed and observed, there was a direct association made between knowing English and being considered smart, or

conversely, not knowing English and being “stupid”. Many women had experienced moments in which people associated their lack of verbal and written English language abilities as a direct metonym for stupidity. It did not seem to matter to their employers that participants could speak numerous other languages. It was insignificant within the social spaces in which they lived and worked that they knew a great deal about politics and world issues.<sup>5</sup> It was not important to their social status that they had utilized multiple forms of intelligence to survive in their personal lives and in their careers. Instead, what mattered within their social spaces in the construction of an intelligent person was their knowledge of English. This link English and “intelligence” emerged from differing spaces where these women lived and worked and was established in numerous ways. For Pula, as mentioned above, the link between English and intelligence emerged in social spaces as she felt that when she spoke in English, many South Africans would “look at her like (she) is stupid.” For Margaret, as she describes above, she most strongly felt associations between English and intelligence made by her employer with the lack of respect she felt from her.

Associations between adult illiteracy and feelings of “being stupid” have previously been explored in adult literacy and language research. For example, in a case study with adult Haitian learners of English, Auerbach et al. (2013) found that many of the learners felt that illiteracy was connected to feelings of stupidity and social disrespect. Similarly, Payne’s (2006) work on “functional illiteracy” demonstrated that notions of illiteracy often connoted ignorance, lack of education, and stupidity for those who are literate and even for those who are not—a connotation he finds inherently problematic and entirely untrue. However, while Auerbach et al. and Payne’s research revealed the many ways that literacy is connected with learners’ sense of intelligence and legitimacy, this research also assumed that “literacy” referred to English language literacy, again supporting the metonymic significance of this connection. Moreover, research centering on links between English, literacy, and intelligence often does not touch upon the ironies

<sup>5</sup> During the United States Presidential election of 2016, a group of women at the English Literacy Programme had an hour-long conversation on Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. I was impressed with their knowledge of American politics and the ways in which they were able to connect American politics to current South African politics.

of these connections in a country, such as South Africa, where English is not the sole official language.

Pennycook (2017) argued that “English remains a massively dominant language of global relations that continues to threaten other languages, cultures and forms of knowledge, to disrupt the educational aspirations of many and to contribute to the reproduction of many global inequalities” (p. viii). In South Africa, while the democratic constitution in conjunction with adult education and language policies appear to support notions of multilingual literacies, the participants in my research continued to feel stupid despite their ability to speak multiple languages and notwithstanding their literacy skills in their native tongues. This feeling of being stupid without English language literacy undeniably affected their feelings surrounding the capability to achieve “success” and to gain accessibility to jobs and social practices steeped in English language literacy.

### Success and Accessibility

**Ruby:** I’m a failure

**Kaiper-Marquez:** You’re a failure?

**R:** Yes, because I can’t speak proper English. But I can come to you and say I need job. My sisters they can’t do that because they don’t know even one word of English.

**KM:** So if you can read and write in Tsonga<sup>6</sup>, why do you still feel like a failure? Because if you already know Tsonga and you can read and write and Tsonga, then why is that not enough?

**R:** Because when I come to you and ask for a job you can’t hear me. When I say something in Tsonga you can’t hear me. So that’s why I’m saying English is the best (Interview, August 7, 2016).

As Ruby suggested, English in South Africa has become essential for notions of success for accessibility to jobs. While the metonyms of “education” and “literacy” lead to feelings of “stupidity” and “failure” discussed by the participants, these feelings were not merely embedded in the symbolic power of English. They were also embedded in certain day-to-day practices that these women could not access and

<sup>6</sup> While we are using the term “Tsonga” to refer to Ruby’s language, previously I use the term Xitsonga as “xi” is a common prefix used in combination with Tsonga.

possibilities for financial gain that they were unable to reach. The women were living in a multilingual country in which eleven official languages are being supported by the constitution, and additionally encouraged by policies supposedly endorsing multilingualism in practice. And yet, English has become a necessity for these women to both survive and to succeed.

Since the creation of the 1996 Constitution, numerous authors have written about the role of English in South Africa and about the ways in which policy and practice do not align. For example, Orman (2008) found that policy documents supporting multilingual and cultural diversity are only available in English. This is evident in *1997 Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training* (Department of Education, 1997b), which can only be accessed in English, as well as in the *Language in Education Policy* (Department of Education, 1997a), also only accessible in English. Similarly, Tshotsho (2013) contended that “one of the major constraints on the implementation of the Language Policy is the unavailability of resources including human resources, funding, facilities, materials and books” (p. 43) paralleling assertions such as Ruby’s that English is directly connected to resources and jobs.

Various participants in my research discussed the need for English to apply for jobs, to fill out forms, to apply for insurance policies, and even to go to hospitals. Without the ability to read and write in English, these processes became much more difficult and led to women like Ruby “feeling like a failure.” In other words, Ruby’s emerging English skills led to little accessibility for job mobility, thus leading to feelings of economic and symbolic power being inaccessible.

### Discussion

As I described within this paper, the women who participated in this research made metonymic links between notions of both literacy and education, with the ability to speak, read, and write in English. These links were often incited and further exacerbated by their employers, their peers, and by practices, such as job applications, that further intimated the necessity of English. Consequently, the South African domestic workers in my research were living in a discursive framework that ultimately shaped how they were viewed in social and work environments and also impacted how they viewed themselves.

While all of the participants demonstrated multiple forms of linguistic knowledge, and many of them had at least some history of formal education, they remained constrained within metonyms that overlook these histories.

It is vital to continue explore the use of metonymy in the South African educational and linguistic context and in these contexts internationally. Although the South African democratic constitution supports multilingualism, and even though the importance of multilingual literacy is reinforced through numerous educational and language policies, adult learners throughout South Africa, including the participants in this study, continue to make links between being “literate,” being “educated,” and knowing English and conversely feel that a lack of English equates a lack of intelligence. These links are only further supported with jobs, forms, and policies themselves that are only accessible in English. Hence, the desire for these women to learn English continues. And yet, “English-only” notions of literacy and education can be changed.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

As Janks’ (2013) notes in her work on critical literacy, “both the word and the world embody human choice, (and) it becomes possible to choose differently and to effect change” (p. 227). By closely examining the problematic linkages between “literacy,” “education,” and “English,” we as researchers, policy makers, and practitioners can achieve more nuanced understandings of the purposes and motivations that adults bring to learning English while further recognizing the legitimacy in learners’ multilingual and/or non-English literacy capabilities. For practitioners, this can be done by examining how terms are used in classroom spaces by both instructors and learners that might connote specific languages or legitimize one language over another. For example, when discussing the literacy levels of learners, instructors can reflect on whether these levels relate to literacy in any language, or if they are referring to English literacy levels explicitly.

For policy makers, change can occur by recognizing how “literacy” is conceived of within educational policies and reconstructing definitions to include multiple language. For instance, when analyzing a Minnesota Adult Basic Education (ABE) policy, Vanek, Cushing-

Leubner, Engman, and Kaiper (2018) found that the policy restricted the use of ABE learners' native languages in support of English language and literacy instruction instead. Moreover, section 463.30 of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) uses "literacy" to imply English language learning and literacy programs while overlooking the role of multilingualism in these programs.

Even more, both practitioners and policy makers must recognize the diversity of reasons that adults pursue further education. While adult education and English language learning are often connected to better jobs, greater financial capital, and higher degrees, a focus on these outcomes often overlooks the complex symbolic reasons for learning, such as learner empowerment, prestige, and identity (re)construction. By practitioners and policy makers recognizing that English is only one language in which education and literacy can be enacted and supported, and further, that multilingual literacies are not a hinderance to one's learning but a benefit, learners such as those in this study might perhaps also begin to recognize their multilingual capabilities as strengths.

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## Appendix

Table of Research Participants

Name of Participant	Age	Home Language(s)	Other Languages Spoken	Passed Matriculation Exam	Years in Domestic Work
Bongi	45	seSotho	English, isiZulu, Afrikaans	No	15+ years
Margaret	55	isiZulu	English	No	30+ years
Pula	45	sePedi	English, isiZulu	Took it twice but never passed	16 years
Ruby	43	xiTsonga	seSotho, tshiVenda, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and a little Afrikaans	Yes	13 years
Zothile	37	isiZulu	English, isiZulu	Yes	20 years

## TAP INTO WORKPLACE LITERACY WITH LESLLA LEARNERS

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### Abstract

Adults learning an additional language in their new country of residence, frequently called *second language learners* and, more recently, *emergent bilinguals*, can play a valuable role in the workplace in the new country. However, all of these learners, and specifically LESLLA learners, need text-based, vocabulary-specific instruction that will help them navigate through the work they are doing or plan/need to do. Teachers of workplace readiness literacy need to have a set of specific strategies and supports to help learners develop work-related literacy skills. Processing, learning, and using skill-specific, trade-specific, and context-specific vocabulary, often with multiple meanings, must support learners' comprehension of work-related practices and tasks. There must be multiple opportunities, with correct language use, for learners to learn and engage in the language and related vocabulary that they need to interact with coworkers and clients. This article describes a clear, accessible, seven-element process, "TAP" (Teach, Apply, Practice), that teachers focused on developing LESLLA learners' workplace readiness skills can follow to help these learners 1) comprehend a job-related text, 2) learn workplace vocabulary in relation to that text, and 3) engage in oral workplace-centered interactions and activities that will help them be better prepared for their jobs. Although many different approaches to teaching workplace literacy are used in adult education classes, as summarized below, teachers often do not have a clear, step-by-step process to follow. The process described was developed and is effectively used in K-12 settings using key elements of second language acquisition strategies and practices for language and literacy development. The steps are described here.

## Introduction

Adults learning an additional language in their new country of residence are often referred to as *second language learners* or *language* (e.g., *English, Finnish, Italian*) learners. More recently, in order to recognize that they do, in fact, already know one or more languages and the value of that language/those languages in their lives, they are often referred to as *emergent bilinguals* (e.g., Garcia et al., 2008, introduced this term in K-12 education; it is now used to describe all learner populations). These learners can play a valuable role in the workplace in their new country of residence. Sanchez (2019) argued that emergent bilinguals are crucial to any healthy workforce and economy. However, they need support, guidance, and instruction that helps them to build the vocabulary, oral language, and literacy skills that they need to enter and be successful in the workplace. This article describes an approach to workplace literacy instruction with LESLLA learners that teachers can work through step by step, with learners at many different levels of proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, in either their home/native language(s) and or in the new language they are learning, once they are ready for a workplace literacy class. The language used for instruction can be the home/native language or the new language.

### The Context for Workplace Literacy Instruction

The primary goal of adult education programs in Europe and the United States is to improve the economic mobility and job preparedness of learners, in order to help them integrate into their new country (e.g., Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Elander et al., 2006; Parrish & Johnson, 2010; Rubio-Festa, 2019; Schaetzel et al., 2019). For example, in the United States, the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS AE) are based on the Common Core State Standards to specifically define what adults learning English need to know and be able to do to participate successfully in academic settings, job training, and civic life. The U.S. Department of Education provides a set of expectations in terms of oral language and literacy at different levels. For example, students should be able to "create clear and coherent level-appropriate speech and text" or "demonstrate

command of the conventions of standard English to communicate in level-appropriate speech and writing” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 15).

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), is designed to improve career and technical education and help students gain the skills they need to compete for in-demand, high-wage jobs in their communities. Other countries have similar standards; for example, the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2018).

### **What LESLLA Teachers Need to Know and Be Able to Do**

Within this context, and keeping in mind the goal to help adults access and be successful with learning and using the language(s) of their new country of residence, teachers of workplace readiness literacy need to have a set of specific strategies and supports to help learners develop work-related literacy skills. Workplace or career vocabulary needs to be accessible for adults to enable them to navigate through a day’s work. Processing, learning, and using skill-specific, trade-specific, and context-specific vocabulary—all of which often carry multiple meanings—must support learners’ comprehension of work-related practices and tasks. There must be multiple opportunities, with correct language use, for learners to learn and engage in the language and vocabulary needed to interact with coworkers and clients (Strube, 2014). Likewise, activities such as Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigms (MALP) may increase engagement in the classroom to foster basic academic skills for emergent learners. MALP encourages incorporating lessons that are relevant to learners’ lives, starting with speaking and listening before moving to written text, and involving learners at all levels in real-life contexts and tasks as a bridge to content activities (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013).

Workplace literacy involves reading and writing, starting with reading job listings and completing job applications. The job application process is a cyclical reading and writing process: the applicant must read and understand the job announcement, then the applicant must prepare a resume or fill out an application form – a process that takes reading and writing skills. After the initial application

process, once the applicant is now an employee, they need to read and write to complete employment forms, read and understand training manuals, and perhaps take tests on the training manuals or other exams for certification. Certain jobs also require reading work orders and writing reports. Context-based vocabulary is the basis for learning these skills and for language and literacy comprehension. While this learner population may have the job skills required for the job, this does not equate to learners also having the language and literacy needed to demonstrate their mastery of the technical skills necessary for the job. Thus, language (including job-related vocabulary) and (workplace) literacy must be taught.

This article describes an approach to adult literacy instruction, “**TAP**” (**T**each, **A**pply, **P**actice), that shows teachers how to take learners through a step-by-step process designed to support learners in learning the language and literacy needed to carry out their work. While the strategies described have their roots in secondary school education programs (Calderón et al., 1998; Calderón & Slakk, 2018) and a bilingual university program in the United States (Calderón, et al., 2018), they can be adapted to relevant workplace or career contexts and learner needs in most languages.

### **Elements of Workplace Literacy Instruction for LESLLA Learners**

The elements of instruction covered in this article, listed below, are applicable to a variety of instructional settings and are described here with a focus on workplace literacy instruction. The order of the activities described may vary depending on the purpose for the class and learner needs, but each of the seven elements must be addressed in relation to the other elements and aligned with the backgrounds and needs of each learner. Elements 2–7 each include **T**each (the teacher describes and models the skill), **A**pply (the students follow the teacher’s model in using the skill), and **P**actice (the students have multiple opportunities to practice the skill, alone, in pairs, or in groups).

The elements of instruction are listed below, followed by a description of each, as well as examples of each.

### Elements of Instruction

1. Start with an awareness of the learners' home/native language(s) (referred to as primary language henceforth) and find ways to build on and explicitly show both similarities and differences between their primary language(s) and the target language (e.g., the different pronunciation of the letter "h" in English and Spanish, or different placement of adjectives before the noun in English and after the noun in Spanish).
2. Base instruction on a printed mentor text that learners will work with. If using a multimodal text, the target vocabulary needs to also appear in printed form. Texts selected are those that model or "mentor" the targeted vocabulary, grammatical structures, and ways the text will be used in oral conversation, reading, and writing for that specific lesson.
3. Orally preview and practice the vocabulary that learners need to learn before working with the mentor text.
4. Build learners' listening comprehension skills.
5. Use learner-centered, cooperative learning strategies and supports that provide many opportunities for oral language use.
6. Build from reading to writing activities.
7. Make connections between vocabulary knowledge, oral language proficiency, reading comprehension, writing skills, job/skill knowledge, and workplace success.

#### 1. Value and Build on Learners' Primary Languages

In addition to the multiple perspectives that emergent bilinguals bring to the workforce, they also bring a background of communication and literacy skills (Sanchez, 2019). They have interacted with different people and seen written text in the new country and so, at least, have a concept of what print looks like in the new language. The task that teachers need to tackle is knowing the learners' abilities in their primary language(s) and learning or knowing the basic similarities, differences, and abilities in their primary language(s) compared to the target language. A few possible starter questions that teachers might want to consider are, "What alphabet or writing system do the learners in my classes know? Do they understand that the printed symbols of a text represent sounds and concepts? Is the alphabet or writing system that they know similar to the language

I am teaching in directionality, letter shapes, and spacing conventions?"

The teacher must then work on knowing how to explicitly make connections between the learners' language backgrounds and abilities and the workplace-related content they are learning in class. This may involve making simple connections or, most likely, explicitly modeling new linguistic or literacy features. For example, if the learner's primary language is Somali and the target language is English, the teacher needs to know which phonemes, morphemes, and grammatical features are present or not present in Somali and which ones need explicit instruction and modeling to acquire the correct pronunciation in English. For instance, what sound does the letter "t" make in Somali? How is that different from English? Additionally, if the learner is orally proficient in their primary language but has not learned to read and write in any language, those domains (graphophonemic awareness) also need equal attention. For example, how is the sound /h/ written in Somali and in English? Making connections between features of the two languages will also involve engaging learners in using their background knowledge about a topic before the class works with a written text.

#### 2. Start with a Written Mentor Text That Learners Will Work With

Learning to read in any language follows the same progression and stages: Emergent, Beginning, Within Word Pattern, and Advanced (Helman et al., 2012). Each of these stages has similar decoding, encoding, comprehension, and literacy elements in any language that can be highlighted or modeled using the following strategies.

Begin by selecting a mentor text that has a workplace focus, no matter how simple it is (e.g., a picture of a man painting a house, with "The man is painting the house." written below it). When learners are ready (determined by texts read already, vocabulary learned, teacher observation of learners' work, and use of formative assessments), use a work-related mentor text that the learners will use in a typical workplace setting. Consider how the text will be used in the lesson. Later, with more advanced texts, consider how they will be used at work. (See the Appendix for an example of a more advanced text.) The teacher should ask himself:

- Is this text appropriate, given these learners' language (and literacy) proficiencies?
- Will this need more than one class period to work through?
- What words or phrases in this piece of mentor text might learners need to comprehend to be able to work with this text?
- What elements of the learners' primary languages might I need to explicitly teach or model? What reading skills will be needed to comprehend this text?
- What communication skills might learners need to negotiate this text?
- What reading, communication, or writing skills will I, as the teacher, need to model?
- What supports will I need to help all learners, at all levels of proficiency in the target language, access this text?
- What do I expect, or might an employer expect, the learner/employee to produce after reading this text? (e.g., Will we be writing a specific type of text? Will the employer want to see a report?)

If needed, create a mentor text that includes the needed vocabulary and literacy elements. Figure 1 shows an excerpt of a mentor text that the teacher might select and work with. If a longer text is used for a higher-level lesson (for example, the text in the Appendix), the text should be divided up to suit the lesson time frame and learner focus.

Figure 1

*Sample excerpt from mentor text*

**Humberto Wants A Job**

Meet Humberto. Humberto is from Nicaragua. He wants a job. Humberto can build houses.

Humberto has his own tools. He has a hammer, a drill, and a tool belt. He is ready for a job.

Jobs are listed in the newspaper. Job listings are also on a website. Humberto has a list of jobs. He has experience.

Humberto filled out many job applications. He has a resume. He has references. He has a work visa. Humberto is ready to work. What job do you think he will get?

### **3. Orally Teach the Vocabulary Learners Need to Get Started With Comprehension**

In recent years, researchers have emphasized the importance of both comprehending written texts and producing the language used in job-focused contexts, orally and in writing (e.g., Friedburg et al., 2016; McKeown et al., 2013; Uccelli & Galloway, 2016). Researchers have also shown the critically important role of vocabulary in the development of reading and writing proficiency – for academic and workplace contexts – for adult learners who have experienced interruptions in formal, school-based learning and have varied experiences with literacy in their primary language and are learning another language (Holtappels et al., 2020). Command of a large vocabulary frequently sets high-achieving students apart from less successful ones (Montgomery, 2007). Therefore, it is likely that knowing more work-related vocabulary supports learners' workplace success overall (Camarota, 2012), and building students' vocabulary will aid their comprehension.

Adult learners involved in or entering the workplace need to have the vocabulary that will make it possible for them to

- Engage in facilitator-participant, interviewer-applicant, employer-employee, and client-technician discourse;
- Interact with others about instructions, processes, and goals;
- Comprehend (read) and produce (write) texts; and
- Succeed in other ways on the job site or in the office (Slakk & Peyton, 2019).

These needs lead us back to the question of, when working with the selected mentor text, "What vocabulary will I teach?" The answer lies in the vocabulary that the learners need to understand and discuss the text and the product that they will produce (Calderón & Slakk, 2018). However, even in a short text, there may be too many words to process upon initial readings. Therefore, consideration must go to vocabulary that will give the learners the most benefit for the energy expended – Tier II words and phrases. Tier II vocabulary are polysemous (with multiple meanings; e.g., *table*, *match*, *bank*) words and phrases, sentence connectors, transitions, and words of specificity (Beck et al., 2005; Calderón & Slakk, 2018). This is not to say that Tier III words – those

that are specific to a content area and workplace-specific skill – are unimportant (e.g., *resume, website, job application*). Tier III words are important; however, Tier II words define, support, and connect the higher-order Tier III content-specific and product-specific words (Beck et al., 2005). Accordingly, teachers choose the words from the mentor text that learners will find necessary to be successful from the start of working with the text. Learners have to comprehend and be able to use descriptor and explanation words (Tier II words; e.g., *wants, is ready for/to, filled out*) before Tier III level technical vocabulary (See the text in the Appendix: HVAC, ductwork). Tier III vocabulary might come in later, with a more complex mentor text, and may be dependent upon understanding the Tier II vocabulary (e.g., *wants, is ready for/to, filled out*) (Calderón & Slakk, 2018). Subsequently, Tier III words are learned while discussing and working with content, while Tier II vocabulary and phrases can and should be taught before, during, and after reading. The teacher should select the Tier II words to pre-teach before starting to read the mentor text, allowing for easier and more complete comprehension when learners tackle the mentor text.

**Previewing and Practicing Vocabulary Before Reading.** We propose previewing and practicing the vocabulary that students are about to read and use related to the selected text. The teacher might select one to five words to teach. For novice-level readers, one or two words or word phrases would be sufficient (e.g., see Figure 1, sample mentor text: *list of, filled out*). Calderón and Slakk (2018) suggest a few simple steps, modified here for adult workplace literacy needs and the addition of pronunciation practice (Leos, 2019). We refer to the individual aspects of this teaching activity as pieces. To provide a complete, whole understanding of the pre-taught vocabulary, each piece is needed and serves a function. (See Figure 2 for a sample script of the pieces for previewing and practicing the word phrase, *list of*.)

Figure 2

*Sample preview and practice script for “list”*

- a. /s/ please say ssss
- b. list, list, list
- c. Humberto has a list of jobs.
- d. A “list” is connected items written in a line; e.g.,  
chef, waiter/waitress, server, hostess, and dish washer,  
or one below the other; e.g.,  
*chef*  
*waiter/waitress*  
*server*  
*hostess*  
*dish washer*
- e. list of, listed, listings
- f. Here is my list of skills; I can \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- g. In our reading and role plays you will see and use *list*.

Note, all of the following pieces are orally produced, modelled by the teacher (**T**each) and, where noted, orally repeated by the learners (**A**pply). They do need to be visually presented for learners to see and have as a reference (the teacher displays all pieces of the script for the preview and practice activity; see Figure 2), but at this stage, there is no writing by students. Writing or adding to personal word banks can be a different activity later in the lesson. The goal with this preview and practice activity is to have the learners start producing the target vocabulary orally.

- a) Teacher models saying the target sound in the first word, and students repeat aloud (process may be repeated as needed).
- b) **T**eacher models saying the target word aloud, and **s**tudents repeat the word three times aloud.
- c) Teacher displays and reads aloud the vocabulary word in context – within the sentence that the word will be found in the mentor text.
- d) Teacher provides a definition at the learners’ level, with possibly a picture or an object, when that picture or realia specifically conveys the meaning (See Figure 2d: *A “list” is connected items written in a line; e.g., chef, waiter/waitress, server, hostess, and dish washer...*)

- e) Teacher provides additional variations of the word (optional) (See Figure 2e: *list of, listed, listings*).
- f) Teacher orally provides a sentence stem containing the target word (See Figure 2f) for learners to practice in pairs for 60 seconds.
- The teacher gives an example, “Here is my list of skills; I can \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.” “Here is my list of skills; I can hammer, measure, and saw. Another sentence stem might be, “Here is a list of tools I have: hammer, tape measure, screwdrivers, saw, and toolbelt.”
  - The learners practice saying the complete sentence, taking turns producing it by filling in the blanks or completing the sentence starter.
  - Novice learners might start out repeating the example sentence or sentences the teacher has modelled, and later move to completing or repeating a sentence themselves.
- g) Teacher orally reminds learners when and where they will use the word or phrase (e.g., in the reading, discussions, and a piece of writing [Practice]; Figure 2g).

Each of these pieces of the **TAP** process should be displayed – on a white board, in Power Point slides, or through some other means, allowing the learners to see and process each piece of the process visually. The learners themselves are not at this time expected to read them on their own, or to copy them down. Visually displaying all pieces of the script allows learners to begin to make connections between the written words and the sounds they represent. The teacher part of the preview and practice (*a-e* and *g*, plus the modeling of *f*) should only take one minute per word. Learner practice (*f*) is also only one minute. Thus, previewing and practicing a new word should take no more than 2 minutes per word. This is a preview and practice activity. Reinforcement of the new vocabulary comes when learners read, discuss, and write using the newly learned vocabulary. Thus, repeating this process for four or five words uses only about 10-12 minutes of instruction. Within those 10-12 minutes, students have had numerous contextual encounters with each word, and, therefore, will start to be familiar and comfortable with the words even before they start reading the text.

How many times do learners need to use a word before they have learned it? Thornbury (2002) argues that a word must be heard or read 5 to 16 times to be learned by adolescent foreign language learners in a classroom. Calderón and Slakk (2018) argue that a learner must hear and produce a word a minimum of 12 times before it begins to become part of their long-term memory and can be retrieved for effective use. There is no research on this with LESLLA learners, but Rohde et al. (2020) argue that “the retrieval of words from our mental lexicon depends on *the number of times we have had to access the word* (Glück, 2007). When it comes to applications to language teaching, the more often we give learners opportunities to hear, see (in print), and produce a word, the more successful they will be in using the word both in and outside the classroom” (p. 56).

#### 4. Build Learners’ Listening Comprehension Skills

One element of verbal communication skills that learners need to be able to do is listen in a new language. Listening is a discrete and complex skill that must be explicitly taught. Lems et al. (2017) remind us that “comprehending oral text in a new language requires constant attention” and can be exhausting (p. 62)! Comprehension via listening is easily prone to fail due to too many unknown words, too large an amount of content at one time, and too long of a time to hold information in short-term memory (Lems et al., 2017). Listening comprehension also involves interpreting facial expressions, body language, gestures, and paralinguistic features, plus engaging in probabilistic reasoning (i.e., interpreting what the other person is saying, how they are saying it, and its significance for that person and context). Lems et al. (2017) note that probabilistic reasoning, which includes pattern recognition, is crucial for oral comprehension, because “it enables us to predict what people are going to say” (p. 61). In the mentor text in Figure 1, using probabilistic reasoning might include mentioning (and modeling) to learners that you, the teacher, used rising intonation when you read the final question. Later, when the class is reading and writing, it can be pointed out that the listener understands that normal intonation indicates one meaning and rising intonation signals that the sentence is a question; an oral representation of a question mark (p. 60).

For learners to know what the relevant language patterns are, they must be explicitly taught and modeled, applied to their work or real-

life contexts, and practiced within the context of those situations (**T**each, **A**pply, **P**ractice). Many probabilistic patterns may already be familiar to the learners; for example, that a rising intonation may signal a question. Other paralinguistic cues may not be as familiar or may have culturally different meanings (e.g., a statement that indicates a desire to help; “Call us,” “Contact us,” “Ask me”). Regardless of these variations, these inferential skills need to be modeled, explicitly taught, and included in the “toolkit” that we give learners to “unpack” a text, as needed (Lems et al., 2017, p. 62).

### ***5. Use Learner-Centered, Cooperative Learning Strategies and Supports***

After previewing and practicing, learners are ready to begin to read the vocabulary in context, summarize the text (at first repeating after the teacher, and then gradually working in pairs), and discuss the newly acquired vocabulary and content (which, again, is first modeled by the teacher). Each step of the TAP process is explicitly taught and modeled. Supports such as word banks, sentence starters, or cloze-style sentence frames can be used to help the learners with a model of the possible answers without having to produce everything themselves. Each of these supports is contextual to the lesson or the topic and can be source material for teaching, applying, and practicing for future use in lessons and at work. As learners continue to practice, they gradually build confidence that they have the correct pronunciation and a rudimentary comprehension of the words and the text. Reading the real-life-based mentor text amplifies the learners’ ownership of the language and vocabulary in the text and the topic.

Discussing the text with a partner, even if it is simply repeating what they have just read (or later telling each other what work they do in their own jobs), helps learners to access and understand the text. This reading and discussion process is easily facilitated when learners work with a comprehension buddy. In pairs, Buddy A and Buddy B practice reading the text aloud, sentence by sentence, alternating sentences read, and pausing at the end of each sentence to repeat, summarize, or comment on what they have just read (Calderón & Slakk, 2018). This buddy work promotes 100 percent participation when the expectation of 100 percent participation is conveyed. Partner work may also be more comfortable for emergent readers, lowering the affective filter.

Over time, they will get to the point where they can read a paragraph or more and summarize at the end of each paragraph.

For emergent readers, this process might start with choral modeling and practice to provide additional support. Emergent readers may work with the teacher, who serves as Buddy A and reads a sentence aloud, and the class acts as Buddy B and orally repeats the sentence. Buddy A (the teacher) reads the next sentence, Buddy B (the group) repeats the sentence, and so on to the end of the paragraph. At the end, the teacher (Buddy A) summarizes what he or she has read. The class (Buddy B) can either repeat the summarization, discuss quickly with a partner, or a variation of both. For this variation of the strategy, mentor text lengths might only be a paragraph long. Thus, each lesson covers less text and is shorter, with more support and the possibility of more focused target vocabulary.

After this initial reading, learners might rotate around the class and ask each other to describe what they do or plan to do at work. As they continue to develop, learners can work on other vocabulary in role-play activities such as interviews, customer service assistance scenarios, and employee-employer exchanges to practice and discuss ways to apply the content and new vocabulary. The teacher can model how to carry out these role-play activities, working with a student. Each of these activities should have the needed vocabulary practiced and previewed, as described earlier in this article. Word banks, sentence starters, or frames as supports also need to mirror each different topic, role-play activity, or scenario.

### ***6. Build from Reading to Writing Activities***

Moving further into helping learners engage in understanding and using the new language and vocabulary in the content of the text, writing may also assist in the mastery process for those who are ready to move to writing. Even emergent learners just learning to write and connect sounds to symbols can begin to write when sufficient supports are provided. The vocabulary, reading, summarizing, and discussion activities discussed earlier in this article act as precursors to the opportunity to engage in real-life writing. Other supports may be in the form of sentences to copy, sentence frames to fill in the missing information, or sentence starters to complete. This writing should be based on the vocabulary, reading, and summarizing of the mentor text of the lesson. For adult learners in a workplace literacy class, this might

include completing an employment application, completing a timesheet, or writing a brief note or report to a supervisor.

Filling out a job application and then interviewing for the job takes specific listening and speaking skills and practice. To work on the skills of interviewing and discussing personal skills and work experience, the teacher might provide learners with a handout like the one in Figure 3. First, they fill in the blanks on the left. Then they write a paragraph about the work they do or want to do. Next, they interview another student and fill in the blanks. Eventually, they will interview a partner to practice the skills of listening, speaking, and answering interview-style questions. If they are advanced enough, they might work together to write the friend's story. The teacher models doing each of these steps on a whiteboard.

Figure 3  
*Writing and talking about "My Story"* (adapted from Wong, 2019, p. 183)

<p><b>My Story</b>                  My name is _____.                  My job is _____                  (or I'm a _____).                  I work on/for _____.                  I work at _____.                  At my job I _____, _____, _____,                  and _____.</p>	<p><b>My Questions</b>                  What is your name?                  What is your job?                  When do you work?                  Where do you work?                  What skills/tools do you use for                  work?</p>
<p><b>My Friend's Story</b>                  My friend is _____. He/She is a _____.                  He/She works at/for _____. He/She works on/at                  _____ (day/time) _____. He/She uses _____ (skills/tools) _____ for                  her work.</p>	

The writing graphic organizer known as R.A.F.T. (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) lends itself well to organizing workplace writing. To begin, learners work in teams to create a piece of writing, using the R.A.F.T graphic organizer (shown in Figure 4). After that, they might share their writing with another pair or group of learners and eventually move to individual writing. As they continue reading and writing, their pieces will become more complex and move into pieces that they might write for or in the workplace; e.g., a description of their job skills that they can tell or send to a possible new supervisor or

employer; a description of the skills and attributes of another person, which would contribute to a job review; a description of a project they are working on, which might include goals, expected outcomes, successes so far, challenges, and planned next steps.

Figure 4  
*R.A.F.T. sample writing prompts*

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Student	Other students	Personal story	Work that I do or want to do
Person looking for a job	Potential employer	Description	The type of work the person would like to do
Employee	Supervisor	Bulleted list	What the team accomplished today
Students fill in	Students fill in	Students fill in	Students fill in

### 7. Make Connections Among All of the Language Skills and Job Knowledge

Lessons may span multiple days, depending on the amount of text, vocabulary, concepts, or other language components that need to be covered. Teachers may wish to consider the topics and content when selecting the mentor text and the amount of text, vocabulary, reading, and discussion to be covered. Smaller amounts of text may be needed when starting to use these activities with learners or when introducing new content. However, we must consider all of the support, discussion, language use, and content-specific practice that learners are receiving. These activities build a foundation in the new language; build the ability to use the target topic vocabulary; and tie the learning to the learners' workplace vocabulary, oral language use, and literacy.

Throughout the lesson, learners will volunteer to orally share their sentences and partner activities (and/or visually if the technology is available) with the rest of the class. The teacher collects data, shares exemplars, and uses informal assessments (e.g., sample sentences that learners created while practicing the target vocabulary, questions they generated regarding the target topic, or summaries of what they were reading) built into the activities to reshape or revisit elements of the lesson, thus personalizing the lesson for that specific group of learners.

Learners will ideally see success outside of the class as they navigate the new language in their daily work and lives. Learners can also bring real-life examples to class of how they have used the new vocabulary and content, thus sharing (e.g., in an oral presentation done in pairs, small groups, or to the whole class) even more learning with their colleagues, and showing their success with the new learning.

### Conclusion

Determining what content and vocabulary to teach, selecting texts to use, and taking learners through the process of comprehending and working with a text in a workplace literacy class can be daunting. However, the TAP model, with its seven instructional components, which include considering the needs of the learners and using their actual work and life situations to help them obtain and become successful with the new language, makes it easier. The TAP model can be used with learners with diverse language backgrounds, literacy proficiencies, and workplace experiences and goals. The components can be implemented by the teacher in the order they are presented here or in an order that suits the instructional context. Showing learners connections that they already may have with the new language and content, and providing them explicit instruction in the elements they need, will help them see that they are learning and owning the new language. Validating the new vocabulary via workplace usage will show the learners that working on the new language, at the same time that their primary language is recognized and valued, is valuable and worthwhile.

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## Appendix

### Sample complex text

#### Goldilocks Heating & Air Conditioning<sup>1</sup>

We help make it feel just right! 804/333.BEAR 804/333.2327

#### Air Conditioning Maintenance

The qualified technicians at Goldilocks Heating & Air Conditioning provide routine air conditioning maintenance services in Osito, VA and the surrounding areas. Whether you need to schedule a yearly tune-up for your AC system, or you would like to know more about our maintenance plans, call us any time. We'd be glad to go over our service plans and discuss the benefits of regular maintenance for your air conditioner. Call Goldilocks' HVAC today for that just right feeling!

#### AC Maintenance Benefits

Maintaining and servicing your HVAC system can be a real bear. Performing regular maintenance tasks for your air conditioning, furnace, or heat pump system will help keep all systems running smoothly throughout all seasons. Changing air filters in central AC systems and making sure there are no obstructions near the vents or outdoor units will help maintain adequate airflow. Having proper airflow is an important part of maintaining efficiency and comfort levels and preventing excess wear and tear. If anything gets trapped in the ductwork, or clogs the filters, your system has to work harder to cool your home. Regularly changing or cleaning filters will also help to improve indoor air quality.

Proper maintenance can also help ensure that your system will perform well throughout its expected lifespan. Better efficiency also means more energy savings and lower utility bills. Call us if you would like to know more about how to properly maintain your air conditioner or heat pump.

#### Goldilocks' HVAC Maintenance Plans

You as a homeowner should perform some minor maintenance tasks and cleaning; however, you should hire a qualified HVAC technician who is trained to inspect the entire system for any hidden concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Author created

before they turn into larger issues. This provides an opportunity for the technician to make any necessary repairs and to lubricate motors and check all the belts and fans. Our technicians will also clean your system and check the ductwork for leaks or other issues that may be costing you more money. We recommend that you schedule an AC tune-up with us at least once a year, and twice a year for heating and cooling systems.

Goldilocks' HVAC is proud to offer maintenance plans to help you save money on routine maintenance and repairs. When you become one of our Just Right Program members, you will get annual inspections and priority service. You'll also receive a 20% discount off of any replacement parts or labor. With our programs, there are no overtime charges, and you can choose between our Diamond, Platinum, or Snowbird plan depending on the type of system you have and how many tune-ups per year you will need. Call us any time to learn more about our Just Right Program.

**Goldilocks' HVAC – Providing Professional AC Maintenance Services to Osito, VA**

At Goldilocks' HVAC, our experienced technicians proudly provide professional AC maintenance services to Osito, VA and the surrounding areas. We are committed to providing quality service for all types of air conditioners, including central AC, heat pumps, and ductless mini splits. Call today to learn about our maintenance plans and schedule your yearly tune-up!

Proof