



The ORTESOL Journal

Volume 26, 2008

Features

They're Everyone's Kids: Supporting Teachers Who Support ELLs

A Foundations-First Approach to Fluent Reading

Beyond Technical Skills: Interconnecting Computer Use, Inquiry, and Oral Communication

Columns

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Teaching Notes

Error Correction: A Traffic Light Approach

What Makes a Trip an Adventure?

Lights, Up! Action! English!

Research Notes

A Survey of Semester-End English Examinations in Northern Cyprus Elementary Schools

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In This Issue

Byrne Brewerton & Deborah Healey
ORTESOL Journal Editors

The 2007 issue of *ORTESOL Journal* was about the future of the profession. This issue continues some of last year's themes with an emphasis on problem solving. We address how we as teachers, researchers, and citizens are looking for ways to improve English language learning and teaching, from the level of the individual classroom to the state system.

In the previous issue of the *Journal*, Karie Mize and Maria Dantas-Whitney reported that the Oregon Department of Education requires the English Language Development curriculum to be "taught by qualified teachers." These teachers have become qualified by adding an ESOL endorsement to their teaching credentials. In this issue, Mize and Dantas-Whitney, along with Alejandra Favela and Mollie Galloway, present the results of a survey of teachers who have obtained this endorsement. While many teachers reported genuine benefits (such as increased knowledge) from receiving the endorsement, others reported that their increased qualifications resulted in decreased choice in their teaching assignments. In addition, they reported a "lack of clarity" about their professional roles after receiving the endorsement and inconsistent school and policy support from administrators. It is hoped that those in decision-making capacities in Oregon schools will take note of this article and provide their ESOL-endorsed teachers with the support they need to serve all students effectively.

In the previous issue, we expressed a hope that Bill Walker would continue to contribute to *ORTESOL Journal*. We are pleased to be able to publish his article on how to make academic reading instruction more effective and enjoyable. He argues that a strictly top-down approach has failed to create fluent readers and that a foundation of bottom-up skills is necessary for readers to become truly fluent. A foundations-first approach

integrates skills, but it does so in a structured and principled way, involving students in intensive reading of challenging texts as well as in extensive reading of easier texts. In keeping with recent trends, foundations-first emphasizes the importance of vocabulary because "language is grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar."

In her article, Faiza Derbel reports on classroom-based research that explored how students went about integrating computer use and oral presentations in an intensive summer course. She conducted a task-based project in which students collected information from the Internet, collaborated on a PowerPoint presentation, and presented it to their fellow students. She wanted to know exactly how the students used the protocols given to them, how they used the Internet as a resource, how they managed information, and how they created their final performances. Additional information from her course, including assignment sheets and guidelines for student presentations, can be found online at <http://www.ortesol.org>.

In the Teaching Notes section, Zenaida Lorena Talamante Ayvar and Don Prickel explain an approach to error correction that hands responsibility for when to be corrected over to the learner - literally, with cards learners display. We have also included pieces by Maya Moore and Ron Metzler on how to enliven classrooms using theme-based teaching and drama, respectively. Finally, Michael Witbeck reports on a survey of English examinations in Northern Cyprus secondary schools. Detailed results of this survey can be found online at <http://www.ortesol.org>.

This is Byrne Brewerton's first issue as an editor. Not only has he enjoyed reading the articles for the knowledge they provide, he has also learned a great deal about the process and challenges of publishing the *Journal*. He hopes to be involved in the *Journal* for many years to come.

They're *Everyone's* Kids: Supporting Teachers Who Support ELLs

Maria Dantas-Whitney, Western Oregon University

Alejandra Favela, Lewis & Clark College

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Oregon has witnessed unprecedented growth in the population of English Language Learners (ELLs). Between 1993 and 2003, our state experienced more than a 200 percent increase in ELL students in its classrooms (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2005). Preparing teachers to meet the needs of diverse students has become an urgent priority for school teachers, administrators, and policymakers alike.

Many Oregon educators have responded to this challenge by adding the ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) endorsement to their teaching licenses. Courses in an ESOL endorsement program typically focus on:

- the history and legal foundations of bilingual and ELL program models
- community perspectives and family involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse students
- first and second language acquisition
- methods to “shelter” or differentiate content and language instruction and assessment

Candidates also pass a standardized exam and complete a practicum experience before being recommended to the state licensing board. Teachers who pursue ESOL training embrace the rewards and difficulties of working with ELL students and adapt their practice to address the specific linguistic, cultural, and psychosocial needs of this student population.

Properly preparing teachers to meet this demographic challenge is important, but too often this

responsibility overwhelmingly falls on the shoulders of a few. If we truly wish to support ELL students, then we also need to provide the necessary systemic supports for teachers who work with these students. As higher education institutions begin to understand and shape the necessary components of a targeted teacher preparation program, P-12 settings (pre-kindergarten through grade 12) must also be structured in ways that support teachers' implementation of these best practices. We have evidence to suggest that while ESOL-trained teachers in Oregon feel empowered to be advocates in their schools, P-12 institutions still have strides to make before they can fully support teachers in their work with ELLs.

Feedback from ESOL Teachers

As ESOL teacher educators at public and private institutions in Oregon, we have long been aware of the significant benefits that ESOL certification brings to teachers. Lately, however, we have been concerned about significant systemic challenges and working conditions that have an impact on ESOL teachers in P-12 schools by reducing ESOL teachers' efficacy and limiting their opportunity to effectively support ELLs.

In order to learn more, we engaged in a range of data collection at our institutions, interviewing and surveying teachers who had completed our endorsement programs to examine the following questions: What supports and challenges do teachers with ESOL expertise have as they seek to improve student learning? How do school environments help or hinder the implementation of best practices for ELLs?

In this article we share the daily realities of rural and urban ESOL practitioners in Oregon, with their names omitted to preserve confidentiality. Based on our findings, we offer specific recommendations related to policy and practice in our state. We believe that the situation of Oregon teachers is not unique, and we therefore hope that educators from across the nation will learn from their experiences and find local solutions to support teachers in meeting the needs of their ELLs.

Benefits from Increased Knowledge, Marketability, and Advocacy

Surveys and informal conversations with our graduates repeatedly emphasized the benefits of acquiring ESOL expertise. As one graduate explained, training on “intentional practices aimed at ESL students” offers essential knowledge and skills to address students’ linguistic and cultural learning needs. Many graduates echoed the comments of a first grade teacher who reported she was able to effectively shelter her instruction after gaining “a better understanding of how language is acquired and the stages [her] ELLs go through.” This knowledge provides benefits school-wide as well as in the classroom. According to one teacher, “I am now familiar with laws and history and can use my knowledge to advocate for my students.”

Numerous teachers have also become involved in committees where they have had an impact on policies for ELLs, and some have become site or district administrators. A former teacher who “implemented ESOL strategies on a daily basis” now works as an elementary principal, where she utilizes her “experience to advocate for [ELL] students ... in creating supportive programs and schedules.” Some teachers have used their increased knowledge to serve as instructional coaches and to play major roles in creating appropriate program models.

One such teacher who designed and implemented a two-way immersion program at her school “presented at the national level on effective practice for ELL students.” Many of our graduates found they were more “marketable” because districts clearly

recognize that investing in ESOL training generates major pay-offs for ELL students and their teachers.

Systemic Challenges

Although an ESOL endorsement is optional for Oregon teachers, federal policies to measure ELLs’ language proficiency have led an increasing number of districts to require teachers to seek additional ELL training or to hire those who already possess the ESOL endorsement. To comply with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2002), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) introduced English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards and the corresponding English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) to measure proficiency levels of ELLs in Oregon public schools (ODE, n.d.).

Students’ English language proficiency results from the ELPA are used to gauge progress in terms of the federal measurement guidelines of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Clearly, the development of

This knowledge provides benefits school-wide as well as in the classroom.

language standards and assessment measures and increased professional qualifications are positive advancements. ESOL faculty, policymakers, and teacher

practitioners value the recent focus on policies and practices that affect English language learners.

However, too often P-12 schools fail to provide the support structures that teachers of ELLs need to effectively implement best practices. Equipped with deepened linguistic and cultural understanding and new ESOL strategies, teachers and specialists expect to make change in their classrooms and schools. As one teacher said:

We learn a lot of wonderful information during our endorsement [program], yet the best practices are still not being applied in the schools. We need more funding and educational support to really give these students what they need to succeed.

Teachers who completed our programs reported a critical lack of support in three pressing areas:

- reduced choice in teaching assignments,
- lack of clarity about professional roles, and
- inconsistent school and policy support.

Reduced Choice in Teaching Assignments

Many of our teachers described gaining critical new knowledge and skills and increasing their marketability as a result of their ESOL endorsement. Still, our surveys and interviews also revealed a disconcerting trend that can make the ESOL endorsement seem disadvantageous for future teachers: Once a teacher became endorsed, his/her ability to choose teaching assignments was often reduced. This trend may be reflective of Oregon's high use of specialists for language instruction.

ELL students need teachers who are trained to deliver sheltered content instruction as well as to develop students' English language skills. Teachers with ESOL endorsements learn to shelter their instruction (Short & Echevarria, 2004/2005: 11) and differentiate the language demands of content lessons so that students at all English proficiency levels can participate in classroom lessons. In addition, ELLs need specialized language instruction to develop the communicative competence in English that native English speakers naturally acquire.

Although both language and content progress is measured by AYP, the focus in many school districts is primarily on the development of language skills. The predominant model being encouraged by the Oregon Department of Education is "pullout," where an ESL (English as a Second Language) or ELD (English Language Development) specialist provides a minimum of 30 minutes of targeted language instruction during each school day (Mize & Dantas-Whitney, 2007). As a result, many graduates of ESOL endorsement programs are not using their expertise in the mainstream or content classroom, and instead are being asked to serve as ESL/ELD resource specialists.

Some of our ESOL-prepared teachers felt that they would be required rather than invited to move into specialist roles. Approximately 20% of those who finished the ESOL program at one of our institutions decided not to apply for an ESOL endorsement with the state of Oregon, in part because they feared being placed in specialist roles "regardless of [their]

wish to remain in the regular classroom." They were concerned that they would be "involuntarily relocated," "pulled out of the regular...classroom," removed from a "position that [they] love," or "forced to teach ESL just because" they held an ESOL endorsement.

In fact, almost half of the teachers we surveyed taught in mainstream or content classrooms and sought the endorsement to better their ability to meet their current students' needs, not to change their role within their schools. Teachers who possess advanced ESOL certification deserve to be consulted regarding their placement.

Lack of Clarity about Professional Roles

Another strong concern that surfaced in our conversations involved a lack of uniformity in titles, roles, duties, and even "prep" periods for teachers and specialists. Our interviewees reported that their duties included coordinating ESL programs; testing, placing, exiting, and monitoring ELLs; counseling students in ESL programs; supervising Latino dance clubs/classes; serving as faculty advisors for student groups; and providing academic advising for ELLs. More than one educator expressed frustration when a disproportionate number of additional duties detracted from teaching. This concern is exemplified by a teacher, who noted:

Teachers who possess advanced ESOL certification deserve to be consulted regarding their placement.

What I didn't foresee was, as a specialist, how many committees or professional teams, both in our school and within our district, in which we would be required to be a part. It has greatly impacted my time for preparing lessons and teaching ESL students as an ESL teacher.

Titles for specialists ranged from "ELL coordinators," "ESL" or "ELD teachers," to "resource specialists." In one case, the school vice-principal carried the official "coordinator" title, but it was the ESL teacher who completed paperwork and served on the ELL committees. Inconsistencies were evident across schools and districts. For example, one specialist with 250 ELLs received no prep periods,

and another with 5 ELLs worked half time on these duties.

Also troubling was that ESL specialists were often unprepared for or unclear about their roles. For instance, a newly hired “ELL coordinator” at the secondary level was not told about her duties when she was hired to be an ELD and Spanish teacher and received no training other than how to administer placement tests. For these teachers, having the ESOL endorsement meant that “you are more than just ... a classroom teacher. You are an administrator, counselor, translator and teacher!” These vast and varied duties severely limited the time that teachers with ESOL training were able to work directly with students who needed their specialized knowledge. These findings raise serious questions about professional equity.

Inconsistent Support Structures

Most ESOL teachers felt their advanced skills were appreciated by administrators, but too often the burden and rewards of educating ELLs fell on the shoulders of a few. Many felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility, often without commensurate assistance, training, or preparation time. Teachers argued for more support “for [those] who have large groups of ELLs in their classrooms [because] it takes a lot more planning time to differentiate for ELL language development.”

One elementary ESL teacher was discouraged that “you have to defend what you do – people don’t see the value.” Another described the challenges she faced when trying to improve the climate for her students:

If I want things fixed, I just have to do more begging. When I get tired of doing that, I feel like I have a hard choice: Either give up when things aren’t equitable, which my students see, or ...succumb to complaining and pleading.

ESL specialists in particular felt that their colleagues often did not understand their roles or did not appreciate the importance of the ESOL program.

When teachers were the only educator or one of the few in their buildings with ESOL training, they were expected to be experts on all ELL-related

issues and to act as mentors for other teachers. One bilingual teacher reported, “The greatest challenge is helping other teachers understand how [kids] learn a second language.” A veteran teacher recounted that she was expected to support a newly hired specialist who did not have an ESOL endorsement but was in charge of teaching the most advanced ELLs. The veteran teacher ended up completing the placement paperwork because the new teacher did not understand the redesignation and exit criteria.

These concerns extended to the policy arena, where teachers expressed frustrations about some of the current standards and accountability practices. One teacher reported that efforts to make positive change have gone largely unnoticed:

I feel the state keeps scrutinizing all of our hard work and have only negative comments, no assistance or help. It is much more of a political job than I had imagined!

This limited support can lead to lower teacher morale and higher rates of burnout:

If the federal/state laws surrounding teaching ESL become more cumbersome than they already are and if the school district can’t be supportive, I would go back to the regular classroom. I’ve lost plenty of sleep already over the demands of being an ESL teacher.

At a time when we need to prepare more teachers to work effectively with ELLs, schools and districts cannot afford to lose these specially trained educators.

Recommendations and Implications

Our findings confirm that in-depth, quality ESOL endorsement coursework for teachers is key to working effectively with ELLs. Whether teachers worked in a self-contained classroom or as specialists, they consistently reported feeling a greater sense of efficacy and advocacy after receiving training in ESOL theory and practice. As teachers gained a better understanding of how language is acquired, they were better able to adjust their daily instruction through appropriate sheltering strategies.

However, our research revealed that an increasing number of schools are shifting towards the

pullout model as the one and only approach to providing support services to ELLs. Yet, pullout classes rarely include mainstream academic content such as math, science, and social studies. In addition to specialized language development, ELLs need qualified classroom teachers who can adapt methods and materials to offer accessible grade-level instruction in the content areas. Core content instruction using effective sheltered instruction that targets specific linguistic needs, as identified by the ELD standards, should be a strong area of focus.

Utilizing native language instruction in programs such as dual language, transitional bilingual education, developmental bilingual education, and heritage literacy may be a more appropriate model to address student needs (see Linquanti, 1999, for definitions of program models, characteristics of successful implementation, as well as program model advantages and concerns). When native language instruction is not feasible, ELL programs other than pullout must be considered.

Teachers with training and support in how to differentiate instruction for different proficiency levels may be able to provide their own ELD support. Schools may choose to have a language development block where English language learners are receiving ELD while native speakers and redesignated ELLs are also focusing on explicit linguistic targets such as grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills (Mize & Dantas-Whitney, 2007). Native English speakers can also be instructed in a foreign language during this language development block.

When pullout is the chosen model, ESL specialists need to meet regularly with classroom teachers so that their roles are complementary. ESL specialists may be able to “push-in” or deliver instruction within the mainstream classroom to increase collaboration and curriculum alignment. ESL specialists also need opportunities to meet with others in their same role to ensure a coherent program at the district level. Specialists must have advanced training when asked to coordinate a program, administer language proficiency tests, or implement new program models.

A school-wide vision adapted to local conditions is essential for strengthening ELL education. Models

of promising practices in teacher partnerships, curricular integration, and professional development programs have been documented in schools in California, Iowa, and New York (Walqui, 2000). The positive outcomes of these programs demonstrate that we can overcome structural obstacles to improve the educational outcomes and experience of English language learners.

Too often, only a few teachers shoulder the responsibility for working with ELLs, especially when they are considered the sole experts. We cannot risk ESOL-endorsed teachers becoming more isolated without commensurate staff support or planning time. Administrators can help by clarifying the roles of ELL teachers and ensuring that extra duties such as translation, counseling, and program coordination are compensated for their workload or that additional staff – preferably bilingual – be hired to address tasks that interfere with teachers’ preparation and instruction. Moreover, school- or district-wide efforts

are needed so that all personnel understand the importance of a well-implemented ELL program. It is vital that ESL specialists and teachers with ESOL

training have support from all of their peers and administrators, including those who have yet to be formally trained in ESOL methods.

Requiring more teachers to receive ESOL training will help mainstream teachers share the burden and the rewards of working with ELLs. In Oregon, fewer than 13% of teachers have received any formal ESOL training while 41% have ELLs in their classroom (NWREL’s Equity Center, 2008). Therefore, it is urgent that more teachers be trained to work with ELLs by infusing coursework into the initial teaching license, encouraging more pre-service and in-service teachers to get an additional endorsement, and offering sustained and well-planned professional development. Perhaps not until more school staff members receive ESOL training will there be a shift in viewing these ELLs as *everyone’s* responsibility. As one teacher put it, “You’re expected to do miracles because they’re ‘your’ kids. Really, they’re everyone’s kids.” Ultimately, if we are to support our ELLs, we will also need to do a better job of supporting the teachers who work with them.

A school-wide vision adapted to local conditions is essential for strengthening ELL education.

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A Foundations-First Approach to Fluent Reading

Bill Walker, University of Oregon

Several years ago, something was going seriously wrong in my upper-intermediate reading/writing class. The students were unhappy and not very productive. They seemed especially to be struggling with the text, a contemporary non-fiction best seller that had been chosen for them. I tried my best to motivate the students to read, but there was a lot of grumbling. One young woman gave me a steely-eye stare and said, "I hate this book. I would not read it even in my own language." Several said, "The vocabulary is too difficult." I was discouraged and felt I was letting them down.

Flash forward. More recently, also in an intermediate-level class, I caught students reading their novels during the break. In fact, I had to tell them to put the books away so we could get on with our other readings. I sometimes walked into class to see students showing each other their novels and talking animatedly. During weekly "book club" sessions, it did not take much to get them started. They got right into asking each other questions about the novels they were reading, and soon I overheard them asking their classmates if they could borrow the book.

I noticed that their reading speed was improving, as well. After seven weeks of one-minute fluency drills, some of them approached 160 words per minute, up from around 110 words at the beginning of the term. Moreover, they seemed to enjoy writing short response journal entries about the novels, and they appreciated the fact that they did not have to answer comprehension questions. I only required that they enjoy the experience.

No *Mutiny on the Bounty* in that class. Why? In the first place, they chose their own titles. More-

over, they were not reading an original, lexically-dense version that was not intended for them. There were no close-reading sessions where they got bogged down in analyzing grammatical structures. I rarely saw a dictionary and almost never saw any glosses in the margins. Because it takes only one week to read these graded readers, students could easily read the three assigned books in one ten-week term. In fact, one student ordered several more titles on the Internet to share with his wife who was not a student here. He finished his three novels and read two of hers.

Ahhhh. Fluency. For many ESL students, the attainment of fluency in reading remains elusive. Every year, thousands of foreign students flock to Oregon to study in institutions of higher learning.

Those who are bound for college

in the US and who are less proficient in English enroll in intensive English programs. They hope to acquire academic language skills sufficient to allow them to pass the TOEFL test in order to start taking university classes. ESL students in these intensive English programs, especially those whose L1 does not use the roman alphabet, often struggle to read accurately, much less fluently.

Typical intensive English programs in Oregon have students mostly from the Middle East and Asia. It is these students who, even if quite literate in their native languages, often have difficulty grappling with reading in English. Their problems with English range from mastering basic decoding skills to developing complete comprehension of a text via a knowledge of the text's features: its vocabulary, structure, cohesive devices, discourse patterns, and genre features. Many reading strategies mastered in the L1, such as previewing a text, scanning for information, guessing

Students could easily read the three assigned books in one ten-week term.

from context, and judiciously using a dictionary, can somewhat easily transfer to reading in English. However, many students still have fluency issues that affect their ability to fully comprehend what they are trying to read.

Whole Language Learning

The goal of getting students to reach fluency has been around for a long time. In the late 1980s and into the mid 1990s, reading was approached from a whole-language learning perspective. At that time, proponents of whole-language learning advocated that students read massive amounts of authentic text, primarily novels written for native speakers, then do copious amounts of writing. Explicit language instruction was frowned upon; i.e., the emphasis was on the “wholeness” of language, not on the “bits and pieces of phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, and words” (Brown, 2001: 48). Students were not expected to completely understand what they read, but rather to sample the text to find the few things that they could understand. It was assumed that after copious amounts of reading and journal writing, clarity would emerge, and then, accuracy would finally be achieved.

For example, in the early 1990s, a Fluency First program consisted of a three-course sequence where students were first taught to “write intelligibly and with relative ease, and to comprehend popular fiction” (MacGowan-Gilhooly & Tillyer, 1996: ¶3). Clarity was the goal of the second phase: students wrote well-developed prose with lexical accuracy. In the third course, grammatical and mechanical accuracy were stressed. “In all three courses, students read about 1,000 pages of unabridged text, and write upwards of 10,000 words” (MacGowan-Gilhooly & Tillyer, 1996: ¶3).

However, the experiment in whole-language learning failed to live up to expectations. Even the original proponents of the Fluency First approach admitted that “efforts to arrive at a reliable assessment of reading ability improvement ... have been unsatisfactory” (MacGowan-Gilhooly & Tillyer, 1996: ¶9). In fact, after the Whole Language Approach was introduced in 1987 to L1 students in school systems across California, students’ achievement test

results plummeted. By the early 1990s, according to Hinkel:

On national tests of reading, California 4th and 8th graders started to show up in 3rd or 4th place from the bottom among the 50 states, together with Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. . . . The whole point here is that if whole language and fluency first failed miserably with native speakers, non-natives don’t have a prayer of learning anything this way.” (Personal e-mail, July 25, 2008).

Some good did come out of the whole-language experiment. Nowadays, whole language is a term used to describe the wholeness of language and lends itself to such widely-accepted approaches as cooperative, participatory learning, and student-centered learning with foci on the social, community-building nature of learners. Wholeness often means the use of authentic, natural language, as opposed to pedagogically contrived language, along with the integration of the four skills and holistic assessment techniques.

A foundations-first approach relies on integration of skills.

For example, Iancu (2005) integrates a substantial number of pre-reading activities into her lessons. She starts with watching and listening to short sections of a video based on the selected novel, then has students talk about the video. This results in a good deal of foundation work in vocabulary acquisition. Students then read the corresponding portion of the novel. Iancu is careful to select novels that are of high interest to her students and which are close to, but somewhat above, their proficiency level. Since students usually do not have high comprehension of the text, she tells them to just find passages that look familiar and try to read them. This, of course, is not what most people think of when they think of reading a novel, but it is a characteristic of the whole-language approach.

Foundations First Overview

In contrast to the whole-language approach, a foundations-first approach is designed to make sure that students do, indeed, have a high level of comprehension as they read. In common with a wholeness-of-language approach, a foundations-first approach relies on integration of skills. Integrating skills means

deliberately involving all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in a principled, balanced way. It is best implemented in a language course in which fairly equal time is given to four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and finally, fluency development (Nation, 2008: 1–2).

The premise behind a foundations-first approach to reading is that for fluency to develop, there needs to be a period of intensive language learning from reading and studying short texts that are somewhat difficult. After a sufficient amount of language proficiency has been acquired, fluency emerges, especially when the students have opportunities to read extensively. Fluency is especially likely to develop if the extensive reading is not challenging, but rather is at the learner’s proficiency level.

Intensive reading focuses primarily on bottom-up reading skills, such as “word recognition, spelling and phonological processing, morphosyntactic parsing, and lexical recognition and accessing” (Hinkel, 2006: 120). In addition, intensive reading includes such activities as finding the main idea, finding major and minor supporting details, finding pronoun referents, inferencing, interpreting graphics, recognizing discourse patterns (i.e., definition, listing, exemplification), and recognizing cohesive devices.

While grammar knowledge is important, more vital to bottom-up reading is lexical competency. This is because “language is grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar” (Hunston & Francis, 2000: 280). It is primarily through intensive reading that the deliberate build-up of lexical competence occurs. Vocabulary is especially important for university-bound students because, in order to successfully comprehend academic materials, the L2 reader needs to know about 5,000 word families (Hu & Nation, 2000).

Having acquired proficiency in the fundamentals, i.e., bottom-up processing, the reader is ready for top-down processing. This, according to some researchers, is seen as “additive or compensatory” in relation to bottom-up processing (Birch, 2002; Koda, 2005).

As a firm foundation in language proficiency is being established, the student is starting to become

fluent. However, it is during extensive reading that the conditions for faster reading and a higher level of comprehension occur. This, of course, assumes that the reader is a rapid decoder and has a well-developed vocabulary. Thus equipped, she can read quickly, experiences the pleasure that comes with being able to engage in the ideas in the text (Waring, 1997), and is able to evaluate and synthesize information.

Strands 1 and 2: Meaning-focused

A foundations-first approach takes into account the four strands in Nation’s (2008) balanced language course: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. This approach begins with the assumption that in the meaning-focused input strands, *the material must not be beyond the learner’s proficiency level*. This is a key distinction between a

foundations-first approach and a wholeness-of-language approach. “Meaning-focused input involves getting input through listening and reading where the

learners’ focus is on understanding the message and where only *a small proportion of language features are outside the learners’ present level of proficiency* [italics added]” (p. 1). In the meaning-focused output strand, according to Nation (2008), reading is related to speaking and writing where “the learners’ focus is on others understanding the message” (p. 1).

Strand 3: Intensive Reading

During the language-focused learning strand, the student engages in intensive reading, where the material is beyond the student’s proficiency level. As a result, the overall message is not worked out until a great deal of attention has been paid to language features. Students “consult dictionaries in reading and writing ... get language-focused feedback on their writing ... deliberately learn new vocabulary ... practise spelling ... and study grammar and discourse features” (pp. 1–2).

For the majority of learners (those beyond the beginning stages of learning the language), a strong

After a sufficient amount of language proficiency has been acquired, fluency emerges.

foundation in knowledge of language features of text, along with skill in using a variety of reading strategies, can be had via intensive reading. The aim of the intensive reading of a particular text is comprehension of the text. However, the overall curricular goal of a course should be the transferable skill of being able to comprehend *a variety of texts*, not exclusively *the one text* or set of texts used in the course. In other words, there should be a focus on transferable language knowledge. Elements that contribute to this transferability are decoding skills, lexis, structure, cohesion, information structure, genre features, and strategies.

Decoding

The first sub-skill that a beginning learner must master is decoding. At a very basic level, for a few adult learners who are the least proficient readers, work must be done on *phonics*, the recognition of written forms of the language and being able to “connect them with their spoken forms and their meanings” (Nation, 2008: 9). It is a very demanding task for these students to visually process words and letters. Initially, beginners learn the shapes of the letters of the alphabet. Students whose L1 does not use the alphabet system will need to work on sound-letter correspondences. In English, this involves regular rules for most words, especially those derived from Latin and Greek. Unfortunately, there are quite a few exceptions, especially among the high-frequency words, most of which come from old English. For these students, a systematic syllabus in phonics instruction may be in order.

Also within the realm of decoding is *phonemic awareness*: being aware that words consist of individual sounds. Wallace (2001) points out that there is a powerful connection “between phonemic awareness, the ability to process words automatically, and reading achievement” (p. 23). In addition, there is the often overlooked fact that some students need to overcome a lifetime of reading from right to left, or from top to bottom, and so must practice reading from left to right. Inadequate control over directionality can have an adverse effect on students’ recognition of words (for example, confusing *girl* with *grill*) at the basic decoding level.

Lexical Knowledge

The lexical knowledge that is vital in the intensive reading process can and should be directly taught. Hinkel (2006) asserts that “irrespective of their aspirations to enter universities, L2 learners need to acquire substantial vocabulary to achieve competencies in practically all L2 skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking” (p. 122). Direct teaching of vocabulary is advocated by Hinkel (2006). She notes that “explicit teaching of vocabulary represents the most effective and efficient means of vocabulary teaching [while] incidental learning leads to significantly lower rates of vocabulary retention” (p. 122). A vocabulary of 2,000 word families is considered sufficient for daily communication needs (Nation, 2001: 15). For the comfortable reading of general, non-specialist texts, 95% to 98% of the running words on the page (about 5,000 word families) are needed (Nation, 2001: 147).

Having so many words to deal with, an instructor may be at a loss as to where to start. Nation (2008) suggests dealing with high-frequency vocabulary first, dealing quickly with or ignoring items that occur infrequently. Students need

strategies for tackling the unknown words they encounter in any text, such as guessing from context, using word parts, and using a dictionary judiciously. They need to learn to engage in vocabulary-retention activities, such as using flashcards (pp. 38–39).

Grammar features that students meet in intensive reading passages need to be analyzed and explained. Learners expect grammar instruction. “Focusing on grammar features during intensive reading provides a good opportunity to satisfy this expectation and at the same time to deal with grammar in a meaningful context” (Nation, 2008: 40). As with vocabulary, attention should be first given to high frequency grammatical structures, while low-frequency grammar points should be dealt with later, more as a way to help the learner comprehend the passage rather than as points to be mastered for written or oral production.

At higher levels of cognitive processing, pre-reading activities help facilitate comprehension and stimulate interest. In addition, discourse features such as cohesive devices, rhetorical patterns, information

There should be a focus on transferable language knowledge.

structure, and genre features can be focused on, analyzed, and explained in the context of the short intensive reading passages. Most of the current ESL academic reading textbooks provide appropriate language-focus activities. In addition, activities to be done during reading help students focus on comprehending abstract concepts and realize relationships among ideas. Post-reading activities check comprehension and enable students to expand on the ideas and information in the text.

Intensive reading passages, because of their inherent difficulty, are short. They are selected on the basis of their ability to focus on language learning and “teach rather than just give practice” (Nation, 2008: 40). Foundational language knowledge, skills, and strategies gained during intensive reading need to be *transferable* to any text, not just the ones used in the course. It is important that the material not contain too many unknown or difficult items.

Mastery of the sub-skills is what a foundations first approach is all about. This mastery begins with intensive reading. When students are reading intensively, they are, by definition, not reading fluently. They are putting a great deal of effort into learning a lot of new language. However, there are delicious fruits to be had from this labor. Intensive reading results in building up a strong foundation upon which faster reading with greater comprehension can occur. While intensive reading gives the students the language foundation they need, it is extensive reading that allows fluency to develop.

Strand 4: Extensive Reading

The fourth strand is fluency development. For students to be able to read fluently, with speed and accuracy, “the reading material needs to be well within the learners’ level of proficiency” (Nation, 2008: 2). When students read huge amounts of *comprehensible* material, such as is found in graded readers, they are provided with opportunities to consolidate their previously learned language and to process (decode) the text rapidly, all the while easily *focusing on the message* and readily picking up the ideas. This type of reading does not occur when the student struggles to read an original text that is too difficult for them.

Nation (2005) asserts that “without graded readers, reading for a second language learner would be one continuous struggle against an overwhelming vocabulary level” (p. 588). Nation also says that “fluency develops when complex activities like reading are made less complex by the fluent mastery of some of the sub-skills involved in the activity” (2008: 65).

The purpose of extensive reading is not to spend a lot of time working out the meaning of unfamiliar grammatical structures and new vocabulary. Rather, the purpose is to proceed quickly through the text with a high level of comprehension so that the reading experience is pleasurable. Learners are not reading fluently when they are writing glosses and notes in the margins of the texts and when they keep getting out their dictionaries. That is an indication that they are “bogged down in the decoding of the linguistic puzzle” (Waring, 1997), i.e., engaged in the *intensive* reading process.

Learners are not reading fluently when they are writing glosses and notes in the margins of the texts.

In order for extensive reading to be fluent, the lexical load must be such that the reader is no longer engaged in working hard at decoding and deciphering the text. Instead, she is focused on the story itself, comprehending virtually everything, and, hopefully, enjoying it. By reading fluently at or slightly below her proficiency level, the student can consolidate her previously learned language, reinforcing language learned in her intensive reading sessions. In addition, she can gradually broaden her knowledge of previously learned language. Bell (1998) feels that because of the regular and sufficient repetition of language forms, “students automatically receive the necessary reinforcement and recycling of language required to ensure that new input is retained” (p. 3).

Vital to the ability to comprehend fully is an adequate vocabulary. Hu & Nation (2000) have established that L2 readers reach a point at which reading comprehension is almost total and the reading process becomes “pleasurable,” i.e., not a struggle, when not more than one word in fifty is unknown. This means that 98% of the running words on the page are known. This seems like a rather high percentage. However, imagine a novel, for instance, that has about ten words per line and perhaps forty lines per page. At 98%, there might be eight words

per page that are unknown to the reader, requiring the reader either to tolerate them and keep on reading, slow down in an attempt to guess their meaning, or stop altogether and resort to using a dictionary.

Contrast this with an unsimplified novel. It is possible that anywhere from 8% to 20% of the running words on the page are unknown to a student who has a vocabulary of about 2,000 word families. That means that almost every line of text has one, and possibly two, new words. A study by Horst (2005) showed that in the initial 3,000 running words (about nine pages) of an unabridged version of *Treasure Island*, there were 145 words that did not occur in the 2,000 most frequent word families of English (West, 1953) or in the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). Here is a small sample of some of these infrequent words:

admiral alarmed awaited beach briskly
buccaneer connoisseur cove dreadful
effectual fawning filthy
frost glared grumbling
horn incivility insist
lingering magistrate
mingled oath parlor
peering pigtail rebuff
ruffian scoundrel skipper snort strode surf
tarry threshold tottering tyrannized villainous (pp. 369–370)

Compare these to the list of words of the simplified version published by Oxford. This version uses a headword list of 1,400 word families. Horst (2005) reported that the number of words which occurs outside the 2,000 word list in the first 3,000 running words is a mere eleven (about one new word per page):

admiral ail anchor cabin crew crutch knelt
mate pirate rum squire (p. 370)

Most reading experts would agree that fluent reading requires that students read rapidly for comprehension by recognizing words rapidly and automatically (relying on a large vocabulary base). Fluent readers can easily integrate information in the text with their own knowledge and engage in metacognitive activities, such as being aware of the purpose for reading and being able to use strategies to monitor comprehension. At higher levels of comprehension, students are more able to engage in

critical thinking about the text (analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the new information).

In order to achieve fluency, Nation (2008) and others strongly advise making extensive reading an important part of in-class and out-of-class practice. It is a truism that students become better readers by reading a lot. Day and Bamford (1998) emphasize that extensive reading is characterized by a large quantity of reading of a variety of texts that students select themselves, enjoy reading, and can read at a reasonably fluent speed. Nation (2008) is explicit as to the quantity of extensive reading that a student should engage in. “This quantity of input needs to be close to 500,000 running words per year, which is equivalent to 25 graded readers a year, or one and a half substantial first year university text books, or six unsimplified novels” (p. 50).

Graded Readers

Though Nation (2008) mentions unsimplified

texts for comparison purposes, he strongly favors using graded readers with English language learners. Insofar as the optimal vocabulary density is 98%, or even 99% for adequate

comprehension, it is “essential that [L2 learners] read graded readers that have been specially prepared for learners of English. It is only by reading such texts that learners can have the density of known words that is essential for extensive reading” (Nation, 2008: 51).

One can measure students’ receptive vocabulary knowledge by testing them on their knowledge of the most frequent 2,000 words of English. One way of doing this is to use a test developed by Schmitt, Schmitt and Clapham (2001), or by using bilingual vocabulary tests such as can be found in Paul Nation’s Vocabulary Resource Booklet at <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation/nation.aspx>.

The success of any extensive reading program depends on the learners’ being motivated. Since teachers’ ideas of what is interesting can be quite at odds with what students think is interesting, it is imperative that students be allowed to have a voice in the choice of their own reading materials. When the emphasis is on the pleasurable reading of a great

Even without a well-developed vocabulary, fluent reading can take place with a graded reader.

quantity of material, it is vital that the reading process not be bogged down with “elaborate reading comprehension tests or exercises on the books they read” (Nation, 2008: 53). It should suffice for students to fill out a simple form, listing the title of the book, its level, how many pages it contains, and how long it took to read it. In addition, there can be a brief comment on something they found interesting in the book.

While Nation highly recommends graded readers, some ESL instructors recoil at the idea of using them. Critics of poorly-written graded readers see these readers as being “inauthentic, watered-down versions of richer original texts” (Nation, 2008: 57). Because of vocabulary limitations, grammatical structuring suffers, so that “what could be neatly expressed in one word is now expressed in several simpler words” (Nation, 2008: 57). It is true that in the early days of graded readers, connectives between sentences were deleted in an effort to shorten the texts, thus resulting in a lack of cohesiveness. Ironically, this simplification often resulted in a text that was more difficult to comprehend (Crossly, McCarthy, Louwse & McNamara, 2007).

Compared to the lack of a few transition words, however, the heavy lexical load of an original text vastly overpowers the student and adds immensely to the difficulty she has in comprehending. An original text, with complex syntax, sophisticated grammar, and a high percentage of low-frequency words forces the student to stop reading fluently and switch to an intensive reading mode. The great deal of effort that intensive reading requires largely precludes the possibility that she will do a great deal of reading. Original novels, therefore, are generally poor choices for fluent reading practice.

A study by Bell (2001) clearly shows that “subjects exposed to ‘extensive’ reading achieved both significantly faster reading speeds and significantly higher scores on measures of reading comprehension” than subjects who were limited to “intensive’ reading, this despite the fact that the intensive group were “faster readers at the start of the program.” Because the texts chosen for the extensive reading experiment were graded readers, Bell recommends that “reading speed will develop rapidly if learners are motivated to read interesting graded readers that are accessible linguistically.”

Luckily, as Day and Bamford (1998) point out,

there are many high quality graded readers on the market today. Many new titles coming out are not simplifications, but original, authentic language-learner literature. Modern authors are sensitive to the need to avoid stilted, unnatural language. Moreover, the argument that a simplified novel is not authentic does not entirely hold up. If a novel written by a native speaker is authentic, is not a simplified novel written by a native speaker authentic?

In the case of the unsimplified version, the writer most likely had a specific target audience in mind: other native speakers. In the case of the graded reader, the author also has a specific target audience in mind: the language learner. Perhaps it would be better to refer to these two types of books as “original” and “simplified,” rather than classify one as authentic and the other inauthentic.

Conclusion

University-bound ESL students need to attain both a high degree of reading fluency and a high level of comprehension in their reading. Gone are the days of programs that focus exclusively on the intensive examination of texts for language-building, or, at the other end of the spectrum, the whole-language approach that floods the student with language that is over their heads, in hopes that as it washes over them, some of it will soak in.

For fluency to develop takes more than just extensive exposure to comprehensible input. Every day students need to work hard, very hard, doing intensive reading of academic texts that are rich in new vocabulary and grammatical structures. Day by day the students will build up their reading muscles, much the way an athlete goes to the gym for a workout. Similarly, when they hit the graded readers, they are like athletes set loose on the track. They will run like the wind.

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Beyond Technical Skills: Interconnecting Computer Use, Inquiry, and Oral Communication

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This article presents the results of a study exploring how students responded to a technology-enhanced task-based project. The project was part of the Information Technology (IT) Skills course designed for a summer English language institute known as the Language Village, held for the first time in Nabeul, Tunisia, in July 2006. The main goal of the two-week instructional and recreational program at the Language Village, Nabeul (LVN) was to give the students opportunities to improve their English by emphasizing oral practice. Those selected were among the top ten percent of their class, based on their second year English comprehensive exam scores. The IT Skills course was one of the three courses offered in the morning sessions; the other two were communication skills and pronunciation.

Developing a Vision for the IT Skills Course

As the person entrusted with designing the course, I was interested in creating a technology-enhanced learning environment whereby computer use, Internet-based research, multimedia design, and oral communication were interconnected. The cornerstone was a project that combined the use of computers (particularly the multimedia software PowerPoint), the Internet, and oral presentation skills.

The project was the context for students to draw on their pre-existing mastery of the four language skills. They needed to skim through the documents they found on the Internet, to evaluate the sources of information and the information in the resources, to identify the central ideas, and to synthesize text to construct the PowerPoint slides. In

addition, they had to transfer and adapt writing skills to create the PowerPoint (PP) slide shows. For them, this was a new genre requiring conciseness and authoring of multimodal text (Stark & Paravel, 2008; Kress, 2003). Finally, to present their project to an audience, the students put to use their speaking skills. This opportunity for “pushed output” (Swain, 1985) fit well within the general objectives of LVN as a language enhancement program.

The course covered ten class contact sessions spread over two weeks (see Appendix A). In the first four sessions of the IT Skills course, the students were required to perform mini-tasks designed to help them discover features of web-based research (directories, search engines, search strategies, and evaluating web resources). Students were then given the project assignment and directed to form their teams, decide on a topic, and design a plan. The assignment sheet included a list of ten topics and set the requirements for completion of the project (see Online Appendix B¹). In the next session, the students were required to introduce their group members and the topic chosen, then explain the group’s reasons for choosing it and how they intended to tackle the project. The teacher acted as facilitator providing feedback and asking questions that helped the students flesh out their outline.

In the next session the teacher introduced PP through a very brief ten-minute “show and tell” presentation covering only the basics. This left room for the students themselves to explore the features they intended to use in their presentation. Students were also provided with a list of tips they could use for the creation of a multimedia presentation as a handout (see Online Appendix C.).

The handout drew their attention to criteria associated with creating effective PP slides, while putting restrictions on the number of slides and number of words per slide. The expectation for the remaining sessions was that the students would be working autonomously within their teams to prepare their PPs to use in their oral presentation. To guide them through this phase, they were provided with a third handout providing guidelines for structuring face-to-face oral presentations and a list of useful expressions for the presentation (see Online Appendix D).

The Teaching Strategy

The teaching style adopted made extensive use of the principle of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986). In the beginning of the course *directive scaffolds* (Cazden, 1988) in the form of PP presentations and “show and tell” demonstrations were used. The directive scaffolds were kept short and less frequent as the course progressed, giving way to more *supportive scaffolds* in the form of on-going support for students as they worked around the computer. The tips, guidelines, checklists, and lists of useful expressions mentioned earlier were part of the supportive scaffolding for the students to use when navigating their way through the project.

As Meskill (2005) suggests, *triadic scaffolds* were used to create a balance between the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, and the role of the computer. In addition, instruction was in the form of tasks, beginning with mini-tasks in the first weeks and then leading up to the project as a series of integrated tasks. The IT Skills course proceeded, as suggested by Nunan (1989), from a course syllabus, to lesson units, and finally to a series of integrated tasks that “form coherent units of work” (p.18). The hope was that while engaged in the project the less competent, shy, or less confident learners could be supported by more expert team members (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Task-based language learning also has support from the research literature in second language acquisition (SLA). The thrust of the argument is that when learners are solving problems in pairs or in groups with native speaker (NS) or non-native

speaker (NNS) peers, they engage in negotiation of meaning conducive to language development (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Varonis & Gass, 1985) within complex social interpersonal relationships that emerge and unfold during task completion (Slimani-Ross, 2005; Zhang, 2004; Foster, 1998; Breen, 1985). LVN participants came from five different institutions, and as a result, the situation was ideal for the negotiation of world views and personal perspectives around a common instructional goal. CALL practitioners and researchers share similar beliefs and expectations for computer-mediated collaborative projects as conducive to target language development and interpersonal/intercultural growth (Jeon-Ellis, Debski, & Wigglesworth, 2005; Belz, 2003; Fürstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001; Warshauer & Kern, 2000; Warshauer, 1997).

The culminating activity for the course was to have students performing orally using PP as media support. In a language development program whose mission was primarily to help students acquire oral and communication skills, setting the public oral presentation

While engaged in the project the less competent, shy, or less confident learners could be supported by more expert team members.

requirement in this project made sense. The PP-supported final public presentation provided an opportunity for students to work with peers to develop a strategy for communicating their ideas about a specific topic in a multimodal, interactive manner. Although the students attending LVN were excellent students of English, the assignment was challenging first due to its novelty as a student performance requirement and second due to its complex, multi-layered nature.

The Study

The study examined how this task-based teaching activity evolved once given to the learners. I considered the learners’ perceptions and accounts of their experience while performing the task as fairly reliable indicators of task outcomes. The data helped me as the teacher identify gaps between intended teaching objectives and evolving learning experiences, and as such, was situated within “exploratory practice” (Allwright, 2000) or “action research” (Nunan, 1992; McNiff, 2002). Action research is research which is carried out by the teacher in her

own teaching situation involving the collection and analysis of empirical data.

Method

The study used a semi-structured interview protocol to capture the students' account of their experiences while undertaking the project. The protocol was designed with a focus on five themes:

- What steps (strategies) they followed to complete the task
- How they distributed roles within the group
- What challenges they faced to complete the project
- How helpful they found the teacher's role
- Whether they would use the same strategies if they were to do the project again

Seventeen of my IT Skills course students volunteered to take part in an interview after their final presentation. They constituted six different project teams (labeled G1 to G6) who were either working in pairs or groups of three to four students. The students were interviewed with the other member(s) of their team immediately after their presentations the last day of LVN in July, 2007. They were given the questions just before the interview. The interview started when they were ready (approximately ten minutes later) with my prompting and following up with additional questions as needed. The interviews were conducted in English, tape-recorded, and transcribed.

The data analysis was guided by the themes in the interview protocol mentioned above. Using the learners' reports, I looked for the pathways learners followed in the process and the strategies they mentioned with regard to using the Internet as resource, the management of information, the creation of the PP presentations, the preparation for the final oral performance, and the challenges they faced in the process of orchestrating and juggling the different levels of the task. I used a teacher-reflexive thinking process (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990) to develop ways to fine-tune the instructional design and implementation strategy for future teaching and research.

Results

Task completion strategies

The data related to the first theme, what steps/strategies the students followed to complete the task,

provided support for the expectation that learners would follow their own paths through tasks (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Nunan, 1989). The groups adopted different entry points and carried out the activities in a different sequence. This was the case even with G3 and G6, who happened to be working on the same topic, "wonders of the world." Students in G6 decided to focus on the "old wonders of the world." Intrigued by the controversy over the new wonders, G3 decided to redirect their attention in that area. The shift meant restarting the Internet search to find information about the new wonders and discarding information they had about the old ones. In other words, the path that this group followed included another loop in the process that G6 did not have to follow.

The numbers of steps the groups followed ranged from six to ten with little variation in the order. The G1 pair mentioned ten steps that included three briefing sessions to discuss what to do next. Table 1 shows the steps that emerged from the students' accounts as fairly stable across groups.

Table 1. Steps in the process

1. Selecting a topic and writing a rough outline
2. Collecting information from the web
3. Selecting pertinent resources
4. Organizing ideas from the documents
5. Discussing the structure of the presentation
6. Splitting the work for more focused search for materials (if necessary)
7. Reporting back and evaluating documents with group members
8. Exploring the PowerPoint software
9. Creating the PowerPoint presentation

The students' accounts made it possible to trace variation in the sequencing of the first three steps above. Students either opted for brainstorming with peers and writing a rough outline first or for exploring the web first and then writing an outline inspired by what they discovered while surfing the net. For example, students in three groups (G1, G4 and G5) started with the outline first and then used it as a road map for the collection of information. This led to a revision of their outline in light of the information gathered from the web (the case for G1 but not for G4). The other possible entry point was to collect

information about the topic first and then write an outline. This strategy was followed by G2, G3, and G6. Thus, writing the outline figured as step 2 for G6, step 3 for G3, and step 4 for G2.

Specific collaborative strategies to divide the work were used while collecting information. S1 (G6) reported: “Each went and collected information on his own and then we compared the results and decided this is good, this is not so good, or this is too scientific.” The more technically capable students in G2 used bookmarks, created a list of favorite sites, and stored their files on a flash disk. They explained the reasons for adopting this strategy: “We downloaded some information and images and put them there (in a folder) because we do not have much time in the computer rooms during the self-access hours and we know we can lose Internet connection...this way we can carry on our work!”

Furthermore, students mentioned using collaborative processes like holding meetings, “reporting to the group” after collecting information and having a discussion about “the selection of relevant documents,” either with reference to the outline or to the project guidelines. The students referred to documents downloaded from the Internet as “usable documents for the project,” “pertinent documents” or “documents which fit the outline.”

While there seems to be convergence about the above strategies, there was variation in the number of discussions and the number of search expeditions across groups. G1 and G3 needed to start a more focused web search once they settled on an outline. The latter group had to do so because they decided to refocus their presentation. The former felt the need to do a focused web search at step 5 upon deciding “what the PP presentation [was] going to look like.” That was, presumably, upon creating a storyboard for their presentation.

The three students in G3 were convinced that having to go back to collect information was a problem, but those in G1 did not share that view. In fact, students in G3 were so convinced it was a problem that they mentioned it in the beginning and once more at the end of the interview. When asked

what they would do differently next time, they responded that would do the task in a more straightforward manner and write a solid outline so that they would not have to go back to collect more information and discard information they collected before. They obviously attributed having to go back to the Internet as an indicator of poor planning.

PowerPoint Creation

In the PowerPoint creation stage, the groups were found to have followed different paths as well. The students mentioned having to “reorganize,” “reformulate,” and “revise” the ideas in the process of creating the slides. The more technologically capable students in Group 2 mentioned discussing possible options and the effects of PP (animation, color, and images) on the audience and made decisions accordingly. However, the less technologically prepared students did not have that level of comfort

and ease with the technology. They therefore had to explore PP first (G1 in step 9; G6 in step 5) and teach themselves how to use the software effectively.

Students in Group 5 mentioned that as they discovered the options in the software allowing more interesting ways of delivering the content, they revised the initial outline. A student in G5 explained: “the outline that we did [wrote] was a starting point but then as we did [created] the PP, we found ways to make it interesting for the students listening to us” (G5, S2).

Another strategy employed by other groups was to test their PP on their peers. Groups 1, 4, and 5 mention that they revised the presentation (and the original outline) in light of the responses they obtained from peers. These groups were keen on raising their fellow students’ interest and impressing the audience. They attempted to achieve that by exploiting the technological options or by introducing “fresh content.” G3, however, was the only group not to mention carrying out any discussion about the creation of the PP slides. In fact, S1 in that group exclaimed: “[I]t’s not so hard to insert the format and use the options!” This raises doubts as to whether enough energy was spent within this group on the effectiveness of the PP presentation.

These groups were keen on raising their fellow students’ interest and impressing the audience.

It was indeed surprising to find out when analyzing the retrospective accounts, that only two groups (G1 and G6) mentioned discussing “*what to say*” (content) and “*how to say it*” (organization) in preparation for the oral presentation in class the next day. The other groups’ account had no details beyond the creation of the PP slides. S1 in G6 and students in G1 acknowledged that not much energy was spent on preparing for the oral presentation. The two students in G1 underscored that their “biggest mistake was not to rehearse before the presentation” and that in future tasks they would work more on timing and pacing their presentation. In this exchange they explained that they did not have a script when they presented in class. Once they were selected to present in the lecture hall, they started the “real” planning:

S2: Well, actually to be honest we made a sketch the night before the final presentation when we learnt that we were selected to present our work in the lecture hall, eh...

R: So tell me about this sketch. What was it like?

S1: We thought of presenting it like a scenario but it really happened to us! We thought we will begin by saying, eh..well, I told her that we are going to be faithful and tell the audience what we felt when we first saw the word “netiquette”

R: What did YOU think?

S1: I told my friend “netiquette?” Are you sure it is not “etiquette?” and she told me “no, it is etiquette related to the Internet” and it was funny actually when we surfed the net a bit and we discovered she was right. I said: “Good job!” (laughs). So that’s how we started the presentation, if you remember.

It appears that what the students needed was the little push of being selected to get them across the finish line.

To summarize, self-reported data about the strategies students employed in the course of completing the project indicate that the students did in fact engage with the pedagogical objectives I had in

mind. By undertaking this assignment, the students were expected to display abilities in forming a thesis for their web-based research project, to articulate a scheme of work (outline or questions), to find the necessary information on the web, to select the materials best suited for their needs, to compose multimodal text, and to communicate the knowledge they had acquired to an audience. Given the evidence in the data presented so far, it can be claimed that they displayed mastery of the information literacy skills (iskills) identified by Educational Testing Services (ETS) (see <http://www.ets.org/iskills>). There is a striking match between the strategies that students reported and the seven iskills assessment indicators, as shown in Figure 1 below.

The students did not dwell on how they made use of the rhetorical functions of graphic design or whether they thought about them in the process of creating the PPs. They did indicate that they developed, in the process, a strong sense of audience. They mentioned thinking about ways to raise interest and surprise their peers with fresh ideas or a different way of dealing with the same topic. Nevertheless, it appears that some students realized, perhaps too late in the game, that the preparation for the oral presentation demanded more of their attention and energy. As a result, the students walked away from the assignment with a valuable lesson: just creating a PP slide show does not make a presentation. S2 in G4 made an insightful comment that summarized the general mood among the groups:

I’d like to add that there is no problem with finding difficulties in this project because that will give us the possibility to think and to try to find a solution; especially for such

- **Define:** Formulate a research statement to facilitate the search for information
- **Access:** Find and retrieve information from a variety of sources
- **Evaluate:** Judge the usefulness and sufficiency of information for a specific purpose
- **Manage:** Organize information so as to find it later
- **Integrate:** Summarize or otherwise synthesize information from a variety of sources
- **Create:** Generate or adapt information to meet a need, expressing a main point and supporting information
- **Communicate:** Adapt information for a particular audience

Figure 1: ETS’s iskills assessment indicators, based on Katz (2007).

an important issue in our life and our environment. So it was an opportunity to learn how we can use PP to sensitize some people to this issue [endangered species].

Another student (S1, G5) had a similar comment about the power of PP in public life:

If I'm given a chance, I would do the project on some other topic that will be used to raise public awareness like AIDS, pollution and a lot of other topics, eh... Because in our society, especially Arab and Tunisian society, there are many topics that are taboo so people don't find it easy to talk about such topics and we need discussion about these topics.

The students used this learning situation to "define their own roles and choose their own course of action" (Nunan, 1989: 128). When asked what they would do differently if they were to do the task again, they asserted they followed the "right steps" and went about the task in the "most efficient way." They felt a sense of accomplishment and appreciated the experience of engaging in such a "complex project," as S1 (G6) put it:

Despite the difficulties in the oral part ... for me, I discovered PP and I am happy we managed to do many, many things at the same time and in a very short time. It is a very interesting project. This is the first time I do something like this.

Despite the novelty of the experience for them, the groups demonstrated that they could put into practice what we taught them about searching the Internet and PP. They brought to the task surprising cooperative working skills and personal qualities rarely recorded in other teaching situations. However, the students' responses pointed to areas of difficulties that would not be easy to detect without the data in the retrospective interviews. The challenges are summarized below.

The Challenges

In response to a question about identifying the most challenging aspect of completing the project, the students mentioned three challenges in the process of

completing this web-based research project: presenting in public, selecting and organizing information from the web, and narrowing down the research topic and focusing the web search.

1. *Presenting in public:* The biggest challenge mentioned by G1, G2, and G6 was to present in public. That meant for them the ability to keep on time and to synchronize the parts among the group members. The three groups suggested that the teacher could provide further guidance about "how to talk in public" (S2) by arranging for "mock presentations" and allowing time for further revisions to the PPs.

2. *Selecting and organizing information:* It seems that by opting for collecting information first, students were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the information they collected and the subsequent need to select sources and organize ideas into the PP. In other words, the more

information they found, the harder it was for them to control it.

3. *Writing an outline and focusing:* G3 and G4

reported having been specifically challenged in this respect. G3, for instance, mentioned "struggling" to give a particular focus for their topic and G4, the challenge of "finding fresh content and simple texts (not scientific texts)."

Contrary to the teacher's expectations, they did not think designing the PP was challenging because, it appears, they related to the PP as a recipient for their ideas/content. For instance, students referred to the process of creating the PP as "formatting" and "putting the ideas in PP format." When they ran into difficulties, they turned to their peers for help and carried on with their work.

Assumptions about Teacher and Learner Roles

The last theme explored in the interview focused on gauging the students' reaction to the teacher's role by prompting them about whether they felt they needed more assistance from the teacher. The responses indicate that they did not really expect much intervention from the teacher. They explained that they believed the assignment was "personal work." They understood their task was to work

The more information they found, the harder it was for them to control it.

individually and with members of the group to complete it and to solve problems as a team rather than expect the help of the teacher. Student 1 in G2 explained: “Personally, I prefer to complete a task..eh..to try it myself and then seek feedback,” and S2 in G5 retorted: “Well, the project is designed to give the students the opportunity to prepare something personal and then the teacher is there if you need help!” S1 in G6 emphatically added: “Well, the PP presentation is **personal** in the end. It reflects what the group members wanted to do with the topic and how to do and say things.”

The only exception came from the students in G3 who mentioned needing reassurance that they were on the right path as they found the open-ended nature of the task particularly overwhelming. They felt they needed more feedback from the teacher first during the planning process, later as they embarked on creating the PP slide show, and once more when the PP was completed.

While the students were generally keen on taking decisions within the team, they also mentioned resorting to peers other than their partners. Students in G4 reported that they sought the help of students from other institutions, who “were more used to this type of work” (S3). Clearly, there was a whole dynamic of collaboration and peer support within the groups and outside of the groups across institutional lines.

It is interesting that while seeking and/or providing each other support, sharing ideas and “computer tricks,” the students left an opening for their teams to do original work and outperform the other teams. “In the end as the deadline drew near, everybody was talking about their projects so we learnt about what other groups working on ‘wonders of the world’ were doing, but we wanted, eh..to add our personal touch,” commented S1 in G6.

The students did note a place for the teacher. They felt they needed more guidance from the teacher upon completion of their first PP attempt. They insisted that the feedback from the teacher would help them improve the slide show before the final presentation, which was more of a high stakes situation for them. Obviously, some students found

the tips provided in the handouts helpful while others seemed to have made little use of them to prepare for the oral presentation.

Interestingly, the teacher’s intention was to provide guidance for the design of a reasonably effective PP slide show. The students’ reactions indicate that the guidelines fell short on drawing their attention to the importance of the delivery phase. They expressed the need for more structured feedback to improve their presentations and to practice with speaking in public. What they had in mind was probably a role for the teacher where she would model, guide, and correct behavior during the face-to-face presentation stage.

There was, indeed, no provision in my instructional strategy for a pronounced phase to prepare the students for the oral presentation. The advice and corrective feedback given to students the day of the

presentation in class came too late for them to improve their performance if they were selected to perform the next day in the lecture hall. This also raises the question whether the

ones not selected would ever use the feedback to revise their PPs. Naturally, a feedback session should not turn into heavy-handed teacher-centered corrections. To keep in tune with the principles of independent constructivist learning, a peer-review activity with the teacher as guide and facilitator is best.

The guidelines fell short on drawing their attention to the importance of the delivery phase.

Implications of the Study

The data on the strategies students adopted to complete the assignment suggest that the students did not allow much time for creating the PP and less for preparing to deliver it. This is in contrast with the rather elaborate accounts they gave about the strategies they employed to carry out the web search and to create the PP. To focus students’ attention on these two important requirements of the assignment, two solutions can be envisioned: a structured peer-evaluation activity and a self-regulated task as preparation for the oral presentation.

A Peer-evaluation Activity

The objective of the peer-evaluation activity would be to help learners develop awareness of the

rhetorical power of PP. The method of setting up such an activity is envisioned as follows. Each pair or group finds one student to review their slide show using a peer response form (see Online Appendix E). Each pair/group is required to collect at least two responses they could use for reference to improve their slide show. For example, Howell and Boremann (1988, pp. 62-63) suggest using principles of graphic design as areas of concern for successful presentations. Ideally, the next class session is reserved for reports from each pair/group on what their peer evaluators thought about their presentation. The reports include explaining whether they agree or disagree with the evaluator and how they intend to deal with the critique.

The remaining time in class can be used for the introduction of the changes acceptable to them. The students are then informed that the next session will be reserved for real-time oral presentations and real-time oral responses from the audience in class (peers and teacher). Before they leave class, students are provided with guidelines for self-regulated preparation for the oral presentation within their groups. The guidelines assist members of the group with what to focus on and what to do as individuals and as a group to prepare for the oral presentation.

Self-regulated Preparation for the Oral Performance

The second area where improvement in the design of the assignment could be envisioned is the oral performance. The suggested change consists of introducing a self-regulated oral preparation activity to be carried out within the group before presenting in class (see Online Appendix F). The purpose of this activity is to focus students' attention on the required standards for speech delivery and other issues related to use of time, interaction with the audience, and common transition phrases for their presentation. The students can be provided with a list of ideas and advice on how to prepare for the delivery with their partners and a checklist to direct them to the requirements for a successful oral performance with PP.

This activity would be an opportunity for the students to think about the use of strategies like self-monitoring, engaging the audience, and keeping the pace of speech. It also gives students a chance to practice using the strategies before standing in front of the audience. This new element in the assignment

will focus their attention on planning and rehearsing as necessary steps to effective public presentations.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study was based on verbal reports from students. While informative, self-reporting gives access only to what the participants say they have done. Other techniques can be used to collect data on the students' composing of the PP, the collaborative dialogues, or their Internet search strategies. Data tracking software like Camtasia allows the creation of video files that document keystrokes, mouse clicks, text produced, and speech. These records yield invaluable data about other facets of task completion processes not captured in the present study. Camtasia requires high levels of technical capability, as well as a willingness to deal with very large amounts of data.

As a lone researcher the teacher may hold conferences with one group at a time using a stimulated recall protocol focusing on the PP design process. This way data can be secured using Camtasia on an external storage device or videotaped, for instance. Another possible research project can record and analyze speaking performance from a communication strategies perspective, covering both verbal and non-verbal components.

Yet another study can focus on the teachers' instructional strategies. Teachers can draw on Meskill's study of "Mrs. M" and her use of "triadic scaffolds" (2005: 48). Of interest would be what Meskill calls the "other scaffolds" teachers provide naturally while visiting the groups as they gather around the computer. Data for this project can be secured using a computer tracking device and an external video recording device. As mentioned above, to make the task manageable one group or two can be selected for the data collection rather than the whole class. Even studies carried out on a restricted scale can provide illuminating feedback to practitioners about scaffolds in computer-assisted learning environments and guideposts for better teaching practices.

Conclusion

This paper describes my attempt to connect technology use, Internet use, and oral communication skills in one course. Thanks to the retrospective data from students, it was possible to draw the paths they followed while completing the project assigned and to

learn about what challenges they faced. Caveats at the level of course design were identified and addressed as suggested above. The data provided assurance that the instructional design was engaging. Students successfully completed their projects and had a hands-on experience with web searching, the management and selection of information, and the reformulation of ideas.

The instructional design of the IT skills course described in this paper followed a constructivist perspective, blending the teaching of ICT with language learning. This study provides support that using such a perspective is possible and worthwhile. It helped create a challenging learning environment at LVN where active, purposive learning and autonomy were stimulated and initiative and creativity fostered among the cooperating students. Attempting to teach ICT as a set of isolated skills would have meant not giving these students the chance to use technology to carry out a purposive communicative task.

One student (S1, G2) described her previous personal experience with using the Internet in a vacuum: "It's not the first time I use the Internet but it is the first time I organize work like that using the Internet. I usually search for information just to take the information; not to do work." The educational answer to fill the gap is the type of project work described in this paper, where access to the Internet is connected with a task that allows the transformation of information into knowledge (Cambridge, 2007).

As revealed in the interview data, this research-based, computer-enhanced collaborative project proved to be a novel experience for the majority of the students. As can be inferred from the data, students will not forget this experience very soon. While it is clear that the teacher's pedagogical plans did not coincide totally with the students' expectations, the learners in this study did not contest the complexity and extra demands the assignment put on them. As a modest teacher-initiated research endeavor, this study illustrates what teachers can learn from their own students about what becomes of the tasks they design. A teacher may by intuition feel that something is wrong (or that all is well) but her own guesses can be contradicted by asking the learners what they think.

The results obtained in this study are a case in point. I would have never noticed during the hurly

burly of daily teaching the task completion paths, the collaborative processes the used, the distribution of role(s), nor would I have been able to identify their new learning needs as the situation unfolded. This study serves to add a bit more data about ICT use as a tool for learning in specific language teaching contexts (Cox & Marshall, 2007; Webb, 2002) and as experienced *from within* by the teacher and her students. All in all, it was a valuable experience for both the learners and the teacher/researcher.

Notes

¹The Online Appendices can be found on the *ORTESOL Journal* website, including the final project assignment sheet, oral presentation guidelines, peer response form, and rehearsal guidelines.

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Appendix A: Course Outline for IT Skills

Session 1 08/01/07	Introduction to the course The Internet and the World Wide Web
Session 2 08/02/07	Web search strategies - DEMO Use of search engines, databases and directories
Session 3 08/03/07	Web search strategies - Application <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Using keyword and phrase search and Boolean operators- Downloading documents and saving them.
Session 4 08/06/07	Project assigned <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Choice of topic and composition of groups- Starting to spot appropriate resources- Task: Evaluation of the identified resources (finding evaluation criteria and carrying out evaluation tasks)
Session 5 08/07/07	E-mail (Part I) Introduction to e-mail: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Creating e-mail accounts- Setting preferences- Customising addresses- Sending a first message
Session 6 08/08/07	E-mail (Part II) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Using e-mail attachments (sending and receiving)- Raising students' awareness to some risks related to e-mail attachments
Session 7 08/09/07	PowerPoint (Part I) – DEMO <ul style="list-style-type: none">- General presentation- Launching a new PowerPoint presentation- Combining PPT effects (colour, animation, images, etc.)
Session 8 08/10/07	PowerPoint (Part II) – APPLICATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Integrating information collected during previous sessions into a PowerPoint presentation- Applying design and communication criteria (cf. worksheet “tips”)
Session 9 08/13/07	Project Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- In-group presentations- Teacher and peer feedback
Session 10 08/14/07	PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS OF SELECTED PROJECTS (Lecture Room)

Teaching Tips

Error Correction: A Traffic Light Approach

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One of the more challenging and often frustrating tasks of the second language teacher is deciding when and how errors should be corrected. Controversy in the field of second language acquisition continues to focus on error correction (Guenette, 2007; Karra, 2006; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2005). Studies in error detection and correction are far-ranging and in some cases, even contradictory. They focus on such themes as feedback modes and methodologies (O'Reilly, Flaitz, and Kromrey, 2001), models for corrective discourse (Panova and Lyster, 2002), use of computer assisted language learning systems (Heift, 2003; Tschichold, 2003), self (student) versus teacher detection and correction (Renou, 2000; Camps, 2003), and specificity versus generality of feedback (Ferris and Roberts, 2001). The research is complex. However, as second language teachers, we know intuitively that the process of error correction and detection must be kept simple and safe for the learner.

Valuing the Learner

We begin with several primary tenets of successfully working with learners in general and with second language learners specifically. Viewing them as resources and models to other learners are strategies consistent with sound learning principles (Gray and Fleischman, 2005; Zehler, 1994). Creating a safe and supportive learning environment is paramount for those students who may lack confidence, fear making mistakes, and are generally weak learners (Bandura, 1997). This further assumes that

feedback should be done with compassion and empathy (Fink, 2003).

Given empathic feedback, there is another important question that is critical to re-examining the arena of error detection and feedback. What role does choice play in error correction? When given a choice as to a set of strategies for learning new content, results show an increased level of performance in the use of the second language (Bishop, 2006; Schwartz, 2004). If choice plays such an important role in learning, then how could it be incorporated as a strategy in error correction? What might be the results if a student were to choose how he/she wishes feedback on errors?

Think “Traffic Light”

One technique that we have used in the EFL classroom is called the “Traffic Light.” We have modified this technique from a strategy gleaned from Vohra (2006). The “traffic light” technique has two steps:

Step 1, The Awareness Talk: Error Detection and Correction

The first thing we did was to have a talk with our students about the importance of error correction in their language learning process. We did not just mention our reasons or opinions regarding this process but we tried to encourage them to think about the positive effects error correction can have in their second language.

Step 2, The Traffic Light: Red, Yellow, and Green

The second step is to explain the use of the traffic light and the meaning behind the three colors: red, yellow, green. Each student is given three squares: one red, one yellow, and one green. When they volunteer or are asked to speak in class, they will flash one of the following three cards:

Red: When a student flashes a red card, the student does not want to be corrected at all. Some students find it frustrating to be corrected when they are trying to communicate. By showing their red card, they are telling us that they do not feel like being corrected at this time.

Yellow: By showing a square card, students want the teacher to correct their major mistakes. These types of students want to communicate freely without being stopped every time they make a minor mistake (e.g., using a male article with a female noun in Spanish).

Green: A green card indicates that the student wishes to be corrected at the very time of the error. Corrective feedback is requested for both minor and major errors.

Observations: Drive Carefully When Approaching Traffic Lights

Initially, many students flashed the red cards, indicating that they were somewhat uncomfortable with being corrected. Many other learners displayed yellow cards. The yellow cards indicated an increased level of confidence in their learning and the acceptance of more feedback. Another significant behavior began to evolve. Students learned from other students' mistakes, and teacher and fellow student corrective feedback allowed additional learning and modeling for others.

Gradually, we began to notice a pattern in the majority of students. They increased the amount they used their second language and flashed green cards most often. They now were seeking clear and honest feedback and correction of their errors. Students explained that when they showed their red cards, they wanted to focus on speaking in the classroom and not worry about their errors at that time. Once

they generated the language more freely, they sought more error correction, flashing the yellow cards. Students gradually moved to the point of wanting error correction. They consistently showed the green card, indicating the value they placed on the importance of immediate feedback when they made errors.

Since adopting this strategy in the classroom, we have seen students taking increased responsibility for their own learning and for their own error corrections. They pay attention to feedback more readily, especially when they can choose how feedback is to be given to them. Letting them make choices and use cues with the flashed cards have increased their confidence and participation in class. Most amazingly, there is a substantial reduction in their reluctance to speak, leading to an increased level of speaking in their second language. They speak with greater levels of confidence, their meaning is more clearly conveyed, and their common errors are fewer. Students are much more eager to speak. The 'traffic light' strategy has definitely changed the dynamics of the classroom and has become an effective technique in the correction of errors.

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What makes a trip an adventure?

Maya Moore, ELS Language Services

It's the end of the day. You have a class of 15-18 predominantly male students in their mid to late 20's. They are sleepy, their eyelids threatening to close at the slightest provocation, and a bit irritable. They are also college bound, which means they want an engaging class, but they don't want to feel they are wasting their time. What kind of course should you create?

A few years ago I made the mistake of putting together a heavily academic journalism class and found my students on the verge of mutiny. This time I chose the theme of "adventure," dividing the topic into three modules: adventure sports, adventure travel, and adventurous people. We began by carving out a general definition of the word adventure, then followed with a combination of structured conversation, interviews of native speakers, team presenta-

tions, *Globe Trekkers* videos, reading, and vocabulary. Some learning objectives are below and a possible syllabus for the class is in Table 1.

Type of class: Theme-based conversation

Target Audience: Intermediate to advanced EFL students

Skills: Listening, speaking, vocabulary development, writing questions, research and working in teams

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this class students should be able to:

- Provide a general definition of the word “adventure.”
- Converse easily with native speakers about various extreme and outdoor sports and the equipment required.
- Demonstrate general comprehension of a guided travel video, including physical and mental challenges involved, geography of the region, and destination.
- Name at least two explorers/ adventurous people who are famous in the United States and describe why they are legendary.

Assessment and materials

Assessment can include comprehension and vocabulary quizzes, and all presentations can be

graded using rubrics for consistency. To help with debriefing you can ask students to make charts, fill in worksheets, and for discussion activities, engage in retelling (where a student tells another student’s story to a third student).

Although I chose the *Globe Trekkers* series, any guided travel video would work, as long as it is lively or even humorous (Dave Barry comes to mind). For the jigsaw I found a wealth of resources (including books, maps and photographs) on Lewis and Clark, Amelia Earhardt, and Sir Edmund Hillary, among others.

Resources mentioned

Globe Trekkers videos: www.globetrekktv.com/
Pencil-Bot : <http://www.pencilbot.com>

Maya Moore been working at ELS Language Centers on the SOU campus in Ashland for the past two years. She enjoys teaching grammar, writing, speaking, conversation, academic skills and technology to a diverse group of international students. She has also worked abroad, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and most recently, Turkey. She received her Ed.M from Oregon State University in June, 2008.

Table 1. Possible syllabus			
	Week 1& 2	Week 2&3	Week 4
Theme Group Discussion topic	Adventure sports Describe an adventure that you had.	Adventure Travel What makes a trip an adventure?	Adventurous people Who is the most adventurous person you know, and why?
Activity #1	<u>Listening comprehension</u> Pencil-Bot video about rock-climbing with worksheet	<u>Listening comprehension</u> Globe Trekkers “Great Treks” video series, with teacher-created cloze worksheets	<u>Jigsaw & presentation</u> Students look through teacher-prepared resources and give a five-minute overview of an adventurous person.
Activity #2	<u>Research & presentation</u> Students do research on a specific outdoor/extreme sport, conduct community interviews, and give a presentation.	<u>Travel agency role-play</u> In teams, students create a travel package to a specific destination.	<u>Interview</u> Students write interview questions, then interview students from another class.

Lights Up! Action! English!

Ron Metzler, Oregon State University

At the English Language Institute, international students in the elective drama class have presented a showcase of their talent in public performances that have been developed from classroom role-plays. This has been highly motivating for students, both those in the class and those who are in the audience.

To turn classroom role-plays into creative performances the public can enjoy, I do the following:

Preparation Stage

- Divide the class into small groups of 4-5. If the class size is large, you can make do with groups of 6 to 7.
- Make up slips of paper for each of the following categories and put them in paper bags: *situation, place, time, and weather*. I have each group select one card from each category. For example, the *Situation Cards* might say: *late for a train at the station or in a foreign country where you don't speak the language*. Examples of *Place*: beach, airplane, and train station. *Time*: afternoon, sunrise, moonlight. *Weather*: windy, rainy, etc. (Maley & Duff, 1982).
- Give groups the instructions to write a dialog (script) together using the information on the selected slips. I allow students plenty of time to write - we usually take 2-3 classes to complete them. They can also create their own theme for the scene: *funny, serious, didactic, etc.* Theme selection helps increase the group's creativity.
- Next, distribute a simple handout to each group that contains a sample dialog and basic stage movements, such as DSL or USR. (See Appendix A). Bernal (2007) testifies that this activity encourages students to learn new gestures, such as "shrug, nod, and bow." They also learn to use imperative language, such as "Move downstage right" or "Try following her."

Rehearsal Stage

- Once the script is written, give students time to rehearse -usually two to three class periods. I listen in and observe each group, making suggestions for better fluency or stage movements. As I see it, my job is to help *guide* the scenes into becoming more realistic. I try to praise often, criticize little. By writing and acting out the scene together, the students imitate communicative situations in a real-world context.
- Next, edit a copy of each group's script and return it in the next class. Students do a few run-throughs of their scenes implementing the changes. They have ample time to practice, but I make a deadline when lines must be "memorized" because it is important to keep students on task. They love this and are happy to get rid of the script, even if the scene is not perfect yet.

Performance

- When the scenes are in good shape, I hold "performances" in class, much like dress rehearsals. I hand out a peer-review form (see Appendix B) on which the class votes anonymously for the best scenes. The top two or three scenes are chosen for public performance. Students often refuse to perform, but they still feel honored to be chosen.
- After two or three scenes are selected, we announce the place and time for the public performance. (Obviously, there will be no ticket sales to worry about.) You can invite students, friends, and teachers to attend. At the ELI, this venue is our end-of-term party.
- In the public performance, non-acting students can perform other tasks: props, art design, lights, sound, computer graphics, or serve as extras in a crowd scene. It is

important give each student a task. I also appoint a student director to help prompt for lines, watch scenes, and take notes.

- On the night of performances, I meet with students for warm-up activities and a run-through of each scene before the audience arrives. Group unity and confidence are important before they go on. Then ... lights up! Action! English!

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Ron Metzler is an instructor at the English Language Institute at Oregon State University. He has taught communications and directed ESL drama productions at several different universities. His research interests include drama, movie making, and TOEFL strategies in ESOL.

Appendix A: Scenes for Script Writing

Actors: _____

Scene:

Character roles:

Place:

Time:

Weather:

U= Up

S= Stage

R or L= Right or Left

*The directions for movement are given from the actor's point of view, looking out at the audience.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

USR	USC	USL
SR	CENTER STAGE	SL
DSR	DSC	DSL

Use character names and stage directions (in parentheses) while writing your script.

Appendix B: Peer Review Form

For each scene, rate the categories 1-5 (1= lowest; 5= highest)

1. SCENE: COMPANY FIRING

Acting	1	2	3	4	5
Script writing	1	2	3	4	5
Believability	1	2	3	4	5
Props	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	1	2	3	4	5

2. SCENE: FOREIGN COUNTRY

Acting	1	2	3	4	5
Script writing	1	2	3	4	5
Believability	1	2	3	4	5
Props	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	1	2	3	4	5

3. SCENE: BANK ROBBERY

Acting	1	2	3	4	5
Script writing	1	2	3	4	5
Believability	1	2	3	4	5
Props	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	1	2	3	4	5

4. Based on your scores, write the number of the scenes you would like to see performed at the End of Term party.

Vote for two: _____

Research Notes

A Survey of Semester-End English Examinations in Northern Cyprus Secondary Schools

Michael Witbeck, Oregon State University

The goal of the survey of semester-end exams was to compare the methodological approach and difficulty level of English language tests which were developed and administered at north Cyprus public secondary schools at the end of the first semester of the 2001-2002 academic year. The survey was made at the request of the “Department of General Secondary Education” and was partially supported by the Oregon State University Cyprus English Language Teaching Enhancement Project.

Survey Materials

The department provided 119 individual examinations, from a total of 29 schools. This constituted a very large percentage of all tests given within the system in the relevant school types at the end of the first semester of the 2001/02 school year. End of semester tests are required at all schools in all classes. English is a required subject at all secondary grade levels.

The secondary system in north Cyprus comprises six forms, age levels 11 to 17, which can be divided into two categories: the *ortaokulu* or middle school level and the *lise* or high school level. There are commonly three *orta* levels, which were coded O1, O2 and O3, and three *lise* levels, which were coded as L1, L2, and L3. The school system also includes three distinct school types: English medium schools (coded EM), Turkish medium schools (TM) and vocational/technical schools. Of the total tests analyzed, seven English medium schools provided 36 exam papers, while 23 Turkish medium schools

provided the remaining 83 exam papers. No papers were provided from vocational/technical schools. At the time of the survey, the practice in all of these schools was that the semester tests were made by teachers, either in working groups at larger schools or individually at the smaller schools. Each teacher or teacher workgroup was responsible for producing a final exam for one level of the English program in that school. Since schools vary in size, each exam so produced might have been administered to as few as 30 or as many as 330+ students.

Procedure

The team of assessors consisted of three senior Turkish Cypriot secondary EFL teachers and two visiting resource specialists. The test papers were first grouped by school type, English medium or Turkish medium, and by grade level, from O1 to L3. Working in pairs or triads, team members then examined each group. We first analyzed each individual exam by section to note the testing approach of each section and to determine which language skills were being tested in each section. We then compared tests in each group and noted the general level of difficulty of similar test sections. Finally we made judgments about individual test sections and rated them as average, easier than expected, or more difficult than expected in terms of the system-wide syllabus and norms.

Since the team did not have access to exam results or scoring rubrics, these judgments are of “face” difficulty only. All sections rated as other than

average were read and discussed by all members of the survey team before a final judgment was made.

General Conclusions

Among the English medium schools, there was fairly broad agreement from school to school about what tests ought to be like. Approximately 20% of the marks on each test come from a reading comprehension passage and accompanying questions. Another 20% came from vocabulary questions. Approximately 50% of the marks come from grammar questions, and 10% from composition tasks. Most schools followed this pattern closely. The one exception was the school coded EMZ, as will be discussed below.

Among the Turkish medium schools there was somewhat greater variety from school to school. The bulk of the test items were vocabulary and grammar: 71% on average, ranging from 50% to 90%. The average percentage of marks given to reading comprehension was 17%, with a range of 0% to 50%. The average percentage devoted to writing was 5.5%, with a range of 0% to 35%. There were no listening or speaking items on any of the TM tests.

In terms of face difficulty level of final exams, there was a great deal of consistency from school to school. With a few exceptions, the topics, structures and vocabulary found on tests were very similar from school to school, as one would expect given that the test makers were all using the same textbooks and working from the same general syllabus.

A few tests had linguistic or typing errors, a few tests suffered from poor production quality, and a few contained items or sections of dubious value. Overall, however, the tests were well made and provided evidence of a high level of competence and language ability in the corps of secondary English school teachers.

Comparative Difficulty Levels in English Medium Schools

In the *orta* levels EM01 to EM03, tests in one school, EMD, tended to have a somewhat higher than expected difficulty level in two sections: reading and grammar. This makes their overall

difficulty level quite high, higher in some cases than that of EMZ, which although not part of the public school system, was included in the survey for comparison. However, the EMD difficulty level is only slightly greater than that of EMF, which is also above average in some areas.

In the *lise* levels EML1 to EML3, EMD tests were also somewhat high in face difficulty, but in this case not any higher than EMA. The main grouping here is that EMD and EMA form a high group in terms of face difficulty, while EMB, EMC and EME form a lower group. EMZ tests in the *lise* levels tended to have higher face difficulty than any of the public EM schools.

Approach and Skills Measured in English Medium Schools

The EM schools as a group depend heavily on grammar and vocabulary items. Thus there is a relative neglect of reading, writing, and especially listening skills. At the *orta* level, the tests at EMD gave more than average attention to these three skills; and at the *lise* level, EMA gave somewhat more attention to them. The most balanced tests, however, and the only ones which routinely addressed listening skills on a par with other skills, are those of EMZ. There were large differences between EMZ and the averages of the other six EM schools. Table 1 shows the percentage of the total score contributed by each item type and a comparison between EMZ and the other schools at the *orta* and the *lise* levels.

There was wide variation in the degree to which various skills were addressed in this group. The range for reading comprehension, for example, was from 0% to 50%. For grammar it was from 21% to 89% and for vocabulary 0% to 61%. None of the 83 tests addressed listening skills. In the area of writing, the survey team decided, for reporting

Table 1. Approach and Skills Measured in Turkish-Medium Schools

	Reading	Vocab	Grammar	Writing	Listening
EMO A-F	18	16	55	10	1
EMO, Z	30	16	12	21	17
EML, A-F	23	20	43	12	2
EML, Z	33	0	3	36	28

purposes regarding this group, to distinguish between sentence level writing tasks and paragraph (or higher) level tasks. Although this makes direct comparison problematic, it was broadly clear that writing was given less emphasis in the TM schools than in the EM schools, the difference being relatively small at the *orta* level and more pronounced at the *lise* level.

Reading Comprehension Question Types

Although the survey did not formally address specific item types within skill areas, the team did notice three distinct types of reading comprehension items: open-ended questions, multiple choice questions, and true/false questions. Of these three types, the open-ended question was by far the most common, followed by true-false in second place, and then by multiple choice as a far distant third.

Open-ended questions are easiest for teachers to construct, and this may account for their popularity. Their effectiveness as comprehension measures, however, is not as clear. Since the survey team did not interview teachers to discuss how answers were marked and credit given, no firm conclusions are possible. In general, however, it appeared that many open-ended questions could have been answered correctly merely by guessing which sentence in the original was relevant and then copying that sentence onto the test paper.

The team observed a number of instances where the instructions for answering open-ended questions stated explicitly that answers must be well-formed. This requirement is likely implicit in most test situations. Few teachers would disagree that well-formed answers ought to get higher marks, but the important point for our survey is that this focus on

grammatical accuracy, within what is nominally the reading comprehension section, means that the overall grammatical emphasis of some tests is, in practice, even greater than the survey percentages indicate.

Results of the Survey

The survey team made several points in its final report. First among these was to note the lack of attention to listening comprehension. A listening component had been mandated by the educational authorities for all final exams, but this requirement was very rarely met in the sample we surveyed. Of the 119 exams, only eight had listening components, and six of these were from one school, EMZ, a semi-private institution affiliated with a major university. We recommended that teachers needed to be trained in how to create and administer listening tests and that administrators had to ensure that needed equipment and facilities were available.

We also made note of the relatively high proportion of discrete point grammar and vocabulary items found in this test sample. The survey shows a great reliance on discrete point grammar and vocabulary items: 69% of all items surveyed. Many test makers now prefer more contextualized tasks that require students to understand and process information in reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Teachers would benefit from training in these alternate methods of assessment.

Editor's note: Detailed survey results can be found on the *ORTESOL Journal* website.

Michael Witbeck is an instructor and former Coordinator of Instruction for the English Language Institute. He spent two years in Cyprus as part of the Cyprus Language Enrichment Program.

Information for ORTESOL Journal Contributors

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ORTESOL Journal, a professional, refereed publication, encourages the submission of previously unpublished articles on topics of significance to individuals concerned with the teaching of English as a second or foreign language, especially in elementary and secondary education, and in higher education, adult education, and bilingual education. As a publication that represents a variety of cross-disciplinary interests, both theoretical and practical, the *Journal* invites manuscripts on a wide range of topics. The following areas are of special interest:

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