Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies
Vol. 7, 1 , 2013, 7–23

What Doesn't Work for the Lowest Level Literacy Learners and Why?

Jean Marrapodi, Applestar Productions

Traditional approaches for teaching reading to pre-literate adults, those who "speak a language whose written form is rare or does not exist" (Savage 1993) are problematic because foundational learning and cognitive areas are often underdeveloped in these students. Three methods for reading instruction (phonics, sight words, and whole language) are explored in light of the pre-literate learner. The author performs a task analysis for activities used in these methods, and subsequent gaps are revealed, explaining why they may be problematic for use with low-literate adults. The task analysis method is advocated for lesson planning, and a recommendation is made for teachers to consider what is being expected of students when activities are presented. Educators, policy makers, and curriculum providers must be reminded that some LESLLA/literacy-level learners are likely to be pre-emergent readers with developmental areas needing identification and instruction and will not be successful with conventional methods of reading instruction without significant pre-reading skill preparation.

Keywords: LESLLA, low literacy, reading instruction, preliterate, adult literacy

1 Introduction

The experienced literacy teacher is keenly aware of the challenges of working with low-literacy learners. Those who are new to the population and those who write curriculum or develop policies to serve them are baffled as to why many activities and approaches are unsuccessful with these learners. Many adult educators are former elementary teachers in a second career and they anticipate what worked in the K-12 sector will work equally well with adults. It often doesn't. Little is done to prepare adult educators for the specialized insights required for working with the lowest-literacy learner. While research abounds around developmental reading strategies for children and L1 learners, there is no or almost no evidence-based research regarding different approaches in reading instruction to beginning LESLLA learners. This is a report of a series of personal experiences from an experienced teacher who learned what does not work with these learners the hard way. The three dominant approaches to

Corresponding author's email: jmarrapodi@applestar.org
ISSN: 1457-9863
Publisher: Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä

http://apples.jyu.fi

reading instruction are presented with a summary of what might cause difficulty or misunderstanding in the mind of beginning first time L2 readers.

2 Reading instruction in the United States

In the United States, reading has been taught in a methodical fashion, varying by the theoretical and educational biases in vogue at the time (Martinez & McGee 2011). Primarily, these methods can be categorized as phonics, sight word, and whole language approaches. Research undertaken by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000) has discounted the exclusivity of using a single method for instruction, advocating for an eclectic component-blending model and explicit strategies for teaching discrete skills. Here, reading is divided into five elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency, with the vision of touching each area during reading lessons. Despite the prevailing research on effective reading instruction (Burt, Peyton & Van Duzer 2005; Condelli 2002; Smith, Harris & Reder 2005; Trupke-Bastidas 2007), many adult educators in the US tend to stick with the familiar and teach with the methods in which they were schooled. For many low-literate and LESLLA (Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) adults, these methods are problematic because of missing foundational cognitive and developmental factors routinely acquired in literate cultures. Because of this, the metalinguistic awareness of the teacher and student are out of alignment. According to Kurvers, Vallen & van Hour (2006: 69), "many observations [seem] to suggest that the concepts on language and literacy teachers brought to the classroom often did not match with what the illiterates were thinking".

The following sections examine phonics, sight word, and whole language methodologies of reading instruction and identify the problems of using them with the lowest literacy-level LESLLA learner. A model of task analysis will be presented at the end to assist the low-literacy educator with a schema for determining the appropriateness of an activity.

3 The Phonics Method

Phonics has been the dominant method for teaching reading in the United States during the last four centuries. Hornbooks, *The New England Primer*, Tower's *Gradual Readers* and *McGuffy Readers* of the 16th–19th centuries are all phonics based (Hightower 2003). Supplemental spelling materials were included so the student had practice decoding and encoding written material.

Using the phonics method, the student is taught to associate specific sounds with specific letters. Students learn the name of each letter and a key word to associate a sound with the letter, such as A is for apple, B for bear. They use the initial sound of the key word as a pneumonic device to aid in recall of the sound of the letter. Students begin to sound out words by blending the sounds of the letters together. For transparent phonetic languages, this method is ideal. In English, there are 26 graphemes and at least 44 phonemes, so the learner is

challenged with multiple options to determine the sound of many of the 26 letters of the alphabet.

3.1 The complications of English

Learning to read in English is complex for the new language learner because of all of the variations in the grapheme-phoneme relationships. Many letters in English, such as b /b/ and l /l/ have a single regular sound, as is expected in transparent languages. When letters are put together, their phonemes may blend together so both sounds are heard, such as in b-r /br/ or b-l /bl/, but quite often, two combined letters make a different sound altogether, as with consonant digraphs like sh /ʃ/ for ship [ʃɪp]. Some letter combinations have multiple pronunciations, such as the digraph th /ð/ as in this [ðɪs], or /ˈθ/ as in think [ˈθɪŋk] or in vowel dipthongs like oo which may be read /uː/ as in moon [muːn] or /ʊ/ as in look [lʊk]. Sounds may change based on the letter that follows, as with r-controlled vowels like ar /ɑː/ as in car [kɑː], or may have "soft" and "hard" letter sounds like the letters g and c which vary their sound by the vowel that follows. "Soft g" says /dʒ/ as in giraffe [dʒɪˈrɑːf] but "hard g" says /ɡ/ as in goat [ɡəʊt]. "Hard c" /ˈk / begins coat [ˈkəʊt] and "soft c" /s/ begins cent [sent]. Memorizing and applying these rules is baffling for the lowest literacy learners. Additionally, there are numerous irregular English words like through [θruː], tough [tʌf], and could [kʊd] which must be memorized as sight words since they cannot be decoded. Learning to read using the phonics method is further confounded by regional accents that alter the pure sound of the intended phoneme.

3.2 Learning to read in a literate culture

When a child from a literate culture is taught to read using the phonics method, flashcards are used to reinforce the letter-sound relationship. The teacher holds up a card with a letter and picture, and the child says the letter, word for the picture, and the sound, such as A, apple, /ă/. An assumption is made that the students have phonemic awareness and the ability to identify the initial sound of each word to participate in this activity. While this is a simple exercise in a literate culture, it is very complex for the low-literacy LESLLA learner. Using a task analysis by the author, the following skills are required to read the flashcard:

1. Recognize the line formation as a letter, distinguishing it from all other possible combinations of lines used to create symbols
2. Recognize the lines as A
3. Associate the name A with the symbol used to form the letter A
4. Identify the picture on the card
5. Recall the English word "apple"
6. Correctly pronounce the word "apple"
7. Use phonemic segmentation to pull the initial sound from the word apple to say /ă/
8. Recite the sound /ă/ in isolation from the word
9. Associate /ă/ with the letter representation A

10. Associate /ă/ with "apple"
11. Understand that "apple" begins with the letter A
12. Eventually, memorize /ă/, apple, A for instant recall

A literate person knows what to look for on the flashcard, easily processing these tasks and recalling the information within seconds. The lowest literacy learner often has deficits in the sub-skills necessary for reading the flashcard.

3.3 Limited visual literacy

Visual literacy is an underdeveloped skill for preliterate people. Doak, Doak & Root (1996) identified four main steps in understanding a visual: 1) deciding to look or read, 2) finding the message, 3) locating and integrating relevant details, then 4) interpreting the information. In a task like a flashcard drill, emergent readers may be overwhelmed with the complexity of what is required and find it difficult to begin to know what to interpret (Dowse 2004). Low-literate learners "find letters and any graphical representations – maps, graphs, charts, even pictures – difficult to interpret" (Burt, Peyton & Schaetzel 2008: 2). Recognizing that the connected, slanted lines make the letter A, then distinguishing it from other objects made of straight lines is a new skill for preliterate learners and must be introduced systematically.

For the preliterate learner, understanding that a printed picture represents something may be a new concept. They easily identify photographs, but clip art, drawings, and illustrations may elude them. According to Linney (1995: 20), "If we have not learnt the common pictorial conventions, a picture simply appears as a meaningless collection of lines, shapes, tones and colours on a piece of paper". Buski's research (2011) investigated ESL learner recognition of line drawings in ESL texts and revealed that many learners misunderstood the concept represented by the drawing.

Beyond pictorial recognition, the lowest literacy-level LESLLA learner may have difficulty connecting the picture of the apple to the real fruit because his or her mental imagery may not be trained to connect a print item with the real thing. Even the real apple itself may be new to some learners. In America, apples are commonplace, but in rural southern India, for example, apples are rare commodities, and some individuals would have no experience with them. Teachers must ensure that any key picture selected as an aid to recall is actually something the learner recognizes and has experience with.

3.4 Difficulty isolating and identifying sounds

When we ask students to identify /ă/ for apple, we are requiring phonemic segmentation and the production of a sound which may be new to the learner. Low-literacy learners do not understand the structure of language and have difficulty understanding that words are comprised of sounds. According to Kurvers et al. (2006: 70) "illiterate adults, like young children, perform poorly in segmenting words into phonemes. In all studies, illiterates differed significantly from readers in every phoneme manipulation task, such as phoneme segmentation, and phoneme deletion or addition". The phonics approach is

based on the critical understanding that words are made of sounds. For the low-literate learner, this concept is puzzling.

For beginning language learners, hearing the differences between new sounds not found in their native tongue is very challenging; reproducing them is even more complex (Brod 1999). In time, as the LESLLA or any new language learning student hears and learns to speak new words, new sounds become familiar and begin to be recognized more readily. The low-literacy teacher must provide activities for the students to practice hearing discrete differences in phonemes to help the learner with the auditory discrimination skills required to identify, differentiate, and reproduce new sounds. Minimal pair exercises are helpful with developing this skill. Here, two similar words, differing by a single phoneme such as (sheep [ʃiːp] / ship [ʃɪp]), (sip [sɪp] / zip [zɪp]), (buzz [bʌz] / bus [bʌs]) are spoken, requiring the learner to identify the designated correct choice.

3.5 Phonics approach limits word choices

Beyond the visual and auditory limitations, teaching reading from a purely phonics approach makes it difficult to create meaningful stories because it limits word choices. All learners look for meaning in their activities. The phonics approach presents a challenge to meet this goal. A few books, like *Sam and Pat* (Hartel, Lowry & Hendon 2006) and *Bob books* (Maslen & Maslen 2006) have good storylines, but the cartoon illustrations may present problems for the LESLLA learner because of the learner's limited visual literacy skills. One LESLLA learner in the author's class, in her frustration with a phonics activity exclaimed, "No cat wears a hat! I don't care about him sitting on a mat. Why are we doing this?"

3.6 Rejecting the phonics approach for lowest literacy Learner

Until the prerequisite steps of sound differentiation of the phonemes in the new language and basic visual literacy, including visual discrimination and picture recognition are in place, using a phonics approach is problematic for the lowest level LESLLA learner.

4 The Sight Word approach

In 1930, the Scott Foresman Company published the *Dick and Jane* series, and millions of American children were taught to read using a highly controlled set of words about Dick, his sisters Jane and Sally, and their dog Spot. This series was one of the initiators of the sight word approach, and it was used to teach reading in the United States into the late 1960s. The model advocated whole-word learning, using a look-say pattern. Teachers introduced words one at a time ("look"), and students practiced reading them ("say") on flashcards and in stories with controlled vocabularies. Proponents believed children recognized the shape of the whole word, and extensive repetition of the words assisted with memorization.

Frequently used words in English were analyzed, and students memorized and were drilled on Dolch's Sight Word List of the 220 Most Common Words (Dolch 1948). Sequential lists of additional words were created and broken down by grade level so basal reading textbooks could be written with stories that contained only words that had been previously introduced.

In 1955, Rudolph Flesch released the seminal work, *Why Johnny Can't Read* and *What You Can Do About It*, discounting the sight word method and advocating for a return to the phonics approach. Readers were no longer equipped with word attack skills to break new words into their component pieces because they had no letter-sound associations.

4.1 Advantages of the Sight Word approach

While the sight word approach has issues because it does not teach new readers to decode, it still has merit. In the 1990s, Edward Fry expanded the Dolch list to become the 1000 Instant Words, including 1000 of the most common words in the English language. Fry's research (1999) uncovered that these 1000 words make up 65% of all written material. Readers who can master these words are successful because they have reached a point of automaticity with much of the material they encounter and can often use context clues to determine words they do not know.

Fluent reading occurs when the reader no longer needs to decode individual words, having neural networks created to recall learned words. The sight word methodology supports fluency, assisting the reader with memorization through extensive repetition. In the 21st century, reading teachers incorporate memorizing the Dolch and/or Fry lists into instruction to assist students to move toward fluency, leveraging cognitive resources on comprehension rather than on decoding. Words that are not phonetically regular need to be memorized and are part of the sight word lexicon.

4.2 Sight words and the low-literate learner

For the low-literacy LESLLA learner, the sight word approach is a step above the phonics approach because there is a one-to-one correspondence between a word and what it represents. Functional, high-interest words can be taught, working with familiar and survival skill words. Learners are motivated and see progress quickly.

There is an initial challenge for the beginning LESLLA learner with this method. The Onderdelinden, van de Craats & Kurvers (2009: 46) study revealed "that those who cannot read nor write, whether adults or children, do not have a clear word concept [however, they] indicate that literacy acquisition enhances one's awareness of words". Not understanding what a word is has the sight word methodology building on a flawed foundation. This is a preliminary skill that must be taught first.

The low-literate learner may not have developed print awareness, understanding that print words represent things and ideas. In the early beginnings of the author's faith-based literacy center, a lesson was presented to introduce reading using a sight word approach. Each student was given three index cards, one with his or her name, and the other two with the words "loves"

and "Jesus". Students knew and understood the sentence "[Name] loves Jesus" in their mother tongue and in English and were very familiar with the concept. The three cards were laid out in front of each student as [Student Name] loves Jesus. As the cards were presented, the teacher pointed to each word, saying [Student Name] loves Jesus. After each student had their set of cards in place, an example was put up on the board using the cards. The teacher pointed to each word, saying, "Elizabeth loves Jesus." The class repeated as the teacher pointed to each word. After the class seemed to recognize that the words on the board represented the sentence "Elizabeth loves Jesus," students were instructed to watch as the words Elizabeth and Jesus were switched. The board now read "Jesus loves Elizabeth." When the students were asked to read what was on the board, they all repeated in chorus, "Elizabeth loves Jesus." They appeared to have no concept that the individual card representing the word was attached to the word even though they watched the cards being switched to create the new sentence. This is a foundational step in print literacy, one of the prerequisites of reading, and substantiates the research of Onderdelinden et al. (2009).

4.3 Print literacy is foundational to reading acquisition

Sebastian Wren (2000) of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory calls this *Concepts about Print*, and considers it one of the baseline requirements for reading. Figure 1 illustrates the components of this framework for reading development. According to Hoover & Gough (2012: para 21):

> [T]he basis for knowledge of letters and the alphabetic principle is knowledge of the mechanics of the printed word, or concepts about print. This includes knowing that printed text carries a linguistic meaning, that there is a correspondence between printed and spoken words, and that text in English runs left-to-right and top-to-bottom on a page.

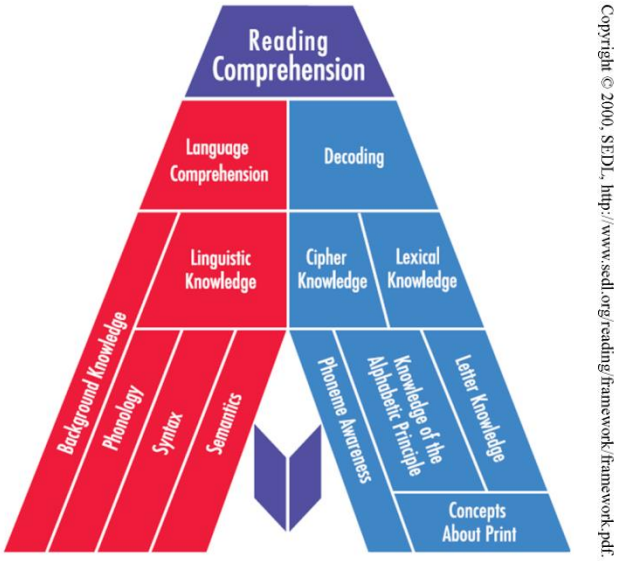

Figure 1. The Cognitive Framework for Reading (Wren 2000: 43).

For any low-literacy learner, print concepts will not be in place unless he or she has had exposure to them. Like very young children, pre-literate learners have no idea how reading works. Students who have no concept of print will have difficulty understanding that words represent linguistic constructs and that individual words may be broken down into letters and sounds. The low-literacy learner must have the critical underpinning of print awareness before any reading instruction will be useful.

4.4 Sight word method requires memorization

Additionally, the sight word approach requires memorization. The ability to memorize and recall information is underdeveloped in low-literacy learners. According to Abadzi (2003: 2):

> People's level of education influences their ability to solve abstract problems, use readily presented data in decisions, recognize and name pictures of objects and understand radio broadcasts. Most important, the unschooled perform less well in most memory tasks: recalling a series of digits backward and forward, remembering lists of words, reproducing a short story, reproducing complex figures that were presented, recalling common objects, remembering sequences. The limited memory and cognitive resources probably also reduce performance in literacy classes.

By comparison with the agile minds of young children who learn to read in the primary grades, learning to read as an adult is a slow, laborious process for the low-literacy learner. Teachers must do all they can to scaffold success and remove barriers to learning.

5 The Whole Language approach

The Whole Language method for reading instruction is a top-down approach, rooted in constructivism. It was popular in the United States beginning in the 1970s (Weaver, 1995). There are distinct receptive and expressive activities, with all instruction centered on meaning-making. Receptive activities begin with literature as the teacher reads a story to the class. Students discuss the story, reflecting on the ideas within it and their thoughts about it. Here, they apply analytical thinking and expressive language. Next, students spend time drawing and writing about the literature they have discussed using inventive spelling. This allows them to create visual and written representations of their ideas using their own pictures and words, sounding things out according to their personally invented rules, with a focus more on the meaning than on the mechanics. Ultimately, students begin writing their own stories, often kept in a journal so progress can be identified.

Inventive spelling comes from the research of Read (1975) and Gentry (1982) who recognized that spelling is a developmental process with discrete stages. Learners progress through the stages of precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic, transitional, and conventional spelling as mental rules are refined (Gentry 1982). In the precommunicative stage, the child moves from scribbling

and begins to use letter symbols to represent words. In this stage, letters represent words but there is no sound-symbol relationship, and may not have left-to right orientation. When the child moves to semiphonetic stage, words begin to have connections with letter sounds, but connections are related to the letter name rather than the letter sound, such as using R for "are", or U for "you". As the child begins to understand orthography, there is movement into the phonetic stage, where the child "invents" spellings based on their own "ingenious and systematic invention of an orthographic system that represents the entire sound structure of the word. Though some of the inventive speller's letter choices do not conform to conventional English spelling for some sounds, the choices are systematic and perceptually correct" (Gentry 1982: 192). In the transitional stage, the child begins to move from phonological to morphological and visual strategies, and begins to use learned words. There are still invented patterns and "misspelled" words. At the conventional level, the student has mastered a designated corpus of words appropriate to his or her grade level. The critical elements behind the process of inventive spelling are the acceptance of what is generated, and the availability of a teacher or parent to answer the child's questions as they arise. The teacher does not correct errors, but waits for the student to seek the proper way to spell particular words.

5.1 Challenges of the Whole Language approach

There is much controversy about this approach because unlike bottom-up approaches, the foundational rules of phonics and spelling are not explicitly laid out for the students. Like the sight word approach, students may never learn decoding skills and may struggle with new words. The naturalist assumes children will learn as they experience different activities, presented when they are ready. Without a planned curriculum, the learning is only as good as the creativity and facilitation skills of the teacher. Advocates of this method find that the children are more engaged and creative, and develop better thinking skills without the constructs of a rules-driven curriculum.

5.2 Whole language and the low-literate learner

For the low-literate learner, this type of approach has advantages and disadvantages. In order to understand a story that is read aloud, the learner must have enough receptive aural language to construct meaning. Most language learners recognize only a percentage of a spoken conversation, so during the reading of a story, they may miss ideas and concepts. Beginning learners easily get sidetracked when they do not understand a word and focus on figuring the word out, rather than letting it go and moving forward. This distraction causes them to miss the meaning of the sentences that follow the unknown word. Reading and discussing things in small chunks provides a comprehension check and allows the learners to ask questions and catch up with the storyline.

Simple stories are generally presented to beginning readers through picture books. If the pictures are anything but photographs, low-level LESLLA learners may not recognize what is being represented because of their underdeveloped visual literacy skills, even if they are familiar with the concept. Beyond

identification, they must be able to create a mental model of whatever the concept is, so it must lie somewhere in their personal experiences and frame of reference. The students must have some connection with the concept in order to construct meaning from it.

Once a story is comprehended by the learner, the approach of accepting whatever is produced in an expressive form has much potential for low-literacy learners. Working with clay to represent the story teaches the learner that symbols convey ideas, a precursor of print literacy. Learners who can draw about a story begin to recognize that pictures are symbolic representations of ideas. In time, students become interested in adding words to their art. Here, the teacher can help spell the desired words or print a model for the student to copy. When this occurs, students learn that writing is an expressive form of meaning-making in response to their own ideas. Giving students the freedom to experiment allows them to generate meaning without needing to be doing it the right way as they gain experience with letters and words. Once this foundation is built, more explicit methods of reading instruction can be added to the curriculum.

5.3 The Language Experience approach

The Language Experience approach, an expressive whole-language activity, is highly successful with most LESLLA learners. In this approach, the class dictates a story to the teacher, who captures it on chart paper. As the story is dictated, the teacher models the correct spelling of words, but will accept sentences as they are dictated. As the story is read out loud, mistakes are often corrected by students who hear errors they did not recognize as they were sharing their ideas. Sentences may be moved around, and new ones added. The story is revised, edited, and rewritten, modeling the writing process. Once the students are happy with the final product, this created story becomes the foundation for future lessons. There are considerable possibilities for extension activities using the dictated story. Students can practice oral and silent reading with it. Students can be directed to find certain words or given copies of words to match in the story on the chart paper. Key words and/or repeated words can be identified and color coded. Cloze activities, where words are left out and must be filled in, help students learn words in context and their placement in a story. The story can be reproduced, and the sentences cut up for the students to sequence. The story can be broken down to one sentence per page, and the students can add a drawing or a photograph to illustrate the story. Students are engaged because they are working with something they feel ownership of.

There are many ways of working with this type of student-generated material. It is especially effective when the story is about a shared experience, such as a field trip or school activity. Stories can also be dictated by individual students, starting with an idea or working from a photograph. Another idea starts with the student's pictures, then captions can be narrated for a scrapbook. The language experience approach provides shared experiences of meaning-making with personal, emotional connections for the learner.

6 Task analysis – Determining the appropriateness of an activity

In reviewing the gaps present in the lowest literacy learners in light of reading instruction, the literacy teacher must always step back and consider the tasks being presented and expectations of the activity to determine if it is appropriate for the student at his or her current level. It is important to remember that many LESLLA learners have limited, if any, experience with school and have not developed commonplace learning skills of a literate culture. According to Brod (1999: 5):

> [T]he learner who knows how to learn comes to class with tools for tackling the different process of mastering learning to read in a new language. The learner who does not have some educational experience usually has less information upon which to draw in coping with concepts as well as fewer techniques with which to tackle the job.

Task analysis is a method of examining the discrete skills involved in an activity. The reviewer decomposes a task by asking how and why to determine principal and subordinate tasks to a level of granularity that represents a single teachable concept or procedure (Ruyle 1999; Poulson, Ashby & Richardson 1996). Cognitive Task Analysis goes beyond the behavioral elements of task analysis and considers the knowledge required to perform a specific activity (Crandall, Klein & Hoffman 2006). These processes of analysis identify the requisite skills and knowledge for a task to be completed. Both are commonplace in corporate training analysis, as an aspect of job analysis in human resource planning, and are used in special education for developing patterning activities. Actions required are broken down into granular components to assist trainers and teachers with the development of learning materials. Using this form of analysis can assist the literacy teacher with the selection of appropriate activities for the classroom. If the student does not have the prerequisite skills required for each component, the activity will likely not succeed with the student.

The following will consider three typical activities used with young children and analyze what is required for completion and consider their appropriateness with the LESLLA learner.

6.1 Task analysis one: Matching worksheet

A matching worksheet is an activity that might be used in the sight word approach to review or assess student recognition of words that have been taught. The student is presented with a worksheet containing five clip art pictures in a column on the left and five matching words in a different order on the right. He or she is to draw a line matching the picture with the correct word. This is the principal task, but in order to complete this assignment, the student must be able to do the following subordinate tasks.

Tasks Required (analysis by the author):

1. Orient the paper so words are right side up.
2. Identify each picture:
    a. Possess visual literacy skills to recognize clip art and identify the item represented.
    b. Form a mental model. Is it a familiar concept?
3. Remember the English name for the picture.
4. Correctly read the five words on the right.
5. Understand that the words and pictures are in different orders.
6. Understand the goal is to connect the picture and word.
7. Associate the picture with the correct word.
8. Use a writing implement to draw a line.
9. Draw a line connecting the picture with the correct word.
10. Understand that crossing lines are acceptable.
11. Recognize the one-to-one correspondence of the words to pictures.
12. Work the task until all words and pictures are matched.

The intent of this worksheet is to provide reinforcement and recognition of the five words. School-based skill assumptions are made, anticipating that the foundation is in place for the learner to complete the task, and the only new skill is reading the words. In a traditional school setting, these prerequisite skills are generally in place for this type of assignment to be completed. For low-literate students, many of these basic skills may be new. If the literacy student has been working with flashcards containing these pictures and words and knows them well, this written task is still difficult unless the LESLLA learner has seen similar activities. A precursor to scaffold this activity might be to start with matching separate word and picture cards, then using a paper version where the picture is opposite the correct word, having the student practice drawing lines to connect them. As requisite sub-skills are mastered, the complexity may be increased, mixing up the order if the items until the student is able to complete the matching activity with crossed lines as initially presented.

6.2 Task analysis two: Cutting out the letter A

The student is to use a newspaper or magazine to find 10 'A's, cut them out, and glue them on the A page in the workbook. The principal task is to locate the letter A in a print source. This type of activity may be part of a phonics approach to reinforce letter names. For the student to complete this activity, the following subordinate skills must also be in place.

Tasks Required (analysis by the author):

1. Know how to use scissors to cut.
2. Fine motor coordination to cut small objects.
3. Understand that it is acceptable to cut up old newspapers and magazines in this setting.
4. Remember the shape of the letter A.
5. Understand that A will be found in many words all over the paper.

6. Understand that "A-ness" is independent of font and size.
7. Recognize A in a variety of sizes and fonts.
8. Discriminate the A from other letters.
9. Hold the place for the A while navigating to it with the scissors.
10. Cut the A in isolation, keeping the letter intact.
11. Operate a glue stick to apply glue to the A.
12. Understand that the sticky side holds the letter to the paper.
13. Position the A right-side up on the paper.

While this task seems simple in a print-literate culture, for the beginning literacy learner, the task is challenging. Consider how many words are in a typical newspaper, then imagine them in a language that uses an unfamiliar character set. Now the task becomes one of complex visual discrimination because of the similarity of letter shapes. This type of activity can only be successful if the student has been able to correctly identify A mixed with other letters in multiple settings. A better activity to help scaffold this type of learning would be to provide a worksheet with three different letters and ask the learner to cut out the A, then provide additional worksheets with restricted numbers of letters and increasing amounts of difficulty. This builds automaticity and understanding of the task and puts the prerequisites in place for the learner to work with the newspaper or magazine.

6.3 Task analysis three: Writing about a field trip

The language experience approach is a top-down learning method used in whole language settings. It tends to be successful for the low-literacy learner because it is based in familiar, concrete experiences. For this example, students dictate a story to the teacher after a shared experience of a trip to the market to purchase fruit for a fruit salad. It is assumed that the teacher has reviewed the vocabulary identifying the purchased fruits, and created a display of the fruits with their labels on a table in the front of the room. Students are asked to describe the trip to the store and the process of identifying and purchasing the fruit. The teacher uses questions to elicit information from the students and writes their narrative on chart paper as they dictate it.

Tasks Required (analysis by the author):

1. Remember the event.
2. Break down the trip into component parts.
3. Recall the sequence of activities.
4. Describe the different activities.
5. Recall verbs related to each process.
6. Recall the vocabulary word for each fruit.
7. Express thought orally.
8. Understand the concept of a sentence.
9. Take turns expressing ideas.

In general, pre-literate learners are comfortable with oral narrative, since it is the primary method they have used to communicate prior to entering a school setting. This activity requires retelling of a familiar event (shopping), even if it is

purchasing unfamiliar items in a new language, so the cognitive load is reduced and the student can focus on expressive vocabulary. Having the fruit names identified and reviewed prior to the activity scaffolds the lesson, and provides a visual to assist with recall. Students may have trouble understanding segmenting of the story into sentences and may want to tell it in its entirety. This is a skill to be built, since pre-literate students may be unfamiliar with the metalinguistic concepts of sentences and words. Otherwise, based on the task analysis, this would be a successful activity for these learners because they possess the majority of the skills required for the lesson and can focus on the target skill of the expressive vocabulary.

7 Working with pre-emergent readers

Many LESLLA learners are pre-emergent readers. Pre-emergent readers need very different instruction than those with some basic skills. Ellery (2009: 34) describes four stages of reading development:

Emergent:	Students begin to make correlations among oral, written, and printed stimuli.
Early:	Students are beginning to read, using problem solving to collect clues about meaning of new words.
Transitional:	Students are making sense of longer, more complex texts, and employing strategies to support meaning.
Fluent:	Students are reading independently for extended periods; relies on text more than illustrations.

The lowest level LESLLA learner may be in a pre-emergent stage, prior to the place where he or she is beginning to make correlations with print. Teachers must provide for developmental opportunities by working on pre-reading activities.

The Public Library Association, in partnership with the Association for Library Services to Children, has identified six essential pre-reading skills in the Every Child Ready to Read program, developed in 2004 and revised in 2011. These skills are:

Narrative Skills:	Being able to describe things and events and tell stories
Print Motivation:	Being interested in and enjoying books
Vocabulary:	Knowing the names of things
Print Awareness:	Noticing print, knowing how to handle books and how to follow words on a page
Letter Knowledge:	Knowing letters are different from each other, knowing their names and sounds and recognizing letters everywhere
Phonological Awareness:	Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words

These skills must be built up in the low-literacy learner. LESLLA students usually come from oral, skill-based cultures, so they have a strong foundation in narrative skills. They must learn to transfer this skill into English. The literacy teacher can leverage this strength to build up the other skills. The teacher must provide significant exposure to materials that allow the LESLLA learner to develop foundational learning skills, generating the experiences with print that will become part of the learner's personal frame of reference. It is crucial that the lessons be targeted to the appropriate level of the students and analyzed to ensure the pre-requisite skills are in place.

8 Conclusion

This paper has reviewed three methods for teaching reading, examining issues that may arise by using them with low-literate adult learners. Traditional activities associated with these methods, such as flashcards and worksheets may be problematic in the literacy classroom because the pre-requisite skills are not in place for the learners. While many of these seemingly simple activities appear in early childhood classrooms, adult education beginning literacy teachers are often surprised when their students are challenged by them. As literacy teachers work with preliterate and low-literacy learners, it is essential to remember that the developmental processes occurring naturally in young children growing up in literate cultures are absent for learners who come from preliterate and limited literacy environments. Learning must begin where the student is at the moment he or she enters our classrooms. Teachers must continually assess their own assumptions and examine the elements of the tasks presented to students. When the learner has mastered the majority of skills in the task analysis, the focus can be directed on the target objective rather than diverted to yet-to-be learned skills. By using a simple task analysis method for each activity, teachers are much more likely to ensure learner success.

References

Abadzi, H. 2003. *Improving adult literacy outcomes: Lessons from cognitive research for developing countries.* Operations Evaluation Department. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

American Library Association 2011. Every Child Ready to Read. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at http://www.everychildreadytoread.org

Brod, S. 1999. *What non-readers or beginning readers need to know: Performance-based ESL adult literacy*. Denver, CO: Spring Institute. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at http://www.springinstitute.org/Files/whatnonreaders2.pdf

Bruski, D. 2011. *Do they get the picture? Visual literacy and low-literacy adult ESL learners.* Capstone Project. Hamline University.

Burt, M., J. K. Peyton & K. Schaetzel 2008. Working with adult English language learners with limited literacy: Research, practice, and professional development. [Retrieved May 27, 2013] *CAELA Network Brief, October*. Available at http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/LimitedLiteracyFinalWeb.pdf

Burt, M., J. K. Peyton & C. Van Duzer 2005. How should adult ESL reading instruction differ from ABE reading instruction? [Retrieved May 27, 2013] *CAELA Network Brief, March*. Available at http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/Readingdif.pdf

Condelli, L. 2002. *Effective instruction for adult ESL literacy students: Findings from the What Works Study*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_54.pdf

Crandall, B., G. Klein & R. R. Hoffman 2006. *Working minds: A practitioner's guide to Cognitive Task Analysis.* Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Doak, C. C., Doak, L. G. & Root, J. H. 1996. *Teaching patients with low-literacy skills.* Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Co.

Dolch, E. W. 1948. *Problems in reading.* Champaign, IL: Garrard Press.

Ellery, V. 2009. *Creating strategic readers.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Dowse, R. 2004. Using visuals to communicate medicine information to patients with low literacy. *Adult Learning, 15* (1/2), 22.

Flesch, R. 1955. *Why Johnny can't read and what you can do about it.* New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Fry, E. D. 1999. *1000 instant words.* Westminster, CA: Teacher Created Resources.

Gentry, J. R. 1982. An analysis of developmental spelling in GNYS at WRK. *The Reading Teacher*, 36, 192–200.

Hartel, J. A., B. Lowry & W. Hendon 2005. *Sam and Pat: Beginning reading and writing*. Boston, MA: Heinle ELT.

Hightower, J. L. 2003. Bottom-up reading instruction in David Tower's Gradual Readers, 1841–1868. [Retrieved May 27, 2013] *History of Reading News, 26* (2). Available at http://www.historyliteracy.org/scripts/search_display.php?Article_ID=243

Hoover, W.A. & P. B. Gough 2012. *The Reading Acquisition Framework: An overview by William A. Hoover and Phillip B. Gough.* Austin, TX: SEDL. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at http://www.sedl.org/reading/framework/overview.html

Kurvers, J., R. van Hout & T. Vallen 2006. Discovering features of language: Metalinguistic awareness of adult illiterates. In I. van de Craats, J. Kurvers & M. Young-Scholten (eds.) *Low-educated adult second language and literacy acquisition. Proceedings of the inaugural symposium*. Utrecht: LOT, 69–88.

Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) For Adults. Official website. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at www.leslla.org.

Martinez, M.G. & L. M. McGee 2011. Children's literature and reading instruction: Past, present, and future. *Reading Research Quarterly, 35* (1), 154–169.

Maslen, B. L. & J. R. Maslen 2006. *Bob books.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000. *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Onderdelinden, L., I. van de Craats & J. Kurvers 2009. Word concept of illiterates and low-literates: Worlds apart? In I. van de Craats & J. Kurvers (eds.), *Low-educated adult second language and literacy acquisition. Proceedings of the 4th symposium.* Utrecht: LOT, 35–48.

Poulson, D., M. Ashby & S. Richardson 1996. *Userfit: A practical handbook on user-centered design for assistive technology*. Brussels-Luxembourg: ECSC-EC-EAEC. European Commission, DGXIII TIDE Project 1062. [Retrieved June 9, 2013]. Available at http://www.idemployee.id.tue.nl/g.w.m.rauterberg/lecturenotes/UFTtask-analysis.pdf

Read, C. 1975. *Children's categorizations of speech sounds in English.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers in English.

Ruyle, K.E. 1999. Analyzing tasks to improve performance. *Technical Training, 10* (2), 24–28.

Smith, C., K. Harris & S. Reder 2005. Applying research findings to instruction for adult English language students. [Retrieved May 27, 2013] *CAELA Network Brief, August.* Available at http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/apply.pdf

Trupke-Bastidas, J. & A. Poulos, A. 2007. Improving literacy of L1-non-literate and L1-literate adult English as a second language learners. [Retrieved May 27, 2013] *MinneWITESOL Journal, 24*. Available at http://minnetesol.org/journal/articles/improvingliteracy.html

Weaver, C. 1995. *Facts on the nature of whole-language instruction*. Michigan English Language Arts Framework Project. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/08894/08894f6.html

Wren, S. 2000. *Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read: A Framework.* Austin, TX: Southwest Education Development Laboratories. [Retrieved May 27, 2013]. Available at http://www.sedl.org/reading/framework/framework.pdf

Received 10 January, 2013
Revision received 24 June, 2013
Accepted 25 June, 2013