Teaching Strategies and Considerations for Pre-literate Learners: A Case Study

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Teaching Strategies and Considerations for Pre-literate Learners: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

English language learners without basic literacy skills in the native language have found developing English language literacy especially challenging. The purpose of the study was to investigate the efficacy of various instructional strategies, including one-to-one tutoring, to facilitate acquisition of basic literacy skills in pre-literate adult learners. Following a case study model, a variety of instructional strategies were employed in an attempt to discover viable methods to aid a pre-literate African woman through impediments to learning, enabling her to access and produce written information on a very basic survival level. At the conclusion of a three month intervention period, the subject demonstrated developing literacy skills. The study displayed instructional methods and strategies appropriate for similarly struggling learners.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

Learning a second language has been a difficult task at any age but particularly for adult learners. Adult learners have approached language learning from diverse backgrounds— in educational levels (both in the native and the new language), cognitive abilities, motivation, life experiences, emotional baggage, resources and challenges.

English language learners without basic literacy skills in the native language have found developing English language literacy especially challenging. Literacy has been defined across a vast spectrum, referring to the negotiation of meaning in many forms--text, numbers, technology, etc. However, an accepted connotation could be that "literacy … involves the ability to use written symbols and conventions to communicate ideas about the world and to extract meaning from the written text, i.e., the ability to read and write" (Simich-Dudgeon, 1989, p.1).

Haverson and Hayne (as cited by Simich-Dudgeon, 1989) classified native language proficiency and education of non-literate adults learning English: the non-literate, the pre-literate, the semi-literate, and the literate in a non-Roman alphabet or other writing system. The pre-literate, learners without a written form

of native language, have encountered even greater hurdles to mastering literacy in English.

Statement of the Problem

For the educator, the needs of pre-literate students have demanded greater resourcefulness than have the needs of students with academic background or a written language. The study sought to investigate the efficacy of various instructional strategies including one-to-one tutoring to facilitate acquisition of basic literacy survival skills in pre-literate adult learners.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project was to employ a variety of instructional strategies including one-to-one tutoring in an attempt to discover viable methods to aid a pre-literate African woman in acquisition of basic literacy survival skills. The woman had not effectively gained basic literacy skills such as the ability to write from memory personal identification information, including name, address and children's names, or to state children's ages, after three quarters of English as a Second Language classroom study. The objective of this research was to help the student through impediments to learning, enabling the subject to access and produce written information on a very basic survival level.

Delimitations

The study consisted of a case study of, and instructional interventions for, an adult level one English as a Second Language student at community college in

Eastern Washington. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007) the bi-county community area had a 2006 population of over 226,000. The student population of the English as a Second Language program was one of the largest in the Washington State community college system, comprised of approximately 1300 students in the 2006-2007 academic year (Columbia Basin College, 2007).

The case study subject was a forty-four-year-old Sudanese woman who immigrated to the United States in 2004. The woman had attended classes at the community college since winter quarter 2007 but remained in level one, the lowest of the six language levels in the English as a Second Language Program. Other participants included the woman's family which consisted of a forty-seven-year-old husband, nine children (two sons ages fourteen and sixteen, and daughters ages five, eight, eleven and twelve within the home and a twenty-three-year-old son at Eastern Washington University), and two daughters, ages twenty-six and twenty-one, in an adjacent town within the bi-county area. The oldest daughter had a baby in September of 2007.

The second significant participant was the volunteer tutor. The tutor chosen and matched with the student had previous experience as a paraprofessional working at the Sudanese English as a Second Language classroom in an adjacent town during another time of day. Other participants included two previous and one current English as a Second Language classroom instructors of the subject, including the participant-observer author who played

roles as the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator (providing a volunteer tutor), instructor (previous summer quarter and second half of winter quarter) and as an additional tutor. Classmates of the subject and students from the adjacent classroom were also present during some observations and provided interaction with the subject.

Instructional materials ranged from simplistic to sophisticated. Teacher-created worksheets, realia (e.g., driver's license), photos (e.g., houses, street signs), letters and shapes (e.g., foam, cardstock), alphabet puzzles, and the workbook *Access* supported lesson objectives. Colored 3 x 5 cards were used for many activities. In addition, computer programs *Type to Learn 3, Triple Play Plus,* and an educational website provided content reinforcement.

The case study spanned three academic quarters, late fall, winter and part of spring during the 2007-2008 academic year with instructional intervention commencing with the winter quarter. Frequency and intensity of instruction were dependent on the availability of the student, transportation, children's school schedules and the schedules of the other participants. Tutoring sessions held at the community college's off-campus English as a Second Language site usually took place as pull out from scheduled class or lab time. Observation took place during class times and tutoring sessions. Interviews were held at the English as a Second Language site and the subject's home as well as electronically through e-mail communication.

Assumptions

The ESL instructors had experience working with low level students and found the subject to exhibit special learning needs. The instructors were in agreement that alternative learning experiences were necessary for the subject to gain skills such as printing name, address, children's names and ages. The instructors and the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator were in possession of, or had access to, appropriate research-based materials and strategies to facilitate the subject's learning, and had been trained and were experienced in administration and scoring of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System. The volunteer had been trained as a tutor and had experience with students from similar backgrounds.

The subject's husband understood the author's proposal and that an accurate interpretation was provided to the subject. The subject and subject's family portrayed the subject's history and experiences as accurately as memory allowed yet situations and circumstances were reported through personal viewpoints, reflections and biases.

Research Question

The primary question of the study was "What instructional strategies will help a pre-literate student attain basic survival level literacy, or at a minimum, show some progress over a period of three months?"

Significance of the Project

The ability to access information from text and to produce written communication has been fundamental to basic survival and imperative for full civic participation. Pre-literate adults have presented an extremely challenging student profile to educators. Instructional methods, strategies and considerations researched and employed during the study provided a foundation for supporting learners possessing similar learning obstacles.

Procedure

The author chose the subject for the study as a result of consultation with the current classroom instructor after both had witnessed, as classroom instructors of the subject, the challenges the subject experienced trying to copy and to learn personal information including name, address, etc. These simple tasks have been challenges for any pre-literate student; however, the instructors generally have seen students able to perform such tasks after repetitive exposure and instruction in the classroom setting within an academic quarter. The subject maintained an excellent attendance record but had not progressed as was expected.

The author approached the subject regarding participation in the special project as well as the assignment of an individual tutor. The subject had a volunteer tutor very briefly during the break between summer and fall quarter just prior to the study. There had been good rapport between the tutor and subject during work on the alphabet and the subject's name. However, only a few

sessions took place due to family circumstances and limited time. The volunteer left the area for university. The author, in the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator role, contacted a new volunteer tutor about availability and interest in the match and an initial meeting was held. There was immediate affinity, particularly as the tutor discovered the subject's daughter had assisted in childcare at the Sudanese English as a Second Language site. A schedule for sessions was arranged.

The author went to the subject's home to discuss the project with the subject and the subject's husband. The husband's translation was necessary for the author to feel confident that the subject had an understanding of the project and of the granting of permission for participation. The author stressed that participation and permission for the project was not necessary for assignment of a volunteer tutor to aid the subject's learning and that as Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator the author would facilitate the acquisition of a volunteer tutor regardless of the student's decision whether or not to participate in the study.

The tutor and the student met approximately nineteen times over the course of five months in individual sessions, in a small classroom setting (three to five students), in the student's home during interviews, and in the student's hospital room. The core intervention period was approximately three months. Some of the encounters were minimal such as the day after the quarter finished and the subject arrived at the school, while others were one to two and one half

hour long sessions. The length of any given session was determined by factors such as the physical state of the subject and family situations. Prior arrangements were made with the classroom instructor to take the student from the classroom or lab, depending on where the level one class was during a particular tutoring session.

The tutor used a variety of strategies and materials in tutoring sessions. The tutor sought to facilitate learning with tactile and kinesthetic activities. Repetition, also a key strategy for pre-literate learners, was combined with aural support. Hands-on learning was critical for reinforcement of the visual information. Material personally relevant to the student was used as content. The tutor moved intuitively between tasks to provide and guide the student according to energy and interest, and generously supplied encouragement to increase the student's confidence. Much session time was devoted to review, partially due to the sporadic attendance of the student during winter quarter.

Specific tasks included sorting foam and cardstock alphabet letters, both upper and lower case, completing a sixteen foot long alphabet puzzle and writing letters on the board. Letters and numbers were also drawn in the air and on the tutor's back. The jumbo air and board numbers using the whole arm were written to imprint on the muscle memory. One of the student's stated goals was to learn the home phone number "Problem, telephone." A desk telephone with large keys was used to practice dialing. Other tasks included alphabet and number

worksheets, and the *Access* workbook with activities identifying shapes, letters or words either the same or different from the prompt item. Pair work included identifying colors and reviewing the color words. Computer assisted language learning continued as a component of the English as a Second Language program. Computer programs used were the ones most commonly accessed by level one students and were chosen by the subject at each lab session for a time period determined by the student's interest. The primary programs were *Triple Play Plus* which the student used primarily to practice hearing and saying numbers; *Type to Learn*, a keyboarding program which reinforces letters aurally, visually, and kinesthetically, and a website lesson accessed through www.agendaweb.org that displayed the alphabet and gave each letter name aurally.

During the above period, the researcher interviewed two family members including the husband and eldest son and had informal conversations with several other children. The subject was observed within the classroom setting as well as during tutoring sessions. An audio recording was taken of a lengthy interview.

The study began at the end of the academic fall quarter 2008. The subject had acquired forty-seven hours of classroom attendance in the quarter which qualified the student for post-testing with the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, the instrument federally mandated for measurement of student progress (Earl & Mendoza, p. 8). The student had been given the test on four previous occasions, during previous quarters, as dictated by state and federal

standards which required a pre-test prior to classroom or tutoring lessons as well as ensuing post-tests at intervals of approximately forty-five hours of instruction. Thus, the end of the fall quarter test served as a form of pre-test to the project's implementation. The post-test was subsequently administered at the end of the winter quarter after the recommended instructional period, coinciding with the projected completion of research. The actual project concluded a few weeks later.

Definition of Terms

Access . *Access* was a workbook style text of pre-literacy exercises and basic literacy activities, in clear format with large print.

basic survivor literacy skills. The phrase basic survivor literacy skills referred to personal information such as name, address, birth date, telephone number and calendar information.

environmental print. Environmental print referred to words, letters and symbols found in everyday life.

non-literate. The term non-literate referred to individuals lacking literacy skills although the native tongue had a written form.

pre-literate. Pre-literate was used in the study to describe individuals not previously exposed to written language, whether or not the native tongue had a written form.

realia. Objects from real life, such as food items, money, clothing, used in classroom instruction were termed realia.

scaffolding. Scaffolding referred to help given by an instructor or a more capable peer so that a student moved beyond the current knowledge or production through independent work. Scaffolds have included questions, suggestions, and requests for expansion or clarification of ideas.

match. The Volunteer Tutor Program Coordinator introduced the tutor to the learner at an initial meeting called a match.

Acronyms

ABE. Adult Basic Education

CALL. Computer assisted language learning

CASAS. Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System

CPA. Comprehensive Peace Agreement

ESL. English as a Second Language

ID. Identification

LEA. Language Experience Approach

PTSD. Post traumatic stress disorder

UN. United Nations

UNHCR. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Early stage adult reading has lacked the intense examination that childhood reading and writing development has experienced. Reading and writing skill acquisition of adult English language learners has had even less focus in research and review. Literature selections reviewed for the current study involved various areas of consideration for English as a Second Language instruction with particular attention to the pre-literate learner.

The major themes which emerged from the literature review were: 1. Characteristics of, and Special Considerations for, the Pre-literate Learner, 2. Affective Domain and Other Non-Cognitive Learning Factors, 3. Instructional Strategies and Approaches, and 4. The Sudanese Experience.

Characteristics of and Special Considerations for the Pre-literate Learner

In general, adult language learners have faced more challenges---economical, cognitive, emotional and even physical--than children or youth when attempting to acquire another language. Adult language learners without previous formal educational experience have found learning a new language even more overwhelming. Haverson and Haynes (as cited in Simich-Dudgeon, 1989) divided such learners into two categories: non-literate (native language had a written form, but learner had not acquired literacy skills) and pre-literate (no

written language in the socio-cultural group). However, Brod (2003), in *The Bantu in Our Midst*, defined pre-literate to include learners lacking experience with the written language of the home locale. For the purposes of the study, the term pre-literate was used to refer to students without exposure to written language, even if found in the native language.

The chart provided by Brod (1999, p. 6) to compare literate and non-literate learners offered information applicable to the more broadly defined pre-literate learners:

Literate Learners	**Non-Literate Learners**
Learn from print	Learn by doing and watching
Tend to be visually oriented	Tend to be aurally oriented
Make lists to remember	Repeat to remember
Spend years learning to read	Have limited time for learning to read
Know they can learn	Lack confidence in their learning ability
Learn best when content is relevant to their lives	Learn best when content is relevant to their lives
Can distinguish between important and less important points	May accept all content as being of equal value

Literature reviewed for the current study examined a variety of specific pre-literate and non-literate learner groups; however, similar characteristics have been found in other ethnicities.

Hvitfeldt (1985) and Marshall (1998) addressed the avenues of learning in traditionally pre-literate societies or ones in which numerous members were non-literate. Marshall, a researcher of the Hmong, emphasized the interpersonal

nature of learning in an oral culture. Information was transferred person to person within a recognized relationship. In addition, there was the immediate application of acquired knowledge. Hvitfeldt referred to the prominence of direct experience, observation and modeling in pre-literate societies as opposed to the stress modern societies have placed on learning more abstractly (p.28). Marshall stated that the traditional American education system has valued individual learning and independent achievement and "everyone is expected to learning [sic] everything" (p.7) in contrast to cooperative learning in which "the memory load is shared" (p.7).

Both Hvitfeldt (1985) and Croyden (2005) pointed out that common, seemingly simple, or obvious pictorial representations used with literate learners often have been misinterpreted by pre-literate learners. For example, a group of Hmong refugees in a camp did not want to be resettled in the United States after seeing the drawings of presumably starving stick people (Hvitfeldt, 1985).

Croyden (2005) reminded that pre-literate learners, perhaps never even having held a pencil, have had difficulty copying board work, taking notes, or accessing information from environmental print. According to Croyden, explicit instructions on classroom expectations and on handling books and papers have also been required by learners without previous education. Herbert and McFeeter's study (as cited by Allendar, 1998) reported that learners with little schooling "have difficulties managing information input, organizing learning

material, following verbal and written instructions, and processing large chunks of new information" (p. 3). Allendar (1998) emphasized the need for programs and policy benchmarks to reflect the variance of student ability and educational foundation.

English language instructors often have confronted a quandary. Pre-literate learners have exhibited behaviors and characteristics considered symptoms of learning disabilities (Schwartz & Terrill, 2000). For example, lack of expected progress has been a major flag for learning disabilities. Slower progress has also been seen in students with little or no educational experience, formal or informal. Primitive writing, letter reversals and awkwardness with materials encountered in adult learners have sometimes appeared to signal learning disability issues but instead may have been clues to an absent academic history.

Literature regarding learning disabilities in adults, especially English language learners, has been scant. Educators Adkins, Sample & Birman; Almanza, Singleton, & Terrill; Grognet; Schwarz and Burt (as cited by Schwartz & Terrill, 2000) stressed adequate contemplation of the situation before identifying an ESL student as learning disabled. The following possibilities for hindered English language progress were noted:

> limited academic skills in a learner's native language due to limited previous education, lack of effective study habits, interference of learner's

> native language …., a mismatch between the instructor's teaching style and learner's expectations …., stress or trauma …. experienced .... [affecting concentration and memory], socio-cultural factors such as age, physical health, social identity, and even diet, external problems with work, health, and family, sporadic attendance and lack of practice outside the classroom. (p. 1)

Many of the noted reasons for slow progress have been experienced by pre-literate students. Standardized assessment of learning disabilities was not reliable as applied to non-native English speakers (Schwarz & Terrill). Given the diagnostic uncertainties of diagnosing learning disabilities in English language learners, Levine, and Brooks (as cited by Root, 1994) recommended instructors not be limited by looking at learning disabilities but rather ascertain and focus on strengths, advice also advocated for instructors of all disciplines and learners.

Affective Domain and Other Non-cognitive Learning Factors

While an individual's educational background and cognitive capabilities have been important issues in education and, therefore language learning, other significant issues have been equally significant. Non-cognitive issues considered in the study involved the affective domain, i.e., matters related to emotion, as well as the physical.

Stevick (1999) states:

> Here, I shall follow Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) in saying that one's 'affect' toward a particular thing or action or situation or experience is how that thing or that action or that situation or that experience fits in with one's needs or purposes, and its resulting effect on one's emotions. (p. 44)

The acknowledgement of the role of affective factors in education was stimulated, though not introduced, by humanistic psychology in the 1960's. Rogers (as cited by Arnold, 1999) criticized mainstream educational institutions 'They have focused so intently on the cognitive and have limited themselves so completely to "educating from the neck up", that this narrowness is resulting in serious social consequences' (p.5). Theorists Brown and Castillo (as cited by Arnold, 1999) emphasized the importance of educating the whole person through the merging of the cognitive and affective domains.

The field of language instruction increasingly recognized affect as a major player in language learning. As Bernat (2000) affirmed, the affective domain was a core feature of "[M]ethods such as Suggestopedia (aims to reduce anxiety by creating a non-threatening environment), Silent Way (the learner must take responsibility), Community Language Learning (the group must decide what to learn), and Total Physical Response (aims to engage the learner physically….)" (p. 2). Affect was also prominent in both Communicative Language Teaching and Krashen's (1982) Natural Approach. Krashen's hypothesis of the affective

filter described a screen of emotion that hindered language acquisition. Manipulation of or attention to affective variables played a role in lowering the filter so optimal input occurred. The instructor's pedagogical goal was to create a situation that nurtured low filter while providing appropriate input.

Horwitz and Johnson (as cited by Bernat, 2000) argued that the attention given to the affective aspect of second language learning continued to be inadequate. Awareness and consideration of the affective aspect of learning has been shown as essential for all educators, especially essential for language educators but exceptionally essential for language educators of pre-literate learners. Bernat (2000) cited Horwitz and Young and stated:

> . . . . although the level of achievement for the majority of language students in typical academic settings is disappointing low, and language teachers cannot change the incoming cognitive abilities of students, the student's native language, or the overall socio-cultural context of language learning and their communities, the affective domain stands out as an exceptional opportunity for the improvement of language instruction. (p.3)

Stevick (1999) believed that affect had a momentous impact on learning and memory. The author claimed that affective data was stored in the same networks as other memories and impacted how data including language playback was shaped, reshaped, and recovered. Stevick used the term clutter to describe older memories fired up by affective data that interfered with the efficient

processing and retrieval of other material. Goleman (as cited by Stevick, 1999) spoke of the affective interference as sabotage of neural signals (in the prefrontal lobes which are responsible for working memory). Bogoch (as cited by Stevick, 1996) concluded even more emphatically "…. information is rarely, if ever, stored in the human nervous system without "affective coding" (p. 6). For the classroom, Stevick (1999) recommended an affectively appropriate teacher mindful of the students' feelings and purposes and the design of "interesting, entertaining, practical or otherwise meaningful" (p. 57) units of learning.

Key affective issues manifested in various forms within the classroom were anxiety, motivation, inhibition and self-esteem (Andres, 2002-03). Stress, or anxiety, was a major affective issue addressed by the literature. Refugees have been affected by several different types of stress in the process of resettlement (Adkins, Birman, Sample, Brod & Silver, 1999). Migration stress was considered a major life stressor that may have happened unexpectedly, was out of the refugee's control and represented the loss of resources such as family, friends and community. Acculturative stress resulted from adaptation to a different culture with new customs and norms with all the accompanying misunderstandings and difficulties. Challenges found in simple life tasks in addition to language barriers complicated the acculturation process. Money problems, unemployment, racism, discrimination and children's school issues only added to the acculturative stress. Traumatic stress referred to the after affects of "extreme events that cause harm,

injury or death, such as natural disasters, accidents, assault, war-related experiences, and torture" (p. 9). Research has suggested that the extreme events caused by willful acts of other humans as opposed to natural disasters more likely resulted in psychological, social and physical changes to the individuals affected.

The results of a study by Sondergaard and Theorell (2004) indicated that the speed of language acquisition was related to "cumulative Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptom load over time but …. not related …. to the number of previous school years" (p.323). The study concluded "that the symptom load of PTSD during the follow-up period is significantly inversely related to the speed of language acquisition in refugees. This implies that treatment as well as preventive measures against worsening of PTSD symptoms are important in order to minimise harmful post-migration stress for the facilitation of integration" (p.323). Allendar (1998) also commented on trauma's effect on learning. The author stated that trauma affected learner confidence and self-esteem, and the chronic psychological impact on memory, attention, concentration and anxiety states was seen to override positive motivation, and to impede learning. Allendar referred to the benefits of teacher training which included recognizing distress symptoms, accessing resources and evaluating suitability of topics and activities for learners affected by trauma in the homeland or in the new community.

In addition to affective issues, physical issues have contributed to lack of expected progress in learning. Injuries, diseases and chronic conditions with the accompanying pain, medications and treatment have all influenced the ability to learn. When informed, instructors have easily provided accommodation for a student's inability to sit or stand for lengthy periods. However, unseen, unreported issues have contributed to learning difficulties unbeknownst to the teacher. Lack of sleep associated with psychological or physical complaints also has affected academic attention and growth. Visual and hearing impairment has often gone undetected. Poor living conditions, diet and climate changes in a new country and lack of medical care and attention in the previous county have burdened immigrants and refugees with ill health and lasting effects of untreated illnesses (Grognet, 1989).

Schwarz (2005) emphasized the necessity for programs to learn about learners, to identify non-educational issues in the way of learning, and to educate teachers and staff about the issues as well as appropriate referral services. Programs have often maintained time constraints have limited the scope of intakes but the author argued that the gathered information ensured that students' needs have been met and educational time and effort were not wasted.

Affective issues included not only matters within the learners but also affective factors within the learning environment involving the classroom, classmates and instructor. In addition to instructional strategies designed to

address affective issues, educators were counseled to make adjustments in the classroom to enhance learning. According to Jensen (2005) neuroscientists have begun to take the learning setting seriously. The author stated, "Physical environments influence how we feel, hear, and see. Those factors, in turn, influence cognitive and affective performance" (p.82). Jensen urged educators to focus on areas of the environment to reduce stress and maximize learning—seating (flexibility for students' feelings of comfort, security and access to resources), temperature (a cooler brain was more relaxed, receptive and cognitively sharp; higher temperatures encouraged excess levels of neurotransmitters which lead to more aggressive behavior), lighting (increased light, particularly daylight, improved alertness, attendance, growth, concentration, and performance, as well as reduced visual difficulties and fatigue), noise (background noise made hearing and paying attention difficult, and increased stress and frustration). Ambient noise particularly affected children and ESL students because hearing new speech sounds was critical for effective language acquisition.

Andres (1991) stated that "…. success in language learning is inextricably linked to the way in which learners experience the classroom: as a place where their weaknesses will be revealed or as a space for growth and development" (p. 89). Accordingly, the author held teachers responsible for nurturing positive attitudes and confident capable spirits. Reasoner, as cited by Andres (1991, p. 88)

advocated the acknowledgement of each student's uniqueness and the cultivation of the components of self-esteem: a sense of security, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and a sense of personal competence.

Bernat (2000) pointed out specific anxieties adult ESL learners have brought to the classroom—afraid of losing dignity, worry about learning demands and fear of first language banishment in the classroom. Instructors were admonished to be very cognizant of the pros and cons associated with the use of native languages in the classroom setting. The author recommended that teachers sheltered students from humiliation, ensured respect, tolerance and good humor, and clearly explained objectives and tasks. Relaxing music, warm welcomes, varied, fun activities and modeling of positive attitudes were also advised to encourage participation and reduce tension and distraction from personal problems. Practices for instructors to foster a positive, supportive classroom climate also included recognition of the students' experiences, contributions to the classroom and personal responsibility for learning, and satisfaction of the students' needs through relevant and stimulating lessons. Andrews (2005) wrote that teachers should get to know students before teaching language in order to establish a desire within the student to communicate. The writer also encouraged integrating daily classroom circumstances which influenced the students' affect, as well as the classroom's atmosphere, into teachable moments—late students prompted a discussion on public transportation, time review; ill family members

or students elicited discussion on medical issues. Stanley (1999) encouraged teachers to be aware of personal affective states to most effectively reflect on the learning process and intuitively facilitate student growth.

Instructional Strategies and Approaches

Best practices in teaching have always included the use of a variety of methods to inspire and awaken the many learning styles and differences students have brought to the learning situation. Teaching a second language has required the mobilization of all methods, perhaps with even greater vigor. Students with special circumstances, such as low or no education in the native tongue, have required the use of the best practice techniques for longer periods with more extension activities designed to target the specific educational needs. Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (2001) presented nine research-based brain compatible teaching strategies that produced student achievement. The list consisted of "identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and cues, questions and advance organizers" (p. 13). Instructors learned that activities designed for pre-literate learners have followed best practices and instructional strategies for all learners.

Croyden (2005), in *Making It Real: Teaching Pre-literate Adult Refugee Students*, stressed the importance of a basic oral foundation for pre-literate

students before the introduction of the connection between the spoken and written word. The ESL teacher and tutor trainer went on to describe instruction in the basic physical aspects of writing, meaning based approaches, and part to whole approaches. Teachers and tutors were reminded to be very explicit in the demonstration of holding a pencil, properly slanting the pencil and orienting the paper as the students probably have had very little history with paper, books and writing instruments. The trainer stated that models of lines, circles and patterns should be supplied for students to first trace, then produce, on blank lines. The recognition of left-to-right and top-to-bottom directionality has also been a difficulty for many pre-literate learners. Both writing on the board and air drawing have been helpful for students, and instructors have been able to observe direction errors more easily. Even the recognition of personal names has been difficult for many beginning readers so samples should be supplied for tracing. Meaning based approaches to teaching literacy involved whole words that had meaning to students, were found in the students' environment or were generated by the students or the teacher for classroom activities or text. Sight words and phrases used often orally such as "What is your name?" or "What is your address?" and the appropriate responses were placed on different colored index cards. For example, components of an address were put on different colored index cards to help the students differentiate and remember. Strategies for using student generated materials included the Language Experience Approach

commonly used in ESL in which students were guided in the description of an experience transcribed by the teacher. The creative process encouraged oral communication and personalization of materials which were used for reading and writing practice. In teacher-generated materials an instructor supplied words to supplement the students' vocabulary for stories or later provided a re-write, an account using the students' narrative but providing correct grammar with controlled vocabulary. Parts to whole approaches helped students identify components of words such as sounds or letters. The sounds were connected with a word and a context for the word rather than the strict isolation of sounds. Exercises included the students' recognition of words known with the same beginning sound or letter, ending sound or rhyming pattern. An activity suggested was the construction of paper chains for each word in a pattern. Lessons about the alphabet included letter formation as well as the distinction between letter sound and name. The classic alphabet song provided additional impression of the letters' names.

Croyden (2005) continued with additional suggestions for creating written materials for the pre-literate learner "Use larger font; use a font that reflects how we write, for example Century Gothic or Comic Sans; have plenty of white space on the sheet ….; use visuals, graphics and icons to accompany written material; … provide a print rich environment ….; review continually …." (p. 76). The use of visual material such as photos, drawings and other artifacts has always been

useful for working with ESL students. In addition, realia, the use of objects, has been even more important for working with pre-literate learners. Material and tasks related to students' personal needs and goals have been shown to increase opportunity for learning success of ESL literacy learners (Holt, 1995).

Reck (1982) in *The HER Project, Homebound English for Refugee Women*, gave several dos and don'ts for ESL teachers and tutors which included "never assume anything" [i.e., check for comprehension, don't ask], "limit new vocabulary, review constantly," and "be patient" (p. 32, 33). The recommendations have been proven even more applicable to beginning students without formal education.

Allendar (1998) encouraged instructors to "continually recycle language and skills, include physical activities and make frequent changes of activities" (p.3) for adult ESL students with minimal or no formal schooling. The learners have also benefited from explicit coaching in study skills including memorization techniques and use of reference tools.

Research regarding one-on-one tutoring as an effective strategy for adult literacy learners has provided mixed results despite assumptions to the contrary (Siedow, 2005). Empirical studies have not met design requirements for generalization of results. Gaps between expectations of tutors and students, and insufficient tutor training for special needs learners influenced the conclusiveness of studies. Amanza, Singleton, and Terrill (1995/96) sought, through action

research, promising practices for helping adults who neglected to make expected progress in ESL classes. The authors believed three long term case studies were representative of the instructional issues experienced with many students over many years. The findings suggested "quiet, focused one-on-one interactions in the lab or with a volunteer seemed more comfortable and productive for the students than the classroom" (p. 6).

Effective instruction for adult basic education students, claimed Jacobson, Degener & Purcell-Gates (2003), included contextualized materials. The researchers, citing Fingeret, stated " research has found that students learn most effectively when instructional materials reflect and incorporate students' prior experiences" (p. 13) while a citation from Freire, Glen, and Purcell-Gates & Waterman indicated that "classroom activities using generative themes taken from the lives of adult learners facilitate their acquisition of literacy" (p. 13). A common phrase used by Adult Basic Education instructors to describe the classroom integration of personally relevant material has been "Students using real-life texts for real-life purposes." Authentic materials used in the classroom have enabled learners to more easily apply and transfer the skills to life outside the school setting in roles as workers, family members and citizens.

Adult education environments have embraced the concept of the learner-centered classrooms (Crandall, 1999). Cooperative learning in pairs or small

groups has afforded students the opportunity to learn from, or scaffold for, peers. Crandall stated:

> Cooperative learning has been shown to encourage and support most of the affective factors which correlate positively with language learning: i.e. reducing (negative or debilitating) anxiety, increasing motivation, facilitating the development of positive attitudes toward learning and language learning, promoting self-esteem, as well as supporting different learning styles and encouraging perseverance in the difficult and confusing process of leaning another language. (p.227)

The interaction promoted by cooperative learning also offered opportunities for students to negotiate comprehensible input and output, to develop cross-cultural understanding, to develop higher order and critical thinking skills, and to develop academic language through content-rich tasks. Also, cooperative learning presented "greater learner-centeredness and learner direction in the classroom" (p. 238). Crandall provided examples of traditional cooperative activities particularly applicable to language learning: think/pair/share, jigsaw, roundtable/roundrobin, numbered heads together, group investigation, collaborative and cooperative writing and peer response, paired classes, and cooperative cloze completion.

Movement was shown to aide the efficiency of learning for all. Hannaford (as cited by Stanley) stated:

> The more closely we consider the elaborate interplay of brain and body, the more clearly one compelling theme emerges: movement is essential to learning. Movement wakens and activates many of our mental capacities. Movement integrates and anchors new information and experience into our neural networks. (p. 173)

Schoepp (2001) reported that songs were also found to facilitate language learning through lowering the affective filter of students. Eken (as cited by Schoepp) claimed that songs encouraged listening, introduced language, stimulated discussion, encouraged creativity, provided a relaxed atmosphere and brought variety and fun to the classroom.

Assessment has always been an important component of education. Recent trends have emphasized formative assessment for assisting and instructing students in the learning process. However, national and state Adult Basic Education initiatives and funding have required formal documentation of student achievement even of beginning learners unable to complete regulated reading tests. One of the assessments most widely accepted and used was CASAS, a standardized assessment instrument used to determine program eligibility and level placement, and to monitor progress and mastery of ABE students (Stiles, 1990). The test was designed in booklet format, two forms to each level, alternated for pre and post-tests as needed. The forms included in the study were CASAS Reading FORM 27 and FORM 28, consisting of multiple choice items

with one letter, one word or short phrase (such as date of birth) as a prompt for three graphic choices. The CASAS Technical Manual (Stiles, 1990) claimed "content validity was established by experienced education practitioners" (p.44) and continued to be verified by adult education specialists. Extensive field testing was employed to determine reliability.

Schumann (1999) approached language instruction and affect from an neurobiological perspective and claimed that no one main teaching technique was the ideal for learners beyond the sensitive period for language acquisition (as adults were) but that every brain was different and adapted to input uniquely, a phenomenon possibly related to learning styles. Motivation, rather, was a greater determinant to progress for the post-sensitive period learner.

The Sudanese Experience

English as a Second Language learners have arrived at the threshold of learning with an assortment of cultural backgrounds. Many students found in ESL classes have come to the United States as refugees. From 1975 to 2005 the United States resettled more than two million refugees (McBrien, 2005). The 1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1, defined:

> a refugee as a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself

> of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. (UNHCR, 2007, p. 6)

Refugees came, not by choice as many immigrants have done, but as a matter of survival. The intensity and the impact of the refugees' stories, told or untold, has varied from person to person. Many refugees came from Africa, forced from their homelands by brutality and lack of resources resulting from war, genocide and drought.

The Cultural Orientation Research Center (Cultural Orientation Research Center, 2007) described:

> Located in North Africa, Sudan is geographically the largest country in Africa with approximately 1 million square miles (roughly the size of the U.S. east of the Mississippi). Sudan shares borders with nine countries including Egypt to the North. The Nile River and its tributaries dominate the country, with deserts in the North and a more tropical climate in the South. Sudan has approximately 34.6 million people from as many as 400 different ethnic groups. The North is dominated by Arabic-speaking Muslims. In the South, at least 100 different languages are spoken, and most southern Sudanese follow indigenous beliefs or have become Christians. (p.1)

Racial and religious tensions have created unrest and internal conflict within Sudan since the country gained independence from Britain in 1956. Only

about ten years of peace reigned from the early 1970s until the early 1980s. Several countries in Africa have served as both a country of origin for refugees as well as a country of asylum for refugees. In the summer of 2000, the USCR Refugee Reports stated:

> Sudan hosts the largest displaced population in the world and has produced one of every nine of the world's uprooted people. At the end of 1999, more than 4 million Sudanese remained internally displaced, and some 420,000 Sudanese refugees were living in neighboring countries." (p.1)

The atrocities in the Dafur region began in 2003 and another nearly 2 million became Internally Displaced Persons (CIA, 2006).

In his memoir, *The Translator*, Daoud Hari (2008) vividly depicted the harrowing experience, common to many Sudanese but intensifying with the Dafur region genocides, of village destruction and annihilation. The anticipation of attack and the escape was described:

> …our mothers knew it was the Antonov [bomber] as soon as they saw the birds leave, and they yelled at us to hide in the wadi, and take some animals quickly. So we took the donkeys and some chickens and goats as fast as we could. As we ran, we could hear people in the village yelling to get this person or that person out of a hut and help them get away. We could not hear the Antonov at this time. We thought it had gone away and

we were safe, and that our mothers were crazy. Our fathers were far away with the animals." (P. 40)

Hari described the ongoing tension, "the problem in dealing with rebel groups is that it is often difficult to know who is on which side on any given day" (p. 12). Young teens joined the resistance groups without opposition from family members. "It was as if everybody had accepted that we were all going to die, and it was for each to decide how they wanted to go" (p. 46).

The traumatized and uprooted residents fled to refugee camps that offered just another stage of hardship. Rebel attacks, assaults, and ethnic conflicts existed in varying degrees throughout many resettlement areas. Although humanitarian relief by host countries and international entities provided new arrivals with supplies containing non-food items such as blankets and a tarp, farming and cooking utensils, and two to four seasons of food ration; congestion, severe climatic conditions, basic food and amenity shortages and infections all took a toll. Education was limited and often expensive.

Registration began for the return of refugees from neighboring regions and countries to southern Sudan after the early 2005 signing of the North/South Comprehensive Peace Agreement, granting the southern rebels autonomy for a period of six years. While the returnees have encountered repatriation issues, the country of Sudan has faced influxes of refugees from neighboring countries (CIA, 2006).

Summary

The literature selections for the study were chosen to provide insight into the pre-literate English language learner and to offer instructional approaches designed to maximize the learner's potential. Pre-literate learners were individuals without exposure to written language whether or not the native tongue had a written form. Aural orientation and traditions, kinesthetic approaches to obtaining information and developing skills as well as cooperative practices were characteristics of pre-literate groups.

The literature review explored the significant role of affective factors on the process of learning. Other non-cognitive factors discussed included visual and hearing problems, physical injuries and conditions.

The review revealed good sources of theoretically and scientifically based studies regarding optimal learning approaches. Recommendations included explicit instruction of the physical process of writing as well as a curriculum responsive and relevant to the learner and the learner's background.

The overview of the Sudanese experience provided additional information about refugee circumstances. The information was specifically pertinent to the subject of the case study, a Sudanese expatriate.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

During the fall quarter of 2008, an intervention project was developed to assist a pre-literate Sudanese woman in the acquisition of basic survival language skills. A key component of the case study was explicit instruction of survival level English. Observation of the student's behavior, actions and academic achievements within a classroom setting, as well as during one to one or small group tutoring situations, formed the basis of the investigation. Supplementary information was obtained through a variety of techniques including interviews and document inspection. At the conclusion of the intervention the student was given a standardized test to determine progress since the previous assessment. Data collected was evaluated for the emergence of themes.

Methodology

The author chose to perform a qualitative study to examine the learner, the learning process and the effectiveness of the instructional methodology. The study included interviews of the subject and members of the subject's family, current and former ESL instructors, document evaluation and observations. The major portion of the study involved one to one tutoring of the subject using research-based methods of working with pre-literate learners.

Participants

The case study subject, a forty-four-year-old Sudanese woman, immigrated to the United States in 2004. The woman had attended classes at the community college since winter quarter 2007 yet remained in a level one class, the lowest of the six language levels in the ESL. The woman's family consisted of a forty-seven-year-old husband, nine children (two sons ages fourteen and sixteen, and daughters ages five, eight, eleven and twelve, within the home) a twenty-three-year-old son at Eastern Washington University, and two daughters, ages twenty-six and twenty-one, in an adjacent town. The oldest daughter had a baby in September of 2007.

The second significant participant was the volunteer tutor. The tutor initially chosen and matched with the student had previous experience as a paraprofessional working at the English as a Second Language Sudanese classroom in an adjacent town during another time of day. Circumstances prescribed a new tutor so the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator assumed the role of a volunteer tutor and began a tutorial relationship with the subject.

Other participants included previous and current ESL classroom instructors of the subject. The participant-observer author played roles as the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator (responsible for volunteer matches), classroom instructor (both previous summer and second half of winter quarter) and the replacement tutor. Classmates of the subject and students from another

ESL class were also present during some observations, and provided interaction with the subject.

Instruments

The author was the primary data collection instrument. Primary data sources used were field notes taken during interviews or tutoring sessions or written after tutoring sessions, and audio recordings, as well the electronic scanning of student work or artifacts. The study involved interviews of the subject, members of the subject's family, current and former ESL instructors and, the bulk of the study, one to one tutoring of the subject. Artifacts included copies of student work, study material such as enlarged driver's license and photographs taken for lessons.

The author, as observer and participant, attempted to discreetly record field notes during tutoring sessions. The subject, often aware of the note taking, did not appear disturbed but was calm and continued with the task at hand. A few times the subject seemed somewhat humored, even pleased at the significance of the interaction or action to cause note taking. The relationship and rapport of the tutor and subject appeared to allow for natural engagement in learning. The author did not believe there was an observer effect aside from the motivational impact the positive reinforcement provided. As a main objective to the study was to promote academic advancement in the subject, positive reinforcement was deemed appropriate, and in fact, a necessary strategy to reach an end.

A standardized examination for English language learners, CASAS Reading Form 27, was administered by the subject's fall quarter ESL instructor prior to the project's commencement, and CASAS Reading Form 28 was administered by the winter quarter instructor near the completion of the project. The administration of the CASAS was in compliance with standard testing policies and procedures.

Design

The research was designed as a case study. The main data collection techniques were observation, interviews and examination of records. The chief data collection sources were observations in the form of tutor logs, interviews, phone calls, e-mail communication, photographs, recordings and informal communication. The author became an active participant observer during the course of the study.

Procedure

The author chose the subject for the study in consultation with the fall quarter classroom instructor after both had witnessed, as instructors of the subject in previous quarters, the challenges the subject experienced trying to copy and to learn personal information including name, address, etc. The simple tasks of copying and writing personal information from memory have been challenges for any pre-literate student; however, the instructors generally have seen students able

to perform such tasks after repetitive exposure and instruction in the classroom setting within an academic quarter.

The author approached the subject regarding participation in the research as well as the assignment of an individual tutor. The subject had had a volunteer tutor very briefly during the break between summer and fall quarter just prior to the beginning of the study. There had been good rapport between the tutor and subject during work on the alphabet and the subject's name. However, only a few sessions took place due to family circumstances (a grandchild was born and a relative died) and limited time. The volunteer left the area for university.

The author went to the subject's home November 7, 2007 to discuss the project with the subject and the subject's husband. The husband's translation was necessary for the author to feel confident that the subject had understanding of the project, the granting of permission for participation, etc. The author stressed that participation and permission for the project was not necessary for assignment of a volunteer tutor to aid the subject's learning and that as Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator the author would facilitate the acquisition of a volunteer tutor regardless of the student's decision whether or not to participate in the research.

The author, in the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator role, contacted a volunteer tutor about availability and interest in the match and an initial meeting was held. There was immediate affinity, particularly as the tutor discovered the subject's daughter had assisted in childcare at the Sudanese English as a Second

Language site, another off-campus classroom location in which the tutor had worked. A schedule for sessions was arranged which included sessions during the scheduled class time of the subject's ESL level 1 class in agreement with the ESL level 1 instructor.

One of the drawbacks found with using volunteer tutors has been the sometimes tenuous nature of volunteer commitment. Although the tutor chosen had the desire and intention to serve the student, personal issues and circumstances did not allow the volunteer to continue with the student. In fact, the tutor even failed to show up for the initial tutoring session. When called by the volunteer coordinator the tutor committed to the next session; however, the tutor did not arrive. The volunteer coordinator having had a previous teacher/student relationship with the subject decided that an attempt at a match with another volunteer (and therefore another opportunity for the appearance of rejection by the volunteer) would not be acceptable for the student or the situation. Therefore, the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator assumed the role of a volunteer tutor and began a tutorial relationship with the subject.

The study began at the end of the academic fall quarter 2008. The subject had acquired forty-seven hours of classroom attendance in the quarter, qualifying the student for post-testing with the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, the instrument federally mandated for measurement of student progress (Earl & Mendoza, 2006). The student had been given the test on four previous

occasions, during previous quarters, as dictated by state and federal standards requiring a pre-test prior to classroom or tutoring lessons as well as ensuing post-tests at intervals of approximately forty-five hours of instruction. Thus, the end of the quarter test served as a form of pre-test to the project's implementation. The test was subsequently administered at the end of the winter quarter.

Data was gathered during interviews with the subject's family, predominantly the husband, but also telephone and e-mail exchange with the eldest son and informal conversations with the eldest daughter at the educational site. The subject's husband, the main interviewee, asked the subject for clarification in the native tongue when necessary. The subject also responded directly to some questions and occasionally interjected responses such as laughter. An audio recording was taken of the lengthiest interview as backup for the field notes taken. The subject's husband demonstrated a willingness to share and elaborate during the initial interview. Therefore, most questions during following interviews were convergent by nature yet produced divergent responses. The author also had informal conversations with several of the subject's children during three visits to the home over the course of the project. In addition, two ESL instructors were interviewed, both a former and a current teacher of the subject. The subject was observed within the classroom and computer lab setting as well as during tutoring sessions.

The tutor and the student met approximately nineteen times over the course of five months; in individual sessions, as part of a small classroom setting (three to five students), in the student's home during interviews, and in the student's hospital room. Some of the encounters were very minimal such as the day after the quarter finished and the subject arrived at the school while others were one to two and one half hour long sessions. The length of any given session was determined by the physical state of the subject and family obligations. Prior arrangements had been made with the classroom instructor to take the student from the classroom or lab, depending on where the level one class was during a particular tutoring session.

In tutoring sessions the tutor sought to facilitate learning with tactile and kinesthetic activities. Repetition, also a key strategy for pre-literate learners, was combined with aural support. Hands-on learning was critical for reinforcement of the visual information. Material personally relevant to the student was used as content. The tutor moved intuitively between tasks to provide and guide the student according to energy and interest, and generously supplied encouragement to increase the student's confidence. Much session time was devoted to review or a new presentation of the content.

Specific tasks included sorting foam and cardstock alphabet letters, both upper and lower case, completing a sixteen foot long alphabet puzzle and writing letters on the board. Letters and numbers were also drawn in the air and on the

tutor's back. The jumbo air and board numbers using the whole arm were written to imprint on the muscle memory. One of the student's stated goals was to learn the home phone number, "Problem, telephone." A desk telephone with large keys was used to practice dialing. Other tasks included alphabet and number worksheets and *Access* workbook pages identifying shapes, letters or words either the same or different from the prompt item. Pair work included identifying colors and reviewing the color words. Computer programs used were *Triple Play Plus* which the student used primarily to practice hearing and saying numbers and other vocabulary; *Type to Learn*, a keyboarding program which reinforces letters aurally and visually and a website lesson accessed through www.agendaweb.org that displayed the alphabet and gave each letter name aurally.

Treatment of the Data

The data was transcribed, compiled and reviewed for common themes. Patterns of performance were evaluated and associated with physical and mental manifestations. The author triangulated the patterns with interview and source data to assert linkages.

Summary

A qualitative study was constructed to facilitate academic progress of a struggling level one ESL student. Through one to one tutoring, a variety of instructional methods were applied to foster the subject's skill gain. Observations, interviews and documents were appraised and emerging themes were interpreted.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

A case study of a level one adult ESL student provided opportunity to collect data regarding impeded progress in realizing basic learning milestones. The student was observed during one to one tutoring as well as small group and pair work within the classroom. Additionally, family members and teachers were interviewed for background and additional insights into the development of the student's language skills. The information was reviewed for common themes.

Description of the Environment

The research took the form of a case study with instructional interventions for an adult level one ESL student at a community college in Eastern Washington. The instructional site for the level one class was a satellite location about one mile from the main campus. The student population of the ESL program was one of the largest in the Washington State community college system, comprised of approximately 1300 students in the 2006-2007 academic year (Columbia Basin College, 2007). Informal classroom surveys by ESL faculty in the past revealed around thirty-eight countries of origin with roughly twenty native languages represented. However, a large majority of the ESL students spoke Spanish.

The case study subject was a forty-four-year-old Sudanese woman who immigrated to the United States in 2004. The woman had attended classes at the

community college since winter quarter 2007 yet remained in level one without gaining the ability to read and write basic survival English in the form of personal information. Other study participants included the woman's family which consisted of a husband and nine children, as well as ESL instructors.

The second significant participant was the volunteer tutor. The first tutor assigned to the student neglected to attend tutoring sessions. The author therefore became an active participant observer and assumed the role of tutor. The second tutor had been an ESL instructor for nine years and had been the subject's instructor the previous quarter in the college's ESL program.

The tutor logged observations and impressions during tutoring sessions and employed strategies designed to help the pre-literate student acquire very fundamental English skills. Family members and other ESL instructors of the subject provided additional information. Further background was obtained from source documents.

Research Question

The primary question of the study was "What instructional strategies will help a pre-literate student attain basic survival level literacy, or at a minimum, show some progress over a period of three months?"

Results of the Study

The assumption that one to one tutoring could move a student academically at a more rapid pace than a classroom setting seemed a relatively

easy one; however, physical needs and family circumstances placed additional limitations on the gains expected during the period of the study. The results of the study incorporated the subject's personal history as well as affect, activities and performance during learning sessions, and showed implementation of instructional strategies and impact of the refugee experience and pre-literate needs. The conversations and interactions provided in the narrative present a picture of both the student's abilities and the student's emotional states. Detailed personal history from the major interviews was documented and placed in the Appendices.

The family history provided in major interviews of the subject and the subject's husband served as a backdrop for the results of the study. For ease of the narrative, the subject and the subject's husband have been assigned the names Lina and Sabi, respectively. The female subject, Lina, was born July 7, 1963 in Lotome, Sudan, a village of 200-300 inhabitants not too far from the Ugandan border. The family's ethnic group was Lango, a community of Nilotic people, primarily agriculturists and nomadic people of southeastern region called East Equatoria. Lina, the second child in a family with a total of seven children, was about one year of age in 1964 when the family's village was burned by Arab soldiers. The villagers, including Sabi, went to a refugee camp in Uganda. In 1973 the villagers returned to another village in Sudan. Lina did not have exposure to the group's written language, written with the Roman alphabet, as a

child nor as an adult. The subject described the days of girls and women, "Many, many work, no sit."

In 1989 Lina and Sabi left Sudan, again, for a camp in Uganda. The family spent almost sixteen years in resettlement camps before arriving as refugees in the United States on September 23, 2004. Sabi reported that adjustment to life in America was "very difficult," and the family would have returned to Africa if not for the children. Lina regretted coming, had much frustration, a heavy heart, and a leg problem from the camp which returned with the cold weather experienced in Washington.

Lina initially attended ESL classes at the offices of World Relief, an international voluntary agency responsible for resettling refugees in the local area. In an interview, Lina's first teacher remembered a motivated, determined student with a zeal to learn. Class had been cancelled one cold, icy day. The teacher and most of the students did not go to class but Lina did. Unfortunately, the student fell and injured her leg. The teacher stated that Lina had indicated with gestures and piecemeal language that English class made the new, difficult life in America worthwhile. The classes were the lifeline, the comfort zone the refugee needed to find acceptance, encouragement and camaraderie. The student developed verbal and listening skills and enjoyed telling classmates stories about life in Africa, including the process of eating giraffe. The instructor reported that

Lina learned to properly hold a pencil and repeatedly practiced drawing lines and circles. The student did not catch on readily and the teacher suspected learning disabilities. The reported difficulties with written symbols and recognizing numbers on the telephone would not be inconsistent with pre-literate learners; however, Lina portrayed what the teacher understood to be descriptions of angry men, assault and resulting headaches. The instructor ended the interview by commenting that Lina's motivation, thirst for learning and drive was really inspiring.

Lina had apparently exhausted educational opportunities at World Relief; resources were provided for a limited time and then refugees were sent to work. Evidently, as Sabi related, Lina underwent an evaluation to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits due to leg problems associated with previous issues in Africa. A family counselor completed "Diagnostic Testing for Cognitive Educational Aptitude" in September of 2006. The government's determination was for no benefits because Lina had not accrued credit from a work history. The evaluator, a Registered Mental Health Counselor, stated in the report [Lina] "seems to have some learning disability" continuing that there was:

> . . . . poor mental focus or interest. It seems unlikely that [Lina] will be able to learn English through standard classroom teaching. It is possible if one on one tutoring was provided over a long enough period, but even this would have uncertain results. Further psychological testing is warranted

but unless an interviewer who speaks her native dialect is found this will not be possible---to rule out learning disabilities. (Pharoah, 2006)

In January of 2007, Lina was assessed and enrolled in ESL classes at the community college, accumulating ninety-five class hours throughout the quarter. During initial assessment the learner scored six out of a possible twelve on oral skills but was unable to do the CASAS FORM 27. By March the post-test showed a gain as the student correctly responded to seven of thirty items on FORM 28, equivalent to FORM 27. However, at the end of the following quarter Lina again was unable to do the exam. The pattern continued with a raw score of ten on the subsequent post-test at the end of summer quarter but no score at the end of fall quarter. Although the student made point gains on the alternate administrations of the exam, recognition and writing of simple, personal information words including the student's name eluded attainment.

That Lina was having a tremendous challenge to learning was no secret to the family. During the initial meeting of the author, the subject, and the subject's husband, the author sought permission to use the results of the case study for a masters project. Lina and Sabi discussed the situation and, although the author emphasized anonymity, Sabi stressed that the family wanted the story known, that knowledge of the difficulties and troubles experienced and then progress and success was important for people to see, particularly the individuals or systems

who had predicted failure. The description of Lina's intellectual isolation, struggles and expected achievements were described "where it was dark and now out". Sabi referred to the evaluation completed which indicated Lina was "incapable of learning". The author sensed a slight excitement, an anticipation of achievement on the part of Lina and Sabi. The very fact that there was interest in working with the subject seemed to elicit an encouraged, appreciative spirit. During this initial meeting the author learned of the previously documented information about Lina's background.

Lina, who had had a previous instructor/student relationship with the author, demonstrated a strengthened sense of kinship. During the first meeting, the subject pointed to a picture on the wall and told the author "me, mom; I, you, me, Africa" and gestured to indicate that the author should go with Lina to meet Lina's mother in Africa. Lina smiled and laughed with delight at the prospect when the author said what a good trip that would be. The occasion demonstrated that the line is fine between maintaining professional boundaries and exhibiting genuine interest and investment. Lina was a perfect example of a low level language learner needing every ounce of encouragement and personal attention to overcome barriers.

With Lina and Sabi's agreement, the author, as the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator, contacted a volunteer tutor about availability and interest in the match. An initial meeting was held. There was immediate affinity,

particularly as the tutor discovered that Lina's second daughter had assisted in childcare at the Sudanese English as a Second Language site, another off-campus classroom location. A schedule for sessions was arranged which included sessions during the scheduled class time of Lina's ESL level 1 class, in agreement with the ESL level 1 instructor. The author was to be an adjunct tutor.

Unfortunately, the tutor never showed up for tutoring sessions even after several attempts. Given the coordinator's investment in the project and the previously proposed participation as an adjunct tutor as well, the Literacy Tutor Program Coordinator assumed the role of sole tutor for Lina. Lina actually appeared to be very pleased with this new arrangement (Haven't most students welcomed one to one instruction by the teacher?) and continued to demonstrate positive acceptance with smiles and eagerness whenever the tutor appeared at the classroom door or the lab entrance.

Although tutoring was to commence with winter quarter, the tutor met with Lina early in December. The tutor wanted Lina to take another look at the the standardized test, the CASAS. In late November, Lina's classroom teacher had attempted to have Lina take the test. Lina did not seem to understand the task and answered two or three answers on each of the multiple choice questions, ending up with 0 for a score and the teacher's comment "not ready" In fact, Lina's ability to take the test had varied over the past three quarters.

Table 1

CASAS Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Appraisal/ Pre-test 1/02/07	Post –test 3/20/07	Post-test 6/05/07	Post-test 8/07/07	Post-test 11/28/07
Form 27	Form 28	Form 27	Form 28	Form 27
Scaled Score 0	Scaled Score 158	Scaled Score 0 “doesn’t understand”	Scaled Score 164	Scaled Score 0 “not ready"

The test consisted of multiple choice graphics with one letter or word prompts. For example, the item had a letter R for a prompt with P, R, T and L as the possible answers. Another item had an upper case letter for the prompt and a series of lower case letters for the possible answers. Yet another item gave a word in upper case letters and the answers were words in lower case letters. The tutor enlarged a few test items and showed only one item per page, as opposed to three items to a page, to see if the student was able to correctly answer any test questions when presented more simply. Lina had difficulty when the prompts and words moved from upper case to lower case and had two other errors in recognizing the correct word. However, the assistance of reading glasses made a noticeable difference on the last sample item.

During the summer quarter, when the tutor had been Lina’s classroom instructor, the instructor had given Lina a pair of reading glasses to see if the

magnification would aid in navigating the printed word. Lina reported the glasses helped ("good, good") but the benefits were not readily evident in the schoolwork done in class. Given the positive response (although no discernable results) during the summer, the tutor again gave Lina a pair of reading glasses to try when attempting to pick out the same word from a list of three words. Without the glasses, Lina picked SLOP instead of STOP (the prompt word) but immediately stated, "T" and recognized the correct word when the glasses were on. When the tutor inquired about an eye examination, Lina seemed to indicate that Sabi had an appointment for all the family. When talking about eyes Lina pointed to the sky "Africa, light, Africa, no good" and she touched her eyes.

Many times the words Lina used did not literally express the intended. A negotiation of meaning usually took place with the tutor repeating the information to Lina with a word or two clarified. Lina was very persistent in attempts to be thoroughly understood. If the interpretation was incorrect another attempt was made by Lina and in turn, the tutor, to negotiate the facts.

During a December interview, Lina was asked by the author to "Tell me your children" [Appendix B]. The student was unable to spell names that the author could not understand and was unable to provide ages or grades for the children. Pronouns were often mixed and Lina occasionally threw arms up and exclaimed "I don't know!" The tutor, not initially understanding Lina's "no more!" after stating the name of the final child, responded incorrectly by

repeating “normal?” Lina, more clearly said “no more” to which the tutor said, “Oh, no more---finish—now only grandbaby” Lina indicated agreement and both women laughed.

The initial tutoring session included talk of going to Yakima (Lina showed Immigration and Naturalization Service papers for resident status) and the oldest son’s expected return home for Christmas break. The concept of time was not refined as Lina knew the son would arrive on a Friday but didn’t know which week. Lina became animated at one point attempting to describe the son’s problem bringing a girlfriend and child from Africa and then agitation set in as Lina described a phone call to Africa, “Me, my mama, talking, no my mom sick—hospital, talking me—Lina sick.” During another encounter prior to Christmas, Lina again agitated spoke of having no money to send to Africa and no money for Christmas., “Me no money, I’m talking Mom, no money, problem, no eat …. My Mom live Sudan, coming border Uganda …. I’m talking friend, money give Mom, Mom big, no working ….” From the above statements and ensuing conversation the understanding was that the mother in Sudan needed money and the fact that Lina’s family did not have money to send to Sudan was distressing as well as the fact that there was not sufficient food or money for Lina’s family here. During the session, as well as in following sessions, Lina appeared to have a need to talk about the family events and concerns.

In late December the tutor delivered a Christmas box from a local church along with items added by the tutor and Lina's fall quarter classroom instructor. Unfortunately, although the eldest son was home from college he was not available to meet the tutor at the time. The tutor had hoped to gain additional information from the son. Lina missed classes the first week of winter quarter because the youngest child was ill. Tutoring sessions began mid-January.

The first January session was held in a small conference room in the ESL building. The room had natural lighting from a window as well as a white board for work. Lina worked with a tutor in the room during a few sessions in the late summer. The session began with Lina speaking of physical issues, "little, little [demonstrates eating motion] little food, hot, cough, Dr. [breathing deeply, touches chest] for me, this one—me talking, yesterday—stomach."

Physical or emotional concerns were often visible or declared at the beginning and even throughout sessions, yet Lina turned to the materials or task at hand with purpose. In this early session Lina began working with letters on little cards, attempting to spell her name. Although the student had difficulty distinguishing between h and n, A and V, and at first a u for an n, Lina obviously had been working on the last name at home. After the letter cards were lined up to spell both first and last names, Lina picked up the nearby notebook and began copying the names, saying each letter while writing. After completing the name in the notebook Lina declared "problem, telephone," to which the tutor inquired,

"You want to learn your telephone number?" "Yeah," the learner replied, "learn telephone, house number. For me, telephone 534-978." The tutor retrieved a desk phone, wrote down Lina's correct phone number, covered all the numbers and then uncovered number by number as Lina pressed the numbers. Much encouragement was provided during ten attempts at the numbers. Lina was very focused and motivated. Unfortunately, when an actual phone call was placed, the student's answering machine seemed to be filled and a message could not be left. "This phone, good," stated Lina, referring to the large keypad on the phone. The tutor wrote the phone number digits on cards and asked Lina to place the cards in the order of her phone number, giving the card with the complete written number as a reference. Lina worked left to right and corrected initial errors upon examining her work. The session ended with a reversion to physical and financial worries, "My mom call, Africa yesterday. Me sick, no $, medical. My husband workshop, Sabi, no working."

Lina was in the computer lab with classmates when the tutor approached for the January 22 session. The student's face lit up. (Later, a former classmate of Lina's told the tutor, "Lina very, very, much, much like you.") Since Lina's teacher and classmates were in the computer lab, the tutor and Lina went to the downstairs classroom to take advantage of the space and materials. A giant alphabet puzzle was constructed, fifteen feet of end-to-end letters. Lina displayed understandable errors in choosing letters—such as placing a W upside down as an

M--was able to look to the classroom's alphabet strip when needed and, with appropriate prompts from the tutor, adjusted the pieces to complete the puzzle. The student demonstrated the use of strategies—identified pieces the same color, turned pieces to determine correct orientation and attempted to name each letter. The tutor asked Lina about the pictures with the letters, relating the pictures to family or life experiences (e.g., lions "Africa" and yoyo "[youngest daughter] has". At the end of the session Lina squealed with delight as she laughed and smiled. "Today, good" [more laughter] "WOW!" Tutor, "That was good." Lina exclaimed, "Good, teacher, very good! Good! Good! I like! I like! I like!"

In subsequent sessions Lina reviewed writing and practiced calling the home phone number as well as repeated the desire to learn the home address, "I want number house, social security. Where do you live? Pasco." The tutor asked, "So you want to work on your address?" The student replied, "Yes, address." The tutor made dotted numbers for Lina to trace. The classroom instructor came by and praised Lina's work, "I'm so proud of you. It's beautiful." Lina said, "America, problem. I'm talking no me school. This one I go home, study." Homework packets consisted of pages of numbers to trace, from the *Access* workbook.

The season brought snow. Lina missed a couple of days and subsequently reported the attempts made to reach the tutor to tell about the absences. "No school, call teacher house. Ring, ring. No answer." Apparently, Sabi was

concerned [“husband leg, no go”] about Lina going to school the day after the closure because of ice on the road and Lina’s previous leg problems. With the discussion of Lina’s leg, the tutor mentioned that the tutor’s mother had just broken a hip. Lina had met the tutor’s mother when the tutor’s mother volunteered with the ESL classes the previous spring. Lina asked, “Mom, Canada?” and proceeded to tell that a sister was in Toronto and that five Sudanese friends were in Vancouver. The fact that a pre-literate student from around the world knew about Toronto and Vancouver, that the cities were in Canada, was surprising. The tutor believed the awareness hinted at a hidden knowledge base.

Continuing to use material authentic to the student’s life context, the tutor enlarged Lina’s ID card to 8 ½.by 11 inch size. The student was very pleased, actually excited, to see the large picture and personal information. The card was compared to the tutor’s driver’s license, providing an opportunity to discuss eye color, addresses, and birthdays. Progress through content was slow as much time was devoted to review and identification of letters and numbers and the actual mechanics of writing; task mastery that was important to Lina as illustrated in comments. “N, A, good ones. N good, A good. M good. A good, JJ problem [picked Js instead of Ls, then picked Ls] “Yeah, very good [pats letter] okay, no problem.”

Another day Lina reviewed sorted letter cards into a wooden box. Upper and lower case letters were in slots together, posing some challenges for correct

placement. After steady, deliberate effort coupled with tutor's guidance and encouragement, all the upper case letters were in order. Lina delightly clapped, grabbed the pencil and notebook and began printing letters from the box. Task accomplished, the smiling student pushed the notebook over for the tutor to see and said "homework" then "I copy this one," and pointed to the board where the alphabet was also written in upper and lower case letters.

Session work was often interspersed with remarks about concerns such as "Africa call, no cut, no cut." (Subsequent conversations shed light to interpret retrospectively as "I can't call Africa, no card, no card" as in no calling card.) or "Tomorrow names, I practice. Me no good today." During one session, Lina spoke disconcertedly of the sister in Canada and the sister's earlier passage from Sudan. "Wow. Sister run, sister husband teacher school Juba [Sudanese city]. UN problem—looking…take children home, running to Uganda, daughter Kenya, process UN. Kampala, big, big Uganda [big refugee camp in Uganda]…Africa, 2 planes." The sister's daughter had begun the process of emigration for the family through the UN process.

In mid-February the subject failed to attend ESL class on a Thursday and the following Monday. The classroom teacher had not received a call from Lina about the absence so the tutor called the home [see Appendix C for tutor's hospital visit log]. Sabi informed the tutor that Lina was in the hospital and encouraged the tutor to visit the student. Lina appeared comforted to see the

tutor, commented about poor sleep in recent nights but stated “Good you come hospital. Me sleep good, see teacher. Today me see teacher, me happy, me sleep. Good. Good, Mamma.” For the following two and one half hours the tutor and student shared the now familiar seesaw word exchange to negotiate meaning. The student told of life in the Ugandan refugee camps—five children had been born. Lina decribed how the physical problems began after arrival in America and increasingly worsened. During this time the student also mentioned friends and relatives in both Toronto and Vancouver. Lina requested the tutor remain until Sabi arrived and then referred to the visit in tired, positive tones, “Talking good you …. good mama, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” An endoscopy examination the following day confirmed the tutor’s suspicions. Lina had ulcers.

Lina returned to ESL class February 25. Prior to the two weeks of absence, Lina was being excused from the regular classroom to work with the tutor one-to-one at least twice a week. During the two weeks the tutor had began teaching another level one ESL class to which Lina and three classmates had been transferred. The tutor had informed Lina, during the hospital visit, of the new class and the transfer. Upon return on the 25th, Lina joined the other students in the classroom. The transition to this classroom was natural and smooth for Lina as the group was small, with familiar classmates (including one from three previous quarters) and the tutor, now the classroom instructor. Lina worked with

flashcards while the other students continued with sentence work adapted to individual skill level.

Lina missed class the next day for an appointment at the medical clinic. The following day class began at the round conversation table in the lab. Lina . arrived a few minutes late but readily took a chair and joined in. Four other students and the teacher were already at the table. General conversation flowed easily and shifted to a discussion about children and language. The teacher asked about which language the students used with children in the home. Lina recounted that the youngest child, a five-year-old, did not pay attention when spoken to in the native tongue which Lina simply called "language". Lina acted this out by calling the child's name and showing that the child continued to look the other way; however, only when Lina spoke in English did the girl respond. The teacher spoke about the benefit of children having both native language and English. Lina emphatically told the classmates at the table, "English number one, language number two. Good." A little shake of the arm punctuated the statement. Lina appeared to be on a roll and excited to be sharing, to be taking the spotlight. The fact that this challenged student was concerned with the children learning English and recognized the importance of English as primary language in America was impressive.

The class eventually moved to the classroom for an entry writing task. The student writing on the board was left-handed so the teacher used the

opportunity to review “right” and “left”. During discussion Lina spoke of two brothers who were left-handed. The parents required that right hands, rather than left, were used. Lina humorously mimicked how the brothers’ behaved, first using left hands than switching to right when parents arrived.

Lina appeared extremely comfortable with the small classroom setting, participating eagerly and animatedly, as described above. In previous ESL classes, with both the current instructor and the most recent instructor, Lina seemed distracted by, and had complained about, the greater number of students and the use of Spanish by the predominant ethnic group. The current, smaller class added a new student the day before when Lina was absent—Maria, a Spanish speaking woman about two years older than Lina, also pre-literate.

Lina missed at least two days each of the remaining few weeks of the quarter due to illness or appointments. Lina and Maria worked side by side on a computer web program which repeated the names of the letters of the alphabet. Afterward, the two students worked with the teacher while classmates took an examination with another class. The teacher had sheets of color paper and held the papers up for Lina and Maria to give the name of the color. Maria did not know the colors. This provided Lina an opportunity to shine. Maria knew “pink” and “black.” Lina was able to give most of the colors (mispronounced grey and didn’t know blue). The second time the teacher held the printed color name up and said the name as the students found the color. Maria took the color and the

word and put them together in a pile. Lina said “number one” and “line” gesturing that Maria should line the colors up with the word, as opposed to stacking them altogether. With a later color Lina reminded, “no, line” when Maria did not lay the colors out. The teacher held up the word purple, pointed to the first letter and gave the sound. Lina said, “Purple,” and the teacher said “Yes, puh, like in [name of city] and [name of Lina’s oldest child]. Lina commented about the recognition, upon hearing from the UN agency, that the family was coming to a place in America with a name which sounded very close (one letter different) to the daughter’s name. Maria, taking the lead this time, worked cooperatively with Lina matching upper and lower case letters. The cooperative learning experience continued to reinforce the bond that was developing between the two ladies in a short time.

Another day Lina and Maria worked on computers—*Triple Play* program in the numbers section and also the web alphabet exercise–and then conversed with a tutor. Lina pointed out that the watch worn was not working (and said something about the plan to have a son fix it). The following day Lina missed class. Maria had a watch box and said the watch was for Lina. The teacher encouraged Maria to bring the box the next day. Unfortunately, Lina attended class the next day but Maria did not. Lina first worked on the computer programs then joined the teacher in the conference room to work on the alphabet, numbers and address. Other classmates remained in the lab.

Lina wore a worried look, shook head, looked away, touched head and said, “No good,” The teacher acknowledged the distress and mirrored the worried look, “You are worried,” to which Lina replied, “Yes, appointment tomorrow.” The burdened student went on, “Me mama died…yesterday me call Uganda…Daddy died, Daddy why,” holding up two fingers. The teacher asked,” Your daddy died and your mama died?” Lina responded, “Me daddy why two mom died, Sabi me, Daddy two, my Daddy why.” “Ah,” the teacher questioned, “your daddy had two wives?” (The teacher had not been told of the stepmother, yet.) Lina reacted emphatically, “YES!” relieved at finally being understood. The teacher continued, “One of his wives died?” “Yes.” “Where is your other mom?” “Sudan. No telephone Sudan.”

After a little chitchat the teacher asked Lina to state the home address, to which the student replied, “I don’t know. Twenty-four.” The teacher drew a little house and put a little sign by the upper left corner of the front door as the sign is at Lina’s house. A photograph had been taken of the house as well as the street sign for a lesson, but the teacher did not have the photo at hand. When the teacher pointed to the drawing of the little sign and asked what number went on the sign the student answered correctly, “420”. The student then was asked about the name of the street, “…on the sign…is it a green sign?” Lina again answered correctly, “Agate” but could not spell the street name. When unable to correctly state the complete phone number the student exclaimed, “Problem sick---

everyday me no coming sick, problem telephone—I coming everyday, everyday, telephone good." Lina continued, "Everyday appointment practice at home," The teacher asked, "You practice at home when you can't come to class? Who helps you?" Lina responded by naming two daughters. Following more alphabet work the pleased student clapped and said, "Good, good. Good—good job today! Long, long, long, Lina no coming."

Before leaving Lina acknowledged the absence of the previous day, and stated, "Sabi go tests," and gestured that Sabi thought attendance was necessary because it was the end of the quarter testing time and that another appointment was scheduled for the next day. Lina related that the eldest daughter was watching the youngest after kindergarten so Lina could be at school all morning, instead of leaving at 10:45 as usual to get home before the school bus. Lina completed the CASAS Reading Form 27 post-test and scored ten points higher than the last successful completion of the test.

The next week Lina attended class and reported that the previous doctor's appointment showed the ulcers were smaller, "Me hospital, doctor [motion for scope] smaller, smaller." While the news shared was good, Lina was obviously moved with sadness when learning that Maria's classroom visit was brief because of a sister's death. Maria wanted homework so the teacher showed both students a *ACCESS* workbook packet for practicing name, first and last, and some matching and circle the word exercises. Lina worked on the packet making two or three

mistakes, self-corrected relatively quickly when reading glasses were supplied (apparently the previously given ones had broken). The teacher, as both tutor and instructor, felt frustration over the eyeglass issue. On more than one occasion Lina had responded that eye appointments were set up. The teacher had written a note for Sabi asking about the appointments, but nothing appeared to have been done. Lina commented, "Appointment, glass," and pointed to the glasses before continuing, "appointment, many, many appointments—finish, I'm sick, going appointment La Clinica."

The following day the teacher had to break the news to Lina that the small morning class would not continue so both Lina and Maria would be transferring back to the larger, downstairs class. Last fall Lina had had an incident in which students moved Lina's books from one table to another. Lina had described the incident to the teacher with much agitation. Because the teacher had shared the incident with the current teacher, the situation was recognized when Lina began relaying the story and appeared distraught over the news of returning to the large classroom. Lina seemed somewhat calmed when the teacher reiterated that Maria would be in the class and seemed further reassured when the teacher said that two spots would be reserved at the front table. Lina gave a smile and headed to the computers to work. The morning ended on a good note with two classes watching *The Gods Must be Crazy*, a movie about Africa that Lina loved and had brought the previous summer to share with the class.

Lina did not attend the next and final day of the quarter but did arrive the following day when the teacher was about to leave the building for a workshop. Lina had baked Sudanese bread for both ESL teachers. The teacher made arrangements to visit meet Lina and Sabi the next day for a concluding interview with Sabi and an opportunity to explain the next quarter's classroom assignments.

The following day the teacher, reverting to role of tutor/author, met with Lina and Sabi for another interview to round out the gathered information. During this interview, Sabi admitted lacking knowledge of the process for obtaining an optical exam through the welfare system. The tutor pledged to determine the details to share with the family and to assist the process in any way.

At this final meeting Lina's husband stated that the recent physical problems experienced had "cleared up" [referring to ulcers healing] but seemed to return on March 20 when there was pain in the "same place." Sabi said, "The disease comes and goes, maybe a stone in the gall bladder" and reported that another appointment was scheduled for Monday, March 24 at a Hematology and Oncology Clinic. The medicine Lina continued to take four times a day made her very sleepy and made study difficult.

The week following the interview the tutor called Lina's home to see how Lina was feeling and to provide information regarding optical examinations. The university student son, home for spring break, answered the telephone and reported that Lina was not home and that she was doing okay. The tutor

explained the details about the optical examinations and the son agreed to pass the information along to Sabi. The son gave an e-mail address to the tutor for a brief e-interview to attempt clarification of family facts after the university break ended.

Spring quarter began but Lina did not attend the first week of classes. The tutor called Lina and asked, ""Are you okay?" and told the absent student, "We wondered, "Where's Lina? Is she sick?" Your teacher wondered, "Where's Lina?" I worried, "Is Lina in hospital"" At the questions, Lina laughed, sounding pleased at the call, pleased with the teachers' worries and responded with a sing-songy, light, "okay" to the tutor's, "I'll see you."

The next week Lina was in class. The classroom instructor had the opportunity to devote most of one class period to individual work with the student. The session was an excellent review and reinforcement of the alphabet and personal information as well as enthusiastic rehearsing of the alphabet song which Lina had been introduced to in the teacher's class a year before. Lina demonstrated progress, yet limited, on retention of personal information. The next day Lina expressed delight at the previous day's work. The one on one session had provided a great opportunity for further teacher student connection as a foundation for the quarter. The next day Lina brought bread for the teacher and tutor.

The following week the tutor met with Lina for a couple of sessions, and continued work with the colored index cards given to Lina with names of three daughters. Each name was written on two cards; one card cut into a few pieces as a puzzle, the second card for reference. The letters of each name were also written on separate little cards. All the cards for each name were a specific color as chosen by Lina to represent each child. Lina drew pictures of the girls on larger, correspondingly colored pieces of paper and wrote the name for each girl. The student distinguished the eldest child with a necklace. Lina matched the name cards to the drawings and practiced spelling the names with the letter cards.

In an unusual twist, the eldest daughter was assessed and assigned to the tutor's evening ESL class. Through an extended verbal dance to negotiate meaning, Lina explained to the tutor that the daughter was returning to English classes because of difficulty reading forms at the hospital and other places. Lina persistently re-phrased and gestured until the tutor totally understood. The student delightfully nodded and clapped, exclaiming, "Yes, yes!"

The spring quarter classroom teacher related Lina's positive participation during subsequent days in the ESL class. The student volunteered to help with the morning greetings on the board and demonstrated a greater confidence within the classroom setting. Lina was able to recognize eight months on printed cards, and with repetition and scaffolding, was able to put the cards in order. The spring class consisted of about half the number of students as the fall had and

included one male classmate from Africa. The tutor continued volunteer tutoring of Lina on a less frequent basis as the student appeared to benefit and to be content with the classroom setting. The student eventually arrived at class with eyeglasses.

Findings

Data gleaned from observations, document examination and interviews all pointed to the significant role of non-cognitive issues in a pre-literate student's learning experience. The middle-aged Sudanese immigrant failed to achieve academically at the rate expected not only due to pre-literacy but also because physical problems and limitations as well as social and psychological concerns handicapped learning. The choice of instructional strategies and attention to affective issues played a role in the progress the student did realize.

Non-cognitive issues, such as vision correction needs and physical illness, were major factors in the learning process and academic pace. The subject had not had an optical examination but appeared and reported to see better with the help of reading glasses. The subject's implication that the sun in Africa had either harmed the eyes or created eye discomfort also pointed to the need for a thorough eye examination. Physical problems manifested as severe pain in both a leg and the abdomen created an impasse to learning on many occasions while general abdominal discomfort appeared frequently. When the physical issues were treated, pain medication complicated the subject's ability to access, retain and

retrieve information. In addition, frequent school absences resulted from the pain, the diagnostics and the treatment (including hospitalization) of the medical conditions. Absences and shortened study time also reflected other family health issues and a child's kindergarten schedule.

The study results showed distressing and distracting affective states were key elements in the subject's concentration and cognitive difficulties. In particular, stress from the financial worries of a large family with the head of household out of work, stress from refugee and resettlement issues, and stress from the language learning situation frequently arose.

The subject exhibited a strong motivation for learning despite physical and negative affective issues as evidenced by continued access of ESL services. All three ESL instructors reported that the student attended class during severe weather, pain or illness. The subject's delight at accomplishment, the drive to negotiate meaning until correct, and the strategies and self-direction displayed during tutoring sessions and home study attested to the passion for learning.

The study reinforced the theory that pre-literate learners performed better when instruction was tailored to the special needs of the individual including content within the context of the student's life. Hands-on activities were particularly embraced by the subject and aided in the retention of information.

At the conclusion of the study the subject showed CASAS score gain, better penmanship and better production of personal information.

The student's affect appeared brightened. Had sharing the family's story and the subject's struggles with the author/tutor aided in the lightening of the student's psychological load? Hari, in *The Translator* observed, "It helps many people just to have someone listen and write their story down: if their suffering is noted somewhere, by someone, anyone, then they can more easily let loose of it because they know where it is" (p.80). In the smaller ESL class of the new quarter the subject, with improved health, displayed greater sense of comraderie, participation, and self-esteem as well as greater retention of basic content.

Discussion

The project was ambitious—the attempt to promote accelerated language acquisition in a student that had made little progress in three years of living in the United States, including at least one year of formal ESL study. Educators often have recognized non-academic challenges students faced, including physical difficulties. However obvious the problems that existed, instructors repeatedly have underestimated the extent the issues have impacted the overall course of learning. The physical and affective obstacles which surfaced in the study appeared key to the subject's learning impasse.

Summary

A case study of an adult level one ESL student at a community college in Eastern Washington yielded evidence of multiple factors in the pace of a pre-literate student's acquisition of basic survival skills. Observations during one-to-

one tutoring, small group and pair work as well as interviews of the subject's ESL instructors and family provided data. The forty-four-year-old female Sudanese student was found to have multiple affective and non-cognitive issues including refugee background and health matters that interfered with the learning process. Instructional interventions, attention to affective concerns, and resolution and treatment of medical conditions allowed the student to engage more fully in the academic activities. Although serious medical issues precluded vast improvements during the limited period, the study provided evidence of student enthusiasm and ability to progress.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The author sought to examine the situation of a pre-literate student unable to satisfactorily progress in an ESL classroom setting. Characteristics of pre-literate learners, refugee concerns, affective issues and instructional approaches were appraised. Recommendations for language instructors and programs were given based on the findings of the case study.

Summary

The English language learner population, including many refugees and immigrants with little or no formal schooling, has exploded in recent years. The educational needs of the new residents, along with the increased performance accountability foisted on adult basic education programs by the state and federal authorities, has created a need to maximize the learning situation. The study has shown the value of addressing the affective and non-cognitive issues with low level English language students while employing methods and approaches particularly efficacious for pre-literate learners.

The study took the form of a case study of a forty-four-year-old Sudanese woman unable to read and write basic survival level English such as names of family members, including self, as well as personal information such as address and telephone number. The subject, a student in a community college ESL

program, was offered one-to-one tutoring in order to provide additional academic support. The most effective instructional activities employed were contextualized, concrete, multi-sensorial and kinesthetic. Interviews and observations during the tutoring and classroom activities furnished data.

The review of literature provided a broad base for approaching the challenges of pre-literate students learning English. The literature recognized the perspectives of both the educator and the learner. Concerns and characteristics common to the individual without exposure to written language established a starting point and the section on instructional strategies and approaches offered practical application of methodology. Non-cognitive learning issues, while not unique to the pre-literate student, profoundly affected the student lacking academic anchors.

Methods and materials highlighted in the literature review addressed both the special academic needs of the pre-literate learner as well as affective issues seen in ESL students. The review of instructional strategies and approaches encompassed research-based best practices for all learners as well as methodology specifically accommodating of pre-literacy needs. Information gathered on student motivation, life situations and barriers better positioned instructors to be reflective and facilitative in the creation of authentic materials and learning environments.

Exploration of the literature regarding physical, psychological, and sociological considerations for educating the pre-literate learner pointed to a variety of approaches and materials to ensure appeal to diverse learning styles, strengths, challenges and personal histories. Such differentiation of instruction has proven effective for all learners but particularly the pre-literate.

Examination of the geographical and political background of the Sudanese experience provided a setting for understanding the conditions many pre-literate refugees have encountered prior to resettlement in the United States. The legacy of national unrest played a major role in the accessibility of education and the psychological readiness of students to learn, both in Africa and in the United States.

The results of the study revealed motivation, stress and physical problems as major themes. Although the subject's inconsistency in completing the CASAS exams (during alternate attempts) and the lack of progress were both possible symptoms of learning disabilities, the signs were not inconsistent with affective or physical interference, or pre-literacy. Although the purpose of the study was to discover effective instructional methods to help a pre-literate learner, a major finding was the significant impact of affective issues on the subject. Stevick (as cited by Arnold, 1999) perhaps best summed up the role of affect in language learning. In response to the question "Why do some language learners learn better than others?" Stevick answered, "…. success depends less on materials,

techniques, and linguistic analysis, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (p. 26).

Conclusions

The subject's specific challenges involved far more than the obvious hurdles of pre-literacy. Physical problems manifested included corrective vision needs, ulcers and leg numbness with accompanying pain. The observed and stated anxiety over financial issues, the reported stress over family issues in the homeland and presumed homesickness as well as other affective conditions of the learner and learning environment all played a part in the student's encumbered acquisition of reading and writing English skills.

The suspicion of learning disabilities arose in the minds of all three ESL instructors of the subject. However, whether learning disabilities were present was less relevant than resolution of physical issues and the student's displayed commitment to learning.

The application of a variety of approaches and considerations for promoting educational progress in pre-literate learners proved appropriate for the subject. The student demonstrated sufficient motivation, familial support, and progress, albeit slow, that the author was convinced the subject was capable of mastering basic survival English skills. While strategies and instructional focus were instrumental, student progress and learning pace were largely influenced by the subject's strengths, areas of need and personal experience.

Recommendations

What a student brings to the learning situation is of no small significance to the learning process. Not only the academic background, but also the emotional experiences, social history and mental state play a major role in the ability and readiness to acquire new material. English as a Second Language learners embark on the English language learning journey with a wide spectrum of history and experience.

Based on the results of the study the author strongly recommends thorough student intakes or the creation of student strengths and needs profiles early in the educational process to enable referrals and accommodations, and the development of appropriate, contextualized curricula. Teachers should provide opportunity and support for pre-literate students to develop an oral foundation and communicative relationships before written production. An instructor's spirit of sensitivity to the students' stories will honor culture and personal dignity, nurture identity, and facilitate classroom contributions and cooperation. Concrete, multi-sensorial activities that bring good humor will reduce tension and help to build comaraderie. The author also recommends instructors practice flexibility and cultivate intuition to capitalize on teachable moments, and access the services of volunteer tutors to encourage interpersonal and community ties and provide additional student support and classroom observation.

Instructors must be cognizant of the affective climate of the classroom and sensitive to the affective states of students, especially when learners have special challenges such as pre-literacy. Teachers should be reflective and observant of bias and affect of self and students in order to nurture a positive learning situation. In addition, the author recommends that educators and institutions assess and adapt the physical attributes of the classroom for optimal lighting, arrangement and temperature. Particular attention to sound management is critical for language learners.

Recommendations specific to subject of the study include continued one-to-one tutoring using identified instructional strategies to reinforce material studied in the ESL classroom, and to provide opportunity for affective support. Tutors and instructors should encourage the student to maintain regular physical examinations and vision correction as prescribed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Information gathered from interviews of the subject, the subject's husband, and the subject's eldest son. Except when specifically noted otherwise, the quotes are the subject's husband's:

The female subject, Lina, was born July 7, 1963 in Lotome, Sudan, a village of 200-300 inhabitants not too far from the Ugandan border. The population swelled to 700-1000 when the climate was good for growing crops. When the rains arrived the land was plentiful ("rains come so yield well") and there was good produce. When there was not enough rain there were "not so many animals" and wells were dug of necessity. The village was made up of huts configured in a circle with common fire, shared area and animals in the center. Lina's husband described the village as "everybody living together". Animals were taken outside the circle to graze. The subject's eldest son, stated that the family's ethnic group was Lango, a community of Nilotic people, primarily agriculturists and nomadic people of southeastern Sudan, near the Ugandan border in a region called East Equatoria. The term Nilotic was originally based on the Nile Valley but now primarily refers to ethnolinguistic affiliation. Sabi reported that Lina spoke four languages-Acholi, a language which spans Uganda and Sudan; local Arabic, not the classic which has details; Karamojong, of Northeastern Uganda; and Lotuho of Southern Sudan (Gordon, 2005).

Lina, the second child in a family with a total of seven children, was about one year of age in 1964 when the village was burned by Arab soldiers. The villagers went to a refugee camp in Uganda. Lina's husband, also a child in the village at the time, described subsequent village fires in which the soldiers went around the village communal fire burning hands of the people who would not answer questions about rifles or people.

In 1973, the villagers returned to another village in Sudan in which Lina's mother remained when Lina and Sabi left in 1989, again for a camp in Uganda. Lina and Sabi had married when Lina was about 17. Sabi commented that with the payment of 100 goats and 15 cows for Lina, as was tradition, the bride became the bridegroom's responsibility. The young man was about 20. The great celebration to declare the shift of responsibility included dancing, killing of goats and drinking of bitter beer "thick like porridge".

The village in Sudan was about two days on foot to reach the shops in the city. Young Lina was busy "taking care of household"---tending the garden and shouldering responsibility for cooking while the mother was dealing with garbage, "scaring animals" (baboons and red and green monkeys), getting water and caring for the family's animals. Lina also took food to the mother. Water was scarce in the village as the area had no lakes so wells were used when the seasonal rivers went dry.

In the village culture girls did not go to school as the belief was that school girls would go to work in the town instead of getting married. Later, traditions changed and girls were allowed to attend school, providing more nurses for the community claimed Sabi. The family's native tongues had a written language using the Roman alphabet but Lina did not have exposure to written language or to letters. Even though the boys attended classes, the girls did not see the material. Sabi said the girls' busy work of "collecting vegetables and water and grinding**"** left "no time to check on work of boys". Lina added, "Many, many work, no sit."

Lina's husband had gone to school in Uganda and in Sudan. More education followed at a Technology Institute for one year. The mechanical maintenance study involved repair of old motor vehicles so Sabi believed the knowledge was useless. Sabi worked in a nursery when the family was in resettlement camps.

The author discovered tribal definition of family relationships to be less rigid than American labels. Hari, in *The Translator*, states "In tribal life, cousins are as close as brothers and sisters" (p.49). Statements most consistently reported that Lina had four brothers, one older, and two sisters "behind" her. The statements that brothers lived Idaho and Maine and a sister in Toronto did not reconcile with statements that the three living brothers and two sisters were in

Sudan. Sabi explained that a father's brother is also regarded as "father" as the uncle would assume the role in the event of the brother's death. Therefore, sons and daughters of the paternal uncle were considered brothers and sisters. The author assumed, after further conversations, that the siblings in North America are actually cousins. Lina's father, second wife and one sister lived in Uganda. The father died while the family was already immersed in the UN process to leave Africa, prohibiting participation in the family grieving. For three years after coming to the United States, until February 2008, the family had had no contact with Lina's biological mother, left behind when the family went to the Ugandan refugee resettlement camp in 1989.

The family spent over fifteen years in refugee camps in Uganda before resettling in the United States. Three children were born while the family was in Kiryandongo refugee camp, about nine years. The two youngest children were born after the famly resettled in Kyangwali. At some point Sabi stayed in Kitgum camp.

In the camp there were many different languages even within one tribe. "So many dialects---the difference in languages would be like people in [one town] not understanding people in [an adjacent town]". Sabi reported that food distributed in the camp was about five to six cups of beans and a wastebasket full size of rice for a month for the family. The refugees also received one or two 100 kilo sized bags of "maize" or corn. In addition, each family had a little space to

cultivate fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables, beans, and peanuts, sometimes selling harvest for a low price. According to Sabi, the family did not go hungry. Lina, on another occasion, however, implied that food was meager at times.

Initially the refugees lived in tents in the camps but made huts after a few months. Sabi reported that up to 19,000 residents were in one of the camps at the highest population. In the camps school was expensive so education for the children was limited.

The family arrived in the United States on September 23, 2004. Had the family been prepared for facing a new way of life and new behaviors? "Yes," stated Sabi, "The angels [agencies? who brought them over] "show us how to use" appliances and other American processes. However, Sabi admitted when the famly arrived in America adjustment was "very difficult," and the thoughts were "if not for children" the family would return to Africa. It was "so hard to stay here---due to this sickness—[she] regretted" coming. Sabi recalls telling Lina it would "take time," but now says, "that time not good…She deteriorate…all this due to frustration, how to survive, how to end situation." Sabi reported that the well-being of the family in Sudan and Uganda was of great concern to Lina, filled with worry especially upon arrival. Sabi said Lina's heart was affected "thinking too much of mother." The man also stated that the weather was difficult, "coldness—very cold—now it's okay." Lina had problems with her

leg the previous summer, reminiscent of problems that arose in the refugee camp. Sabi described the initial problem in camp. [It was] “paralyzed…not feel; numb, and hand”. Local medicine rubbed all over seemed to heal the problem in Africa. But when exposed to the cold in the United States the problem “started again”.

When the author queried if Lina wanted to be a secretary, doctor, nurse, teacher, if Lina had dreams for other work No, “…too late” Lina claimed to be “Old enough. Too late, too late, no working**.** Sabi said that Lina “better just remain---and to learn, to read the streets, the time and money” “To shopping,” Lina added.

During one interview a visitor came to front door telling Lina and Sabi’s son to encourage the family to ride the church bus to Easter celebrations. The dialog sounded as if some of the girls had visited the church before. Sabi commented to the tutor [I] “cannot change religion. If I were Muslim I would remain Muslim, I am Christian. I remain for my church.” Sabi went to seminary for 1 year when he was fourteen or fifteen and had recently inquired about sending sons to seminary or daughters to convent but found out the children would need to be much older. The family attended a local Catholic parish.

APPENDIX B

December interview with subject:

During this session the tutor asked Lina to “Tell me your children”.

Lina: number one girl. [P E L]. This one baby.

Tutor: has new baby? (Lina knew the tutor was aware of the baby’s birth in September) How old? (showed fingers)

Lina: me, no, my husband, me no (i.e, didn’t know how old) number two, Michael

Tutor: how old? (repeated,)…M has a wife?

Lina: yes

Tutor: yes, wife

Lina: wise, I don’t know

Tutor: wife…M married [showed ring] in Africa?

Lina: yes, Africa (negotiation of meaning was based on the information that the tutor had gained when previously visiting Lina and Sabi)

APPENDIX C

Tutor log entry from February 11 and 12, 2007:

Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Pasco, Washington, Room 224.

L had not been to class Thursday or Monday. I called to her home about 1 PM. S informed me that L was in hospital and had been there since Friday. I understood him to say they didn't know what was wrong; maybe something with the heart. With his encouragement, I headed to the hospital, to room 224.

I entered L's room quietly after the nurse assured me that she was awake. Her face and eyes, while showing fatigue, medication effects and anxiety, evidenced her comfort at seeing me. She motioned for me to go around the end of the bed and sit close. A stray tear trickled down the far side of her face as I spoke with her. She indicated that her head didn't feel right "no good, no good"

As time passed L motioned that she needed to use the restroom so I called the nurse for assistance as a catheter bag was still in place as was an IV. Her feet felt very cold so I asked for socks for her. I rubbed her feet to warm them and massaged away my tutor role. The nurse inquired if I had suggestions for her in communicating with L. I replied that she really did understand a fair amount, spoken clearly and with gestures.

I sat by her bedside for two and one-half hours and we settled into our familiar speech pattern to negotiate meaning. Her few words, my active listening, filling in the blanks, ending with a question mark; her affirmative response or new

attempt at explanation. She told me that her husband had worked in a nursery, growing many plants. She spoke of the lack of irrigation systems in the area. She pointed to the wastebasket and said that was the amount of rice in the camp and beans two times the size of the paper cup on the table. I asked "one day? one week? one month?" She replied that was from the UN (United Nations) for one week. I wondered about nutrition, hunger. I learned that five of her children had been born in the refugee camp in Uganda. We started talking about breastfeeding babies. She said as she patted her breast "no food, no baby good" My translation which, she confirmed "if mama doesn't have enough food, not enough milk for baby."

The bed made a regular groaning sound which I found annoying and was obviously somewhat discomforting to L. I later found out from the nurse that the bed adjusts in order to reduce bedsores. I wondered if that had been explained to L. At one point L commented that she had not slept well in the past days but stated "Good you come hospital. Me sleep good, see teacher." She continued, "Today me see teacher, me happy, me sleep. Good. Good. Mamma." In tutoring sessions when she comments "good, good" she gives an emphasized nod of the head with each "good" but this time her weary head rested on the pillow.

We talked, in our seesaw exchange of words. We talked of family; we talked of Africa and of her pain in her stomach area. Through motions and words including "America sick" it was evident that she had not had the pain in Africa. I

wondered if perhaps her problem was ulcers. She motioned to her chest and spoke of “doctor” and “tomorrow”. I asked if she was going to have a test tomorrow. I later confirmed with the nurse that she would have endoscopy in the morning. Several times she touched her head and stated **“**not working good”.

I thought that L’s husband would be showing up soon but the time was slipping by. L borrowed my phone and called home. [I dialed.] I think she was verifying that S was going to come by. Or, maybe she just wanted to check in as a mother does. Later, when I indicated that I should leave she protested and indicated that I should stay. I think she said something like “no, no, S” I asked if she wanted me to stay until he came, and she did.

During that time she had me help her drink. It was a homemade concoction, I believe with some rice. I thought about hospital food, American food, and how different our diet must be, how comforting for her to have a mix from home. We chatted about food in Africa, including mangoes and papaya (she pointed to the curtain, the color of fruit) and described the huge fruit.

We talked about her sister in Toronto and she mentioned Vancouver. I was just amazed, again, at her knowledge about these the two large Canadian cities. So many Americans are ignorant of the country to the north.

L listed the names of her nine children. 1-9. As our visit wound down, L again referred to my visit in tired, but positive tones, “talking good you…good mama, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” When I left I mentioned to S that I

would want to know how she was doing the next day. He suggested I should come, again.

The following day I showed up at the hospital in mid-afternoon. L's husband and daughter were just leaving. He showed me a color photo from her examination. She had ulcers.