ESL Literacy Instruction

A GUIDEBOOK TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Dedicated to Thomas Peter Collins

Foreword

Viewpoint 1

What is the justification for yet one more methods book in the language arts? That is a question that has been posed by many over the past twenty-five years or more. Although there has been a proliferation of methods texts and perhaps needless duplication of information, there is still clearly a dearth of theoretically sound guidance in the area of literacy instruction for ESL students.

The writing of *ESL Literacy Instruction*, then, has been undertaken in response to the needs of experienced teachers, but especially to the needs of teachers just embarking on a career in ESL teaching. It is not a methods text in the traditional sense; it is a resource for teachers, teacher educators, and in-service leaders to assist in the development of programs for ESL students of all ages.

This volume bears the mark of scholarship. What is particularly noteworthy is that *ESL Literacy Instruction* is not an instructional cookbook. It honors teachers by recognizing their role as professionals. The teacher is never seen as a mere purveyor of information, the transmitter of what has been endorsed and sanctioned by policy makers. The teacher is assumed to be a professional decisionmaker, the stimulus to and promoter of learning—not the first cause.

Lee Gunderson's book, then, offers choices, not a prescription for learning. The ESL teacher is presented with a rich source of ideas and approaches. But these ideas are always within the context of a theoretical framework that provides the reader with a rationale for the author's suggestions. The book is a starting point for a the teacher who needs specific ideas and techniques. But the teacher is given a freedom to move immediately beyond the specifics—to extend and improvise because she has been given the basis for the ideas and the theory driving them. Such an approach is essential to all staff development but especially to the development in the area of ESL, where the clientele is even more diverse than it is in first-language classrooms.

Carl Braun
Professor of Educational Psychology
University of Calgary

Viewpoint 2

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body" wrote Sir Richard Steele in the early eighteenth century. Without exercise the body becomes listless; without reading the mind grows dull. Effective teaching of reading to ESL students opens the door to a new culture for them—to its literary art, its world of the imagination, its abstract thought, its philosophy and morals, its humor, its business world, its day-to-day social encounters, its communication system.

But the teaching of reading to students who do not have full control of English structures and vocabulary is a complex process, particularly when some of those students have learned to read using a different symbol system. Because teacher-training programs in ESL (or in any other field of teaching, for that matter) are imperfect, teachers need texts that will not only provide answers to today's questions but will also enable them to continue to experiment with new methods and materials day after day. That is, they need texts that will allow them to grow professionally. One of my favorite sayings is, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory." Lee Gunderson has provided his readers with sound theory on which to build their reading program. He has then outlined a variety of activities but has left it up to his readers to design programs that suit the age range and backgrounds of their students.

This is an important book. First, by taking into account what is special about ESL students, it points up the inadequacy of using only approaches advocated for use with speakers of English as a first language. Second, being comprehensive, clear, and practical, the book provides teachers with the information and skills they need to enhance their teaching of reading—thus increasing their students' chances of success.

One evening, many years ago, after my class of adult ESL students had left, I noticed a woman still sitting at her desk, crying—but her face was radiant! We had been reading Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." "I have loved poetry in my own language ever since I can remember," she said haltingly. "I never dared to hope I could love poetry in English." Reading had opened the door to poetry in her second culture. If I had known then what I know now about the teaching of reading to ESL students, I could have opened the door much faster! Lee Gunderson's book provides the answers many teachers are looking for.

Mary Ashworth
Professor of Language Education, Emerita
Ganges, British Columbia

Preface

THE STATE OF THE ART OF ESL READING INSTRUCTION

Students for whom English is a second language (ESL) are a substantial portion of the population in many school districts across the United States and Canada. Many schools in such places as San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Jose, Miami, Chicago, New York, Toronto, Vancouver, and Edmonton have more ESL students than they do native English-speaking students. The California department of education, for instance, reported that 12.6 percent of the state's school population had "a primary language other than English." These students were described as "limited-English proficient" (LEP). In addition, 12.1 percent were described as students who had a primary language other than English, but were "fluent-English-proficient." Nearly one quarter of the State's four million students had a primary language other than English. The number of LEP students increased 21.5 percent from 1982 to 1985 (Honig, 1985).

Special English classes at all levels enroll students in oral English development programs. Most often they are taught to read, however, in regular or mainstream classrooms where they are generally assigned to the "low" reading group with the poorest native English readers. They are taught using an adopted basal series and are asked to read orally in an unrehearsed fashion.

The majority of ESL students are enrolled in mainstream classrooms where they are taught to read using mainstream methods, practices, and materials (Gunderson, 1983a; 1985b; 1986b). It is no coincidence that they are approximately two years behind their native English-speaking classmates by the time they are in the sixth grade (Cummins, 1981). It is also obvious that classes for secondary and adult students are not succeeding, either (Southam, 1987). There is a crisis in the schools for ESL students. Simply using standard materials, methods, and approaches designed to teach native English-speaking students has not been successful.

Teachers are faced with the difficult task of teaching their ESL students how to speak, read, and write a second, sometimes a third, fourth, or fifth

language. In the past they have concentrated on teaching students oral communication skills. Recently, the skills of reading and writing, also, have been acknowledged as vitally important to survival in English speaking societies. All too often, however, the adopted instructional approaches, practices, and programs are those designed for native English speakers (cf. Gunderson, 1985b; 1986b). Ironically, these approaches are often vehemently condemned by researchers as being inappropriate even for native English speakers! And they are failing to teach ESL students to read (cf. Carter, 1970; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1975). The discussions in the following chapters focus on literacy programs designed for ESL students at all age levels. The discussions also equip the reader to make critical decisions about placing ESL students into appropriate literacy programs and constructing teacher-made materials within different models of literacy instruction.

Chapter 1: Reading Programs—Practices, and Approaches

Chapter 1 begins with a brief history of reading instruction. An analysis of the history of reading instruction reveals the roots of the standard reading practices used to teach ESL students in classrooms across North America. A description of the current trends and major theoretical contentions of various influential authors is presented. Finally, different programs are described and discussed in reference to the needs and abilities of ESL students.

Chapter 2: Reading Programs—
Language Proficiency, Literacy Background,
Purpose for Reading, L2 Reading Ability

Selecting and/or designing literacy programs for ESL students is often more complicated than selecting programs for native English speakers. Procedures for selecting appropriate reading programs are delineated in Chapter 2 based on students' age, literacy background, purpose for reading, and oral English ability. The reader is asked to make decisions about programs within a personal theoretical viewpoint. Assessment procedures are described and demonstrated--instruments that allow students' English proficiency, English reading ability, content reading knowledge, and background knowledge to be considered when literacy programs are designed and/or adopted and adapted for ESL students. L2 assessment at all levels is demonstrated.

Chapter 3: Teaching Young ESL Students to Read

Thousands of New ESL students are enrolled in elementary schools every year in North America. Schools and school districts face yearly crises as they attempt to cope with the influx of ESL students. Thousands are simply enrolled

in mainstream classrooms in which teachers valiantly attempt to teach basic literacy skills. Chapter 3 highlights the elementary-level ESL student. The chapter contains decision heuristics to help place students in programs that match their abilities and backgrounds, both within different theoretical positions and different pedagogical approaches. The chapter contains discussions of such topics as ESL phonics instruction, whole-language instruction and ESL students, L2 basal reading approach, and L2 comprehension instruction. The chapter is filled with practical ideas to teach beginning ESL students literacy skills.

Chapter 4: Teaching Older ESL/EFL Students to Read

Older ESL students represent unique problems to teachers. Decision heuristics are presented to enable a teacher to design and/or select programs that match students' needs and abilities. Special emphasis is put on programs that do not offend older students by placing them in obviously childish material. Survival and special reading programs are discussed and examples are given. The adult-level student's needs are delineated.

Chapter 5: Teaching Academic Reading

At some point, ESL students must be able to read, comprehend, and learn from text. This chapter discusses intermediate, secondary, university, and adult-level ESL students and their special content-area reading needs. General content skills are discussed. In addition, examples of methods for teaching students to read content texts are provided.

Chapter 6: The Present and Future of ESL Reading Instruction

The final chapter in the book contains some final observations and conclusions about ESL/EFL reading instruction. It makes suggestions for further classroom research and speculates on the direction of curriculum development for ESL/EFL students. The chapter ends with the suggestion that the classroom teacher must become the agent of change in order to improve the ESL/EFL student's chances at becoming a functioning member of society.

Appendix: An ESL/EFL Reading Bibliography

A Reading Bibliography is included at the end of the book. The articles and books included are those published over the last ten years or so that form a

useful foundation for the study of ESL/EFL Reading. The bibliography is not exhaustive, but contains many items that are extremely informative.

Conclusion

The fastest growing segment of the public school population across North America is the ESL group. ESL students from age four to eighty are enrolled by the thousands in public and private elementary and secondary schools, private and public English Institutions such as the YMCA, community colleges, and universities, where they are taught to speak, read, and write English. The purpose of this book is to provide both ESL and mainstream teachers with the background and expertise necessary to plan and implement reading programs that will match the special needs and abilities of their students at whatever their age levels.

Reading is a vital skill, one that allows individuals to become thinking, participating members of society. Teachers must have the knowledge and expertise to provide ESL students with the best possible programs. This book is dedicated to that task.

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Contents

1

Reading Programs

PRACTICES AND APPROACHES

That a book on ESL reading instruction should contain a discussion of programs designed for native English speakers may be a surprise. In a recent survey, however, it was found that 80 to 90 percent of elementary-level ESL students enrolled in mainstream classrooms are taught to read using materials and approaches designed for native English speakers. Elementary ESL teachers reported that they used mainstream reading materials in about 55 percent of the cases. Secondary and adult teachers reported they use basal reading series in about one quarter of the cases (Gunderson, 1985b). Secondary teachers in fields other than ESL reported that they did not alter their instruction for ESL students in order to account for their reading needs (Gunderson, 1986b). Incredibly, students having trouble with the English language were expected to learn from text written in English without extra help from their teachers. It is vital that teachers know about reading programs, materials, and approaches designed for both ESL and native English speakers. This chapter contains a discussion of the history of reading instruction over a period of about three thousand years. It presents the major theoretical notions that led to different reading programs and approaches.

Teaching Reading in the Greek Fashion

In ancient Greece boys were taught to read in a simple fashion. First, they learned the names of the letters of the alphabet in order, then backwards. Then,

they practiced putting consonant sounds together with vowels, that is, they practiced reading syllables. Finally, they read aloud with their teacher. Although there was some experimenting in different countries with different methods over the period of some three thousand years, the basic reading methodology remained the same (cf. Mathews, 1966) until well into the nineteenth century. The system worked well for the Greeks because their alphabet reliably represented the phonemes of their language. However, events conspired against the students and teachers of English.

English was written using the Roman alphabet as early as the twelfth century. Of course, there were both students and teachers of English during the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, but little is known about how reading was taught. The reading program of the fifteenth century was very much the same as that of the ancient Greeks. English teachers taught with one additional aid, however—a hornbook, a paddle-shaped device that contained the letters of the alphabet, some selected syllables, and the Lord's Prayer. It was covered with a transparent piece of horn to protect it from little fingers (see Figure 1–1).

Students learned the names of the letters of the alphabet in order, then backwards. They practiced syllables and read the Lord's Prayer aloud. The student who was successful in this enterprise was given a book of religious material, a primer, to read. Learning to read English, however, was getting more and more difficult.

In the fifteenth century the art of printing was introduced to England. This tended to fix spelling (Mathews, 1966). Unfortunately for the students of reading, while the sounds of English changed, spelling was not altered to account for the changes. Mathews (1966) notes that "today we spell about as they did in the time of James I (1603–25). . ." (p. 23). And how were students of the time taught to read?

Hoole (1660, 1912) reports that students learned ". . . by oft reading over all the letters forwards and backwards until they can say them." Hoole reports that bright students learned quickly, but less bright ones ". . . have been thus learning a whole year together (and though they have been much chid, and beaten too for want of heed) could scarce tell six of their letters at twelve monts' end" (p. 33).

The early schools of North America borrowed both the hornbook and the pedagogy, one essentially unchanged since the time of the ancient Greeks. The first North American schoolbook was the *New England Primer,* published in about 1690. Students were taught using the *Primer* by learning to name the letters of the alphabet, practicing syllables, and reading aloud the primarily religious material in the *Primer.* Two actual-size pages from the *Primer* are shown in Figure 1–2.

In 1783 Webster's *Blue-Back Speller* was published. This reading program had students memorize the names of the letters of the alphabet, learn letter-sound correspondences, and read orally. It was an advance in reading pedagogy, since it had students look at individual letter-sound correspondences.

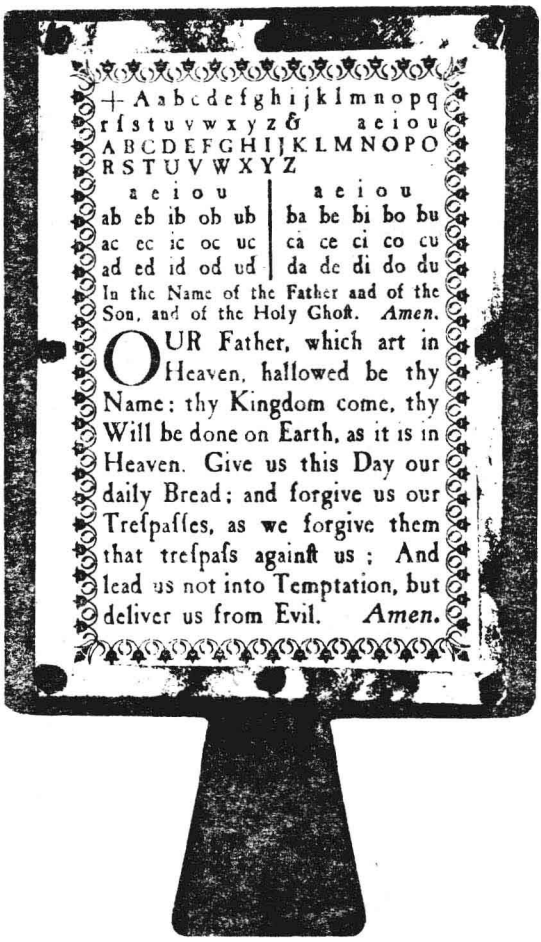

Figure 1-1 A Replica of the Hornbook

Content was primarily religious, but it also contained material related to the history and the Constitution of the United States. There were many moralistic selections to help guide the development of the youth of America. The emphasis on letter-sound correspondences makes this reading program one of the first to focus students' attention on phonic relationships.

The beginning of the nineteenth century brought an amazing revolution to reading pedagogy. McGuffey's Eclectic Readers, first published in 1837, were a series of books aimed at different grade levels. Grade levels had not been considered important before McGuffey. His material also contained more illus-

Good Boys at their Books.

HE who ne'er learns his A,B,C,
Forever will a Blockhead be;
But he who to his Book's inclin'd,
Will soon a golden Treasure find.

Children, like tender Trees do take the Bow,
And as they first are fashion'd always grow,
For what we learn in Youth, to that alone,
In Age we are by Second Nature prone.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m
n o p q r ſ s t u v
w x y z &

Vowels.

A E I O U Y a e i o u y.

Conſonants.

b c d f g h j k l m n o p q r ſ s t v w x z

Double Letters.

ff ffi ffl fi fl ffi ffl ſt ct

Italick Letters.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Kk
Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss
Tt Vv Uu Ww Xx Yy Zz

Italick Double Letters.

ff ffi ffl ſt ſh ſi ſſ ſſi ſk ſſt

Figure 1-2 The New England Primer Reprinted by courtesy of Silver, Burdett, & Ginn, Inc.

trations than other reading programs. It stressed phonic relationships, syllables in isolation, and the repetition of words. The material contained moralistic and patriotic text and some literary selections at the upper levels. Producing good oral readers was a goal of the McGuffey program. In addition to providing multilevel texts, McGuffey also included a teacher's guide with each volume to improve instruction. The guide informs the teacher on how to teach good oral reading. For instance, in the revised edition of the *Fifth Eclectic Reader,* McGuffey's first comment is:

> The great object to be accomplished in reading, as a rhetorical exercise, is to convey to the hearer, fully and clearly, the ideas and feelings of the writer. (*Fifth Eclectic Reader*. New York: American Book Company, 1879, p. 9)

The teacher's guide contains advice on how to improve articulation and intonation. Such features of oral speech are presented as the "absolute emphasis," "emphatic pause," and "pitch and compass." The following is an example of the kind of material students read.

An Excerpt from McGuffey's *Fifth Eclectic Reader*

The Venomous Worm

> Who has not heard of the rattlesnake or copperhead? An unexpected sight of either of these reptiles will make even the lords of creation recoil; but there is a species of worm, found in various parts of this country, which conveys a poison of a nature so deadly that, compared with it, even the venom of the rattlesnake is harmless. To guard our readers against this foe of human kind is the object of this lesson.*

The nineteenth century also brought a great deal of public criticism to schools and to the teaching of reading. Many individuals bitterly attacked the teaching of reading. Individuals such as Gallaudet (1888), Keagy (1824), Mann (1844a), Palmer (1837), Peirce (1844), and Rice (1893) denounced the Greek-developed pedagogy as out of date and, indeed, harmful. It may be that Mann's (1844a; 1844b) criticisms were the most influential (Mathews, 1966). Mann (1844a) in evaluating the ABC method stated:

> If the child is bright, the time which passes during this lesson is the only part of the day when he does not think. Not a single faculty of the mind is occupied except that of imitating sounds; and even the number of these imita-

*From: McGuffey, *The Fifth Eclectic Reader* (New York: American Book Company, 1879), p. 77.