

**The Classroom as Contact Zone: Translanguaging and Critical Literacy
Development in a Beginning ESOL Class for Adults**

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Abstract

This paper documents a year in the life of an ESOL adult literacy teacher. It is a work of narrative inquiry, an examination of reflective teaching in action. As such, it includes commentary on the cycle of observation, reflection, research, and action. In particular, this narrative examines the relationship between literacy practice and transcultural communication in the classroom. The teacher-researcher analyzes classroom observations, student work, lesson materials and her teacher journal. She shares her experiences with Community Language Learning, critical and basic literacy instruction, and translanguaging. Her work illustrates the ways in which the classroom is a meeting place---a contact zone between and among teacher and students and their understandings of the world in which they are living and learning together. Lesson Plan materials are included as well.

ERIC Descriptors

Translanguaging

Translingualism

Transcultural

Monolingualism

Contact Zone

Action Research

Narrative Inquiry

Interaction

Mediation

Basic Literacy

Critical Literacy

Usage-based instruction

Lesson Report

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Introduction

BOSTON: GOVERNOR'S FY 2019 BUDGET PLAN SHORTCHANGES ABE YET AGAIN: Proposed Budget would cut ABE Funding by 1.4 Million: Earlier today Governor Charlie Baker submitted his version of the FY 2019 budget to the Legislature, recommending an appropriation of \$28.2 million for adult basic education (Line Item 7035-0002). This figure represents a cut of \$1.4 million below the current FY 2018 appropriation of \$29.6 million; it also is the third year in a row that the Governor has proposed reducing funding for ABE. [MCAE (Mass Coalition for Adult Education) Alert #6:FY2018. 1/24/18] (ABE is Adult Basic Education)

WASHINGTON, D.C.: In an extraordinary ruling on Thursday, the majority of the U.S. Court of Appeals found that “the words of the President” provided “undisputed evidence” of an anti-Muslim bias. In a 9-4 ruling, the federal appeals court held that the third version of Trump’s travel ban---which limited visitors from six majority-Muslim countries as well as two other nations [North Korea and Venezuela], was likely unconstitutional...the U.S. Supreme Court hears oral arguments in the matter this spring. [HuffPost, 2/15/2018 3:29PM ET Ryan J. Reilly--*--A Federal Appeals Court Just Said Trump’s Tweets Show He’s An Anti-Muslim Bigot*]

NEW YORK: President Trump’s incendiary words about immigration have dampened the prospects that a broad spending and immigration deal can be reached by the end of the week...The angry recriminations continued from allegations that Mr. Trump called African nations *shithole countries*. [NYTimes *As Shutdown Talk Rises, Trump’s Immigration Words Pose Risks for Both Parties* by Jonathan Martin, Michael D. Shear and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, 1/15/18]

MICHIGAN: Michigan father deported to Mexico after living in the U.S. for three decades. [Headline: www.nbcnews.com January 16th 2018, 7:57 PM]

In the fall of 2017, I began to conduct action research into my teaching in order to determine best practices to help my students progress in their English studies. I was not, however, interested in examining best practice in a vacuum. I wanted to examine *my* practice and student progress in the particular context of *our* classroom in the 2017-2018 school year. Just as there is no such thing as a prototypical human being, there is no such thing as a

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prototypical classroom. My students were unique and complex adults and beginning English language learners in Eastern Massachusetts ranging in age from their 20s to 70s. Some had had little formal schooling in their L1s; others had had a good deal more. Some were currently employed and some were not. Some had children; some had grandchildren. We, students and teacher, spoke nine different languages and we were all affected by the events outlined above. The facts of our complicated adult lives did not simply vanish at the classroom door; they fundamentally shaped our learning experiences.

I chose *Narrative Inquiry* as the means by which I would examine my practice and student language development. I thought an account of teacher and learner experiences in a literacy and beginning ESOL classroom might prove to be a useful historical record in the TESOL field. Expressing oneself, being heard, and being understood are difficult in any language. My hypothesis at the outset of this inquiry was that an interactive classroom environment in which *translanguaging* and cross-cultural exchange were welcomed would positively impact students' language development. In our class, we were all figuring out the who's, how's, where's, when's, what's and why's of the English language and each other's first languages.

Initially, as I began my action research into best practice and student success, I conceived of student language learning success in narrow terms of programmatic success, i.e. student promotion to the next level. My students would not take the usual summative assessments---the BESTPLUS and a trans-literacy test---employed by my program due to funding imperatives. I began by studying a syllabus drafted for my class level and I set to work providing students with exposure to and practice with syllabus-outlined elements of the English language. However, I suspected there was something superficial about this, my first conceptualization of student

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language development. Language learning success as defined by level promotion was vague and somewhat arbitrary, and it seemed to have the unintended consequence of objectifying students. Further, it had been my experience that teacher and students were learning partners---our work was inextricably bound together. Teacher formally instructing and students passively receiving knowledge was not an accurate depiction of classroom life or the learning process, in my mind. It ignored the role of student agency in producing positive learning outcomes. Syllabus learning objectives felt partially exterior to the process of language acquisition.

In the classroom, we---teacher and students together---adapted our conversations to each other; adjusted our class-work according to each other's needs and expectations; took notice of each other's moments of impatience and mirth. We both sought language improvement and forward learning progress, sometimes with more vigor, sometimes with less. Our successes and challenges were intertwined. Language-learning growth was not somehow exterior to these relationships.

As I learned more about Translanguaging in the fall, I hypothesized that it might have a positive impact on teaching and learning in my classroom. I wanted my narrative inquiry to include a record of classroom interactions and student work informed by translanguaging practices. I hoped this inquiry would help me make sense of how my students' language development was proceeding and might further advance. It was not until I began to analyze the data in my action research that I saw all the ways in which my classroom, our classroom, truly was a *contact zone*.

Essential Terms

There are several terms it has been important for me to examine and define in the course of this action research. When I determined that I wanted to conduct action research with regard to my teaching practice, I began investigating the term narrative inquiry. My narrative inquiry has been guided by Karen Johnson and Paula Golombek's definition in their article "The Transformative Power of Narrative in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE)" (2011):

Inquiry, as a mechanism for teacher professional development, is rooted in a Deweyan theory of experience...[R]eality is relational, temporal, and continuous, and it is through a process of active, persistent, and careful observation, consideration, and reflection...that experience becomes educative (Dewey, 1933)...when narrative functions as verbalization, it becomes a powerful *mediational* tool that enables teachers to begin to not only name the theoretical constructs they are exposed to...but [also]...to begin to use these concepts to make sense of their teaching experiences and to regulate both their thinking and teaching process. (p.487- 493)

In the process of explaining for myself, through journaling, how I was implementing interactive activities, addressing students' instructional needs, and attempting to translanguage, I was reflecting on the give-and-take of teaching and learning in my classroom. i+1 was not simply an abstract SLA concept; it had 19 faces in my journal entries. Narrative inquiry enabled me to interpret SLA principles in the real time and space of my classroom. For example, it was not enough to think about interaction as pushed output activities (i.e. creating situations in which students needed to converse with one another). The language content of the activity mattered to my students. The interactions between particular personalities in my classroom mattered. Student motivation could and did affect the amount and sort of scaffolding needed activity to activity. Personal interest could shift a student's zone of proximal development upward or downward.

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At the end of each night's class, I analyzed observations of student interactions and class-work in my journal. I made changes to routines, materials, and activities in succeeding classes, based on this nightly analysis. I noted evidence and impacts I perceived from instances of translanguaging and transcultural exchange. I also noted the level and quality of teacher feedback I offered students. Narrative inquiry and examinations of student work led me to investigate certain cognitive, sociological and psycho-linguistic terms more closely. I have examined *translingualism* and the practice of *translanguaging, usage-based instruction, basic and critical literacy approaches, transcultural communication, and the 4 modes of language activity---mediation, interaction, reception, and production---* as they relate to *the 4 Skills and Grammar*.

I take Kiramba's (2017) understanding of translanguaging as being a means by which teacher and students can "transgress boundaries to strive for ways to know and live fully and deeply as whole human beings." (p. 99) If a student becomes *stuck*, no further discourse is possible in a strictly monolingual classroom. Reaching beyond basic to critical literacy becomes elusive in such a situation. Basic literacy instruction involves decoding, spelling, and syntax practice at the word and sentence level, while critical literacy moves more intentionally into the meaning-making aspect of oral and written discourse. (Spiegel, M. and Sunderland, H. 2006. p.17) Translanguaging can be a tool to nudge students beyond expression at the word and sentence level and can feed their improvisational language impulses and analytic thinking capacities in their L2. Translanguaging is not the same thing as translating. There is a sense of being on the bridge together rather than teacher and student being on either side of a river connected across the waters only by earphones relaying teacher utterances to the student's ears in his/her L1. In translanguaging, the student attempts to share his or her ideas and life experiences

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with the teacher without resorting to word for word translation. In turn, the teacher attempts to scaffold this communication with intermittent use of the student's L1, use of cognates, knowledge of the student's L1 language structures (i.e., letter/sound and grammar systems), knowledge of world history, current events, and the particulars of her student's previous exposure to the language of instruction. The student is not forbidden to use his/her L1 as is the case in a monolingual classroom; nor is the teacher forbidden to use the student's L1 to facilitate comprehension. Translanguaging is the act of using more than one language to communicate complex points of view and interpretations of information. It can be used as a scaffolding device to move students toward more and more complex expression.

Usage-based instruction similarly taps into the idea of the importance of finding ways in the language classroom to be responsive to students' general experience. It provides a way to connect translanguaging and literacy instruction. Betsy Rymes (2003) highlights the importance of "oral preparation for literacy." (p. 365) As my students were learning to read and write in English, it was important that they be able to use outside the classroom what they were learning inside the classroom and vice versa. Students needed the means to connect the language of their life experiences to the language of the classroom. As well as having opportunities to share their own experiences, students needed exposure to collocations and idiomatic phrases and common contractions.

Language complexities should not be avoided because their forms are not neatly packaged for explanation. Instruction should take account of what students will hear on the street and at work. Learning lists of verb conjugations and grammar rules in isolation has limited value. Language needs to be situated within a meaningful context. I acknowledge, though, with new language speakers, that a lot of thought is required to figure out what to emphasize first.

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One important distinction between basic and critical approaches to literacy lies in this emphasis on regular form. In basic literacy, there is a good deal of emphasis placed on correct form practice. I think that there ought to be a balance between discrete skills instruction and the communicative skills instruction emphasized in a critical literacy approach to language development. Otherwise, literacy instruction can devolve into phonics practice and decoding at the word level with very little actual sustained reading or conversation practice.

The need for a critical literacy component becomes clear in writing instruction. For example, in *teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners* (2006), Spiegel and Sunderland report that “the diagnostic assessment materials that generate targets in terms of individual curriculum elements and the widely held belief that everything needs to be “mapped” to the curriculum may also have the potential to encourage an emphasis on the sub-skills of writing at the expense of activities that focus on learners’ wider goals for communication. The review of practice found a high use of exercises that focused on discrete skills, especially at the word level.” (p. 26-27) Further, a very prescribed grammar-based and reading comprehension skills-based approach to language instruction can not only stifle the writing and expressive capacities of students, but it can impact how students view themselves in their L2s. According to Elsa Auerbach in *teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners* (2006), “writing instruction, often goes further than shaping conceptions about writing itself, it can contribute to constructing learners’ sense of their own identities and possibilities.” (p. 28) Students need to learn the vocabulary of their thoughts and feelings and not just the vocabulary of classroom exercises or phonetically regular word families. Critical literacy implores students and teachers to put themselves in the middle of meaning-making. Text and speech are mediated by reader, listener and speaker points of view and reaction. In fact, the CEFR (Common European Framework Reference) has moved away from

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describing language competencies in terms of the 4 Skills and grammar. The CEFR (2017) describes language competencies in terms of knowing (*savoir*), knowing how to do (*savoir faire*), knowing how to be (*savoir etre*) and knowing how to learn (*savoir apprendre*). (p. 30)

Language proficiency is not described in simple terms like a Reading Level, but rather it encompasses elements of communicative capacities---reception, production, interaction and mediation. When we use language, we do not primarily speak, listen, write and read in isolation. We use these skills in combination to express ourselves and communicate with others for mutual understanding.

This critical literacy framework has been helpful for me in terms of creating lesson activities for my students. It has informed my lesson planning and broadened my understanding of student voice and agency in the language classroom. Further, it has been my experience that basic and critical literacy have sometimes been misconstrued as having different and opposing larger educative purposes---something akin to the way in which vocational education has been pitted against college-prep in high school. The goal of both basic and critical literacy, I believe, is to empower students to live independent lives in which they feel capable of managing the inevitable trials and triumphs (family, financial, emotional, health-related, etc.) of adult life as they arise. The emphases of these approaches may differ but I do not think the ends do. Reading instruction cannot disregard phonics instruction and syntax practice, but this practice and instruction needs to incorporate student voice and experience, somehow. There must be a narrative surrounding skills practice that engages students. Students need to be using language meaningfully; they cannot simply be repeating words or correctly filling in the blanks. Students need to experience the usefulness of language. Language class should be full of communicative experiences for students. Students should have opportunities to exchange their thoughts and

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ideas with each other and the teacher. It seems natural that my classroom, the classroom, is a *contact zone*, therefore. Canagarajah constructively imagines the classroom as a *zone* (2013), a meeting place where understanding is negotiated across languages by teacher and students---“we have to consider...communication and literacy as involving a shuttling between languages and a negotiation of diverse linguistic resources for situated construction of meaning.” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 1) Further, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged by the teacher, classrooms are sites of transcultural exchange.

The Narrative Framework for Research

Over the course of several months of intense examination of my teaching practices and student work, I gained deep insight into all the thousand-and-one ways the classroom is not an entity apart from the rest of the world, but rather is very much in and of the world of both teacher and students. In my journal, as the year unfolded, I wrote about how I scaffolded particular activities. I wrote about where scaffolding failed and where unanticipated scaffolding turned out to be needed. I also wrote about the complexity of having students talk more than the teacher in a beginning English class. I wrote about still emerging English vocabularies. I evaluated mass-produced ESOL textbooks and virtual materials at my disposal. I wrote about materials I adapted and created. I wrote about the value of repetition and wondered if there was a difference between practice and repetition. I dialogued with myself about whether exercises were communicative or only students making sounds. In a beginning English class in which student literacy is also a consideration, letter recognition, decoding skills and pronunciation activities are incorporated into lesson plans. I reflected on how a lesson could, did, or did not balance the mechanical and the meta-linguaging aspects of language instruction with the truly

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communicative and meaning-making aspects of language instruction, as I understood these distinctions. These reflections sent me researching. I wrote in my journal about ways to turn repetitive exercises into more interactive call-and-response sorts of dialogue. I journaled about the complexity of thinking about teaching literacy in a language foreign to students. I journaled about student motivation and the particular impact of the affective filter on students' willingness to speak. Through journaling, I learned it is important to find ways and means to practice pronunciation without crashing down on student speech at the moment of production. I have journaled about the complexity of only intermittent exposure to English. Some of my students shared with me, in their *Weekly English Learning Diaries*, that I was the only person with whom they interacted in English.

Journaling helped me think through exercises and practices and study activities students might be more likely to attempt outside of class. I journaled about my particular teaching approaches and initiatives that were a departure from the reading, writing and speaking activities I was accustomed to seeing in mass-produced ESOL materials. I reflected on student reactions to personal, local, national and international News materials I created and about instances of successful and unsuccessful translanguaging I used during class activities. Periodically, I wondered if I should abandon teaching content not strictly contained within the class level syllabus. I asked myself how I could best help my students build their English language abilities. I sought answers for my queries in the field of many names---TESOL, SLA, socio-psycho-cognitive linguistics and language literacy. (Ortega. 2013)

Narrative inquiry has been a valuable tool for me as teacher. In taking time to reflect in writing on how students respond to particular classroom activities and English language concepts discussed and practiced during class-time, I have engaged in calculations about the steps I will

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take in our next class together. Further, and of great significance to me, I have found that in the process of thinking about the night's lesson, I begin to differentiate automatically. I have witnessed, as I journal, that students become individuals and not just *my class*. I remember what particular students have said, how they have performed certain tasks, and what sorts of interactions were fun or a struggle and then I begin to think about the why of these reflections.

Over time, I did begin to view my open journaling as occasionally too whiney and as driven at times too much by my personal reactions to the night's class, however. I wanted more structure for my reflections. It was helpful to have a place to articulate all the teaching thoughts and emotions flooding my mind on any given night, but I wanted to focus more explicitly on my students' teaching outcomes in my reflections. Reading Jack Richards and Charles Lockhart's *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* helped me refine the format of my journal reflections to better meet my stated goal of improving my lesson plans to enhance students' language proficiencies. I tried out different formats before settling on my own modified version of a Lesson Report. (Richards, J & Lockhart, C., p. 19) to organize my nightly reflections. I have appended this modified Lesson Report to the end of this paper. My hypothesis at the outset of this inquiry was that an interactive classroom environment in which *translanguaging* and cross-cultural exchange were welcomed would positively impact students' language development.

The Students and the Setting

The level I teach has variously been called Pre-level 1, Pre-Literacy, and Basic. I have found each student's conversancy with written and spoken English to be as individual as one might well imagine and expect, perhaps, in any classroom. As of this writing, I have taught 19

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students this year. Currently, I have 14 students, because two of my students moved up a level at the start of the second semester and three of my students stopped attending class in the middle of the fall semester. One of the three students who withdrew was a young 20-something adult, Tema, who returned to her home country in Ethiopia for an extended visit with her parents. Her conversational English was good, but she struggled with decoding in reading simple texts and with letter order in spelling. One older woman from Haiti, Laure, took on an evening baby-sitting job. Her aural comprehension of questions developed strongly with classroom practice and exposure, though her vocabulary for response was limited. Her access to English text was limited by the fact that she could not read two-syllable words in English and struggled to read non-phonetically regular one-syllable words. When she wrote, her fingers showed signs of arthritis from what I imagined to be years of much difficult manual labor. I taught both Tema and Laure in the spring of last year when I followed what I would describe as a rather prescriptivist basic literacy approach to instruction, though, at the time, I did not understand academic distinctions between basic and critical literacy. Simultaneously, last spring, I noticed what I thought were flashes of deep resonance on students' faces and in their communicative capacities and general linguistic abilities when I occasionally translanguaged in French and Spanish. I did not learn of this term translanguaging until this fall, however.

The third student who left overwhelmed in November of this year, Margarita, was from Venezuela. She seemed overwhelmed and spoke about troubles in Venezuela, a sick mother, and sons living in various places; she spoke about all of this in Spanish. Though I wanted to experiment with translanguaging in this year's beginning English class, Margarita was illustrating for me, in real-time, the complexities of this undertaking. When she was offered an opportunity to speak in Spanish, she made no attempt to try out her English. Translanguaging

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did not lower her affective filter; she did not feel freed to talk across or between Spanish and English with me. She felt freed from struggling to speak English. Different from some of her classmates, Margarita could read and write with relative ease though English word meanings escaped her. She had a lot of worries on her mind and it may have been that English was just a burden too many for her to manage. I don't know. She left our class shortly after Thanksgiving.

Three of my current students speak Bengali. Chandra has an elementary-school-age daughter who sometimes helps her with homework. Her phonemic awareness is strong; she can decode words in reading and this phonemic awareness supports both her oral fluency and aural comprehension. However, writing, and spelling in particular, has been challenging for her because she has not had wide experience with either speaking or reading in English. I observed that simple fill-in-the-blank and repetitive form-based exercises were not furthering her language development. She completed cloze- tasks easily, but they didn't help her to generate or articulate her own responses to simple Wh-questions posed to her about her personal life or in regard to texts she read. She has benefitted from more text-based and usage-based communicative sorts of productive activities that promote narrative and longer discourse forms like sustained dialogue and topical discussion.

Ashish is 65. He reads and writes in English well, though he has struggled with syntax and spelling. ["In Cambridge my life difficuly. I am 65 years old so I have no job becaus I do not feild work"]. He has been motivated by *critical* writing, reading, speaking and listening activities like discussion of News stories and trans-cultural conversations about the U.S. and students' home countries. For example, when we discussed autumn celebrations in the U.S. and yearly celebrations in students' home countries, Ashish wrote in his *Weekly English Learning Diary* more than a month later that he struggled to understand the word "celebrate" even after

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translation into his L1, because holiday celebrations weren't part of his cultural formation. He also enjoyed a back-and-forth with another student who wrote on the board that homes in his country were "300 square meters." The number system is different in this particular student's home country so I could not be sure if this student meant to write the number 30 rather than 300. I asked how many people might live in the house he described and the student responded with 3 fingers. I could not be sure if this particular student was talking about his former home or homes more generally, but in any case, Ashish said "As teacher, you must not accept that answer. Most people are poor." This exchange---communicated from Ashish---was astounding, deeply satisfying, and affirming of communicative language development given that he has struggled at times simply to report his address or the day's date. However, I did also temper Ashish's response, because the scale of the house in question could not be confirmed with certainty due to the fact that the teacher's and two students' abilities to talk generally about dimensions and numbers were hampered by an oral and written language divide. Nevertheless, this interactive communicative exchange was significant because Ashish struggled to respond in real time to Wh-questions about himself and curriculum content related topics like Family, Home, and Work.

Sometimes, I wonder to what extent these seemingly innocuous subjects like Home and Family may cause pain for my students. I wonder if they have lost or been separated from family or been forced to flee their homes; if they feel bound to silence about their work so as not to risk losing their livelihoods. I try not to press for information, but accept what students share. The News can provide a relevant and current reality-referenced path into thematic content without the reference point always having to be personal.

Bani who just recently joined class is a grandmother who helps with the care of her grandchildren. Her basic reading, writing and speaking skills are solid; however, she is

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unaccustomed to speaking activities that require only minimally scaffolded responses. Given her writing strengths, I have hesitated to provide sentence starters. Maybe this is a mistake. Perhaps feeling some initial fluency in speech, which sentence starters can provide, would lead her to say more; perhaps the parameters sentence starters provide would limit the scope of her responses. I cannot be sure. This sort of reflection commonly guides my practice now. I have come to understand that toggling is perpetual as a teacher.

Shi, whose L1 is Chinese (I don't know his dialect; I've used simplified Chinese with Google Translate), is an older gentleman of a certain age. Initially, he didn't understand the phrase "How are you?" or what an appropriate response might be. After several exercises, counting demonstrations, and attention being drawn to a classroom poster of explanation, he struggled to understand the question "how many?" in the fall. Nevertheless, in November, when I wrote up the holidays students celebrated in their home countries as *Our Class Personal News*, he felt compelled to communicate to me that in China "National" Day is celebrated rather than "Independence" Day as I had recorded for our Class News. This, of course, is meaningful communication much beyond decoding and reading a regular two-syllable word like basket. I also fully appreciate the fact-checking and translanguaging done on his part to clarify that China had never been colonized.

Habib speaks Urdu. He has lived in the U.S. for a number of years, has a green card, and recently got engaged. His spoken English is conversationally very strong for a beginning-level English class, though often "am" is the default verb of choice. At the beginning of the year, I confused aurally his use of "walk" and "work," but generally his oral communicative capacities are a strength. He showed me an Urdu phrase book at the beginning of the year which I haven't

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seen in a long while now. I think this may be because he is only now learning how to phonetically decode words in English and recognize this as component of reading and writing.

Ana and Isabella speak Spanish. They both are from the Caribbean. They both feel empowered by phonetic dictation practice. Word accent is an observed focus for both. Ana is a young woman whose communicative skills seem under-developed. She has a strong family network locally, but I am not sure about her schooling history. She is newer to class and she is still getting accustomed to class routines. She is a beginning reader. Often she copies the work of her classmates rather than taking her own time to work through reading and comprehension difficulties. This school coping skill reminds me how difficult it is for a teacher to reach every student's instructional level at all times with every activity. As teacher, I perpetually toggle between students and necessary and interesting content materials.

Isabella is especially self-conscious about her pronunciation. She has good aural comprehension skills, but gets tongue-tied and her mind goes blank when she is called upon to give a response without a sentence tag framework. Her affective filter rises to the point of forgetting the word "go." She has appreciated translanguaging of vocabulary and grammatical concepts. Recently, she has felt empowered to speak using a weekly oral practice prompt for talking on the phone. Having a script seemed to provide her with the support she needed to feel comfortable attempting this speaking task: "Hi Megan, I am to leavee you a messenger. Who are you? I am good. I--- hope---you----have---a good----weekend. I am---I will see----see you---in Monday. Bye." The script I provided to students was the following: "Hi Megan, this is _____. I want to leave you a message. How are you? I am _____. I hope you have a good weekend. I will see you in class on Monday. Bye." After Isabella completed this task, I journaled about developing more similar sorts of tasks.

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Mazaa is a young college-aged woman from Ethiopia. She speaks softly and initially seemed accustomed to copying and repetition as being mainstays of English class. For example, in a reading exercise that required students to match story sentences with appropriate illustrations, Mazaa simply rewrote the sentences laid out at the top of the page next to pictures below without regard to sentence meaning or picture content. I report this while also acknowledging that some pictures in the basal reader were only ambiguously related to their designated sentences in sequence.

Kofi and Eshe, also from Ethiopia, practice different religions; both speak Oromo, but only one speaks Amharic. Google translate only has Amharic which is unfortunate for both student and teacher. Kofi has grown children in their 40s and has hearing loss in his left ear. His *basic* literacy skills have become more and more solid. He always completes his homework and speaking practice activities. Over the course of the year, he has become more accustomed to answering simple Wh-questions and personal information questions. He is very methodical and it has taken until March to build the patience of his classmates who would often jump in to answer for him at the beginning of the year. His writing has steadily become more and more expansive. He had enjoyed class opportunities for this transcultural exchange. The following is from a *Weekly English Learning Diary* assignment:

Please write about your week:

“This week my news is International. East Africa in Ethiopia my country was a long time. is very difficult because no democrac. Oromia and Amharic younger people They are asking questions the govermet change and elecion doing AT people. It is was true questions. But This country govermet do not Give a Good answer. Killing many people. I am sorry.”

My new words in English are:

“In Wintertime I cannot go D---- Park to walk because snow down in the filed. It is cold Therefore I cannot outsaid in the house.”

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I speak English with “my friend .”

Kofi’s growth as an English speaker affirms my belief that the intentional practice of transcultural exchange valued in translanguaging is a powerful learning resource.

Eshe has three children and has lived in the States for more than five years. I am her second or third beginning English teacher. Her English communicative capacities are strong and she enjoys talking about the News. For example, she has shared with the class her knowledge of the different roles state and national senators play in U.S. representative democracy as well as sharing her opinion about the lottery system of immigration. She communicates personal information about her family and daily activities with her classmates, fluently. She struggles with decoding when reading unfamiliar texts, however. Weekly diary assignments have motivated her: [This week: “I go to work. I go to YMCA with my children. I go shopping. I do the laundry. I clean my home.”] I think that the *Weekly English Learning Diary* writing has focused her attention on word formation. This blended approach of basic and critical literacy has helped her see there is a purpose for phonics and decoding in reading as well as in more explicitly expressive tasks like diary writing.

Bisharro is from Somalia and has two pre-school-age children. She has spoken of being amazed at how quickly her children are learning English. She seems to feel most motivated when doing spelling check-ins and textual reading. She does not enjoy writing and speaking activities that are only minimally scaffolded, but still she manages to communicate her needs effectively. She has not done her homework all year and often misses class due to childcare responsibilities.

This is Myrline’s third or fourth year in a Basic/Pre-1 English class. She was hesitant about speaking improperly initially. Haitian Creole is her L1. To date, she struggles to read through to the end of the word (the for they; he for her; day for date; when for where) and

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sometimes it seems as if reading and meaning-making have become disconnected in her mind. She has a stronger and stronger grasp of everyday conversation, sight words and CVC words. As spring begins, she now writes responses to simple questions whereas at the beginning of the year she sat back and waited for someone to tell her what to write. She is uncomfortable speaking much about herself. She has very defined communication boundaries for herself in class, it seems.

Catheline also speaks Haitian Creole. She comes to Pre-1 having in the past been in Level 2 English classes. She spells and reads well, but her mind sometimes races ahead. [“Today is Yesterday and January 10th...My day is Wednesday. Was January 12th. Tomorrow is yesterday was January 11th.” (The correct date of the class night in question was January 10th.)] Her speaking can be fluent and responsive at times, but inconsistently and unexpectedly so. She uses the start of the progressive aspect for all verbs in conversation (i.e. “I am go.” “I am cook.”, etc.) and comfortably mixes English and Haitian Creole in a unique patois of her own. She has begun doing the *Weekly English Learning Diary* and has called and left a message on my Google Voice account recently; she seems to appreciate attempts at more genuine communication. I get the sense that she has read a few times already some of the basal stories we read in class.

Stevenson initially switched into class from Level 1. He is middle-aged and supports a family. His L1 is also Haitian Creole. His attention is engaged when we do phonics work and dictation in class. His basic literacy skills of reading and spelling and simple sentence construction seem solid. However, I would describe his knowledge of Wh-questions words and his ability to answer questions about simple texts as beginning. As is true of all language learners starting out, regardless of age or literacy, Stevenson’s thoughts automatically flow

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seamlessly in his L1. His understanding of English seems very atomized---as if he hears and understands a word here and there when other thoughts in his L1 are not preoccupying him.

As a teacher, I respect cognitive linguists' commitment to comprehensible input and, certainly, figuring out how to break down textual and grammatical information into decipherable chunks for students is important. However, this is only part of the language education process. Somehow all these bits of grammatical, phonetic, lexical and semantic information need to be linked together in strands of discourse. Sometimes I feel like a tailor trying to figure out the appropriate suit measurements for my students. There is no mistaking when the measurements are off. For example, in Stevenson's case, after several weeks of talking and reading and writing about home structures and experiences, he asked one evening at the beginning of class---"what is *home*?" In teaching, the question of what alterations to make comes up often and requires lots of nipping and tucking and familiarity with many fabrics and threads and patterns. More recently, Stevenson has zeroed in on deriving textual meaning as I have translanguaged with him via French. When writing about sports he watches on t.v. and sports he plays, for example, he asked if watching sports was like *sivre* (i.e. "following sports"). This was all in the context of News about the Olympics. When Stevenson first came into class he seemed to appreciate learning and knowing he should use classroom language prompts like "Please repeat that" and "I don't understand." The idea that he might make such comments in class seemed novel to him.

As I reflect on the languaging work of each of my students, I think about how student investment in the work of the moment impacts production and interaction. Contact Zone is a very good descriptor for the classroom, because it suggests fluidity---an ebb and flow---to responses, to engagement and to the relationships between teacher and student and student to student, as well as to the content of instruction. It is as if the classroom is place where one long

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perpetual conversation is taking place, the shape and substance of which is always evolving. Students' attention and focus can vary according to many factors with lesson content and particular interest being just two of many such factors. As teacher, I cannot know all that is happening in my students' lives, but the more aware I am of the entire landscape of their lives the deeper our communicative exchanges will be and the greater the growth of their language facilities.

The Texts and Activities

I began the year wanting to increase the interactive dimensions of my class feeling certain this would lessen unnecessary teacher-talk time and that increased student language production would increase my students' English language capacities. I felt translanguaging would facilitate student English production, like a lifeline across choppy waters. As well, I wanted to find ways for my teaching practice to be more responsive to the particular needs of my individual students. This desire to differentiate my instruction led me to an exploration of the distinctions between basic and critical literacy approaches. I had been taught to be mindful of the form-meaning-use triad in my language instruction, but, through research, I became aware that in the field there were diverging form-based and usage-based schools of thought shaping the materials and textbooks I might be using with students.

Reflection and Research helped me understand my confusion when I would scan different resources. Many ESOL materials---on-line or textbook---sandwiched random grammar exercises between dialogue practice about the workplace or the doctor's office. Or, there were adult readers that looked like old-fashioned 3rd grade American history textbooks or *Dick and Jane* basals for adults. These resources could be made productive and interactive via partner readings,

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via partner story-sequence-deciphering activities, in asking students to answer simple textual comprehension questions, or in the practice of reproducing correct grammatical forms, but, generally, the English learner was outside the scope of discussion.

Often the experiences described in easy-reader stories were remote from student lived-experience. Students could make little personal connection with some of the language they were learning----“Buddy peeled the beets. The oven went POP!POP! They eat meat and potatoes and peach ice cream.” (Sam and Pat 2) In the case of grammar practice texts, students were always asked to reproduce correct forms for sentences generated by others. It seemed that asking students to take a stab at writing whole sentences on their own was frowned upon. The assumption seemed to be that correct forms would just drop from the mouths of students if they repeated other people’s sentential utterances often enough. Or, at the least, I wondered if this was the expectation. Single-minded emphasis on correct-form production undermines language development, I think. Students need space to play with their own expressions in English. If they are expected to speak and write perfectly, as beginning language learners, they become their own worst enemies.

The third sort of text I discovered on the shelves seemed to understand that speaking was important, but the writing and reading remained like basal and fill-in-the-blank grammar exercises with an, admittedly important, insertion of *I* as subject. The real-time interactive communicative activities were interesting, but the conversation instructions were complicated for students to understand and for teachers to explain. These communicative interactions were scripted outside the classroom and the identities of particular speakers (i.e., my students) were of seemingly minor significance to the potential quality of any given interaction. In all three sorts

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of materials, student agency, if prompted (i.e., use of *you* or *I* as subject), seemed incredibly prescribed. These bounded conversations can depress student motivation.

The Journaling Process

Journaling helped me think through my hesitations about how best to use these imperfect materials at my disposal. The general journaling cycle proceeded something like this. I would teach my class and then journal or generate a Lesson Report the same evening or the following morning. These reflections on my teaching would then lead me to research particular ideas in teaching which, in turn, would lead me to try out different activities in subsequent lessons which would then lead me back to further reflection and so the cycle would begin again. Eventually, a reconsideration of best forms for recording my reflections led me to adopt a Lesson Report format as my preferred mode of reflection and inquiry. (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) The Lesson Report was like an outline for my reflections---1. What did I teach 2. How much time did I spend 3. What materials did I use 4. What worked and didn't work 5. What did students say. I created explicit parameters for my observations and then left a section at the end of the report for any general observations I might have that did not seem to fit into categories of remarks already outlined.

The practice of reflection and research helped me understand that, as teacher, I was a critical mediator of information for students. Adapting and experimenting with materials and creating my own should not feel transgressive in a negative way, as if I were crossing some line etched in stone by experts who had already figured out what the prototypical classroom should look like. I do not think there is a prototypical classroom. A favorite quote I came across as I

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was reflecting on reading and writing activities for adult beginning English speakers provides this account of ESOL texts:

Take a typical ESL family: The first thing that strikes the objective observer is that its members are appallingly accident-prone. They are constantly burning, scalding and cutting themselves or falling off of ladders. In spite of strong warning about throwing lighted matches into waste paper baskets, they have managed to set their house on fire. That is probably a blessing in disguise as the sink, bath, and loo were permanently blocked, the roof leaked and the kitchen ceiling had collapsed... Their conversation is limited to describing problems, complaining, apologizing and occasionally asking the way. There are some things they never do: argue, express opinions, go to meetings, study, laugh, tell stories, protest, run their own businesses. After unblocking all those loos, they don't have the energy... (Spiegel & Sunderland, 2006, p. 21)

Reading this quote gave me the confidence to keep at the idea of talking about News---personal, local, national, and international---with my beginning English class. Neither the struggles with wording in news reports nor more general news content missteps along the way were a waste of our limited class time, I decided upon much journal reflection. The benefits of supporting genuine student reflection on life far outweighed any struggles to find voice that might and did occur. The potential to introduce a wider vocabulary interesting to students was a further benefit.

Initially, when my journaling was quite free-form, there was much rumination that helped me shape upcoming class lesson plans and set routines. Journaling definitely provided an outlet for the surges of emotion that life in the contact zone inevitably produces, as well. But I would come to realize that I needed to sharpen my reflections so that I could think more clearly about student and teacher learning objectives in the long view. Early (Sept. 25th) journal commentary could be dominated by my feelings and impressions about the particular night's class:

I have been assigning seats to get students to meet each other---figure out pair work---the room is very small for getting up and moving with stuff once class is underway...I hope this isn't seen as a too controlling...

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In my journal, I talked about wanting to implement *Weekly English Learning Diaries* in September, though I did not actually get them going until December. Initially, I wrote a lot about my routine and task challenges:

I still haven't figured out how to have folks move along smoothly to the next thing...I'm grabbing papers away so we can do a whole class check-in...I usually arrive at work between 4:45 and 5pm and I leave between 9:50 and 10:15pm...human beings have their own very individual flows---challenging to find balances---X was impatient with listening to others. Z was tired---[I] was worried things were too easy---now I need to slow down again.

There were also general observations about student interaction of the following sort---nice to see student Y explaining the assignment to Student Z. In the fall, there was a lot of talk about pacing and production, creating materials, and the problem of activities being too complicated:

need to find pictures that key to program themes of learning and Ss lives....Need discrete vocab. And the syntax construction of discourse...building discourse capacities in reading, writing and speaking is important. Getting students to talk about a topic of interest---got to relate to the question---“what holidays do you celebrate?” “where you are from?”----need to keep up with spelling and phonics and syllabification. showing/seeing versus telling...there is so much to do!!

There was a lot of emoting---“class was horrible!!” or “I feel like a tyrant!”

I did note evidence of translanguaging from the beginning of the year and, in sum, on re-reading my journal entries and in reflecting on my class to date, I have seen that the News has provided more opportunities for *tran*languaging and transcultural exchange than work in Basal Readers or phonics. Though it is true, in listening to one of my student's leave me a phone message as part of a homework assignment, that my knowledge of the Spanish pronunciation of the letter j helped me explain the /h/ sound in English. At the very least, my phonemic awareness of potential confusions between letter sounds in students' L1s and English made me more sensitive to the number of challenges students face when learning a new language and learning how to read in a new language. More generally, in my reflections on practice this year,

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I learned that the font **Comic Sans** is a preferred type-face for learners whose L1 has a different alphabet script from English, because “g” in Times New Roman looks like a different letter from its handwritten version, for example.

The open-ended reflective journal I kept until January documented well my emerging sense of teaching as toggling. Here is a portion of my January 3rd entry:

I’m trying to keep in mind providing opportunities for critical thinking in class...while also trying to keep in mind students’ practical language needs on the job and while doing errands. Since my students are new to English and have little experience with reading or writing in English, a lot of our work is at the sentence level. Utterances are hard to convert into writing because Ss are unfamiliar with spelling and syntax structure of English. Spelling and syntax orientation needs to happen at the sentence level, but communication happens at the discourse level. Trying to keep all this in mind is challenging and this is before thinking about the particular needs and preferences of each student in class. The fact of 8/9 languages has been making me wonder how I can enact translanguaging especially as I have only a couple of words in Chinese and none in Bengali, Amharic, Arabic or Somali and I am conscious of wanting to avoid flipping into Spanish and French/Creole because that seems unfair and potentially confusing to other students...I’ve decided when I’m in one-on-one conversations this back-and-forth is okay.

The actions I took from lesson to lesson and student to student were not static or ever complete. Change and shifting course is the constant in a room full of sentient human beings. I have seen more and more evidence of how important a role transcultural exchange has in translanguaging even if I have only a few words with which to work across languages. This connection between language and culture has been exciting for me to observe as a beginning ESOL teacher.

In January, as the 1st semester was concluding, it occurred to me that I needed to shift the emphasis of my journal reflections from my teaching practices to student outcomes. On January 7th, I switched to using Lesson Reports both in hopes of restraining the emotive aspects of my reflections and in the interest of focusing my thoughts on the tasks students were doing and on how they were managing and reacting to these languaging tasks. I did end up modifying the Lesson Report format in Richard’s and Lockhart’s *Reflective Teaching*, because I wanted to

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include a space for student class comments and general observations (see Appendix 1). Without a doubt, Lesson Reports sharpened my focus on student production.

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I understand more clearly now that thinking about learning tasks in terms of scaffolding, $i+1$, input/output or production/interaction, reading texts, writing prompts, speaking, listening, grammaring, vocabulary, phonics, relevance, or critical literacy angles is of little value without student input and feedback, whether explicit or observed. During class, I have watched and continue to watch what my students are doing when they are working together and when they are working alone. I have made note of where their understanding falls down and then quickly set the wheels turning to create activities to address the confusions observed. During the course of my research this year, I came across the concept of *mediational* tasks in the CERF. *Mediation* has been an interesting language-learning idea for me to read about because it carries within it the sense of this regular toggling back-and-forth that we---students and teachers---do with each other and within ourselves as we perform languaging tasks. Perpetually, I think about why I am asking students to listen to me or talk or write, rather than just proceeding along page by page to the listening, speaking, writing and grammar activities in some program-sanctioned textbook or according to some predetermined schedule. My teaching decisions are influenced by all manner of student interaction.

I still find it hard to fathom how schools can broadcast by date what content is being covered and which activities are happening in every single classroom without regard for the complicated human beings within each particular classroom. If the classroom is indeed a contact zone, there can only be learning if students take part in shaping the discourse and learning tasks.

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Reflective journaling has helped me notice and connect with the explicit and implicit feedback I receive each night in class from students' comments and from their work; it has informed my work creating classroom materials and it has clarified my learning expectations for students. It has also helped me figure out my responses to questions about the meaning and purpose of teaching and learning more broadly. I am in conversation with my students and myself when I plan, when I journal, and when I am in the classroom. My students are also in conversation with me through their work and all their actions, loud or quiet, within the classroom. Each of us is trying to understand and be understood by the other.

As a discerner of student need, capacity and interest in the contact zone, I have begun to look at my students' and my own confusion differently. Instead of wanting to avoid uncertainty, I have begun to see it as a marker of learning or, at the least, as providing an opening for learning to occur. This new view of confusion has broadened my thinking about differentiation as well. I have come to think about students progressively expanding their responses within activities as opposed to creating entirely different sets of tasks for a "lower" and a "higher" group of students. Even though I have heard for years that "mistakes are good," in taking a look at mass-produced ESOL materials out there, it is easy to see how a teacher can become confused about aims when correct answers seem to be spoon-fed to students. Further, programs are training their focus more and more on SPLs (student performance levels) to secure ever diminishing funding streams and teachers have to be mindful of program metrics of growth. Reflective journaling has helped me understand that the SPLs (determined by formal summative assessments administered program-wide) are only one observable marker student success. The work students produce is another valid marker of student success. For each student I have created what might be described as a work portfolio. There are not enough projects in my students' portfolios, but still

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they do constitute an authentic form of assessment. I can see where students are and where they were months back; I can see what they struggle with and what interests and motivates them.

After I had been journaling for some time, I became concerned that my learning assessments were somehow too small-bore. I had created the traditional spelling check-ins and listening dictations, but I knew these sorts of tasks had little or no value outside the classroom beyond tuning students' ears. I tried rethinking and expanding my understanding of and imagination for student learning objectives. Here's a list I generated when I was shifting my thinking from classroom routines to student outcomes.

Students can:

1. read for understanding
2. write and speak about impressions and observations in complete sentences/comprehensible utterances
3. sound out new unfamiliar words
4. decipher syntax scrambles
5. conduct conversations with peers
6. respond spontaneously to topic questions
7. survey each other and record each other's different responses
8. study vocabulary
9. practice grammatical forms
10. ask questions
11. try different tasks
12. speak without fear of over-correction by the teacher
13. internalize correct grammatical forms
14. give date
15. give addresses
16. give phone # and make phone calls
17. email
18. describe workplace
19. describe family
20. communicate with healthcare professionals, with their neighbors, kids' teachers, the parents of their children's friends, civil servants...
21. discuss local news stories
22. explain a problem (i.e. talk to a landlord)

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This original list now seems both obvious and a little immature to me. The truly communicative work of self-expression and transcultural exchange is not at all reflected. It may be implied, but diary work I have been pursuing with students is entirely excluded from this list of assessable knowledge. I smile as I acknowledge this, because at the time I generated this list of student goals, I felt proud of myself for its particularity and focus on class work relevant and applicable to my students' lives outside the classroom.

The format of the *Weekly English Learning* and *School Diaries* that students write has changed over the course of this year in response to what students produced or were able to produce. In future classes, I imagine using these different formats (and others still as yet uncreated) with different students at different points, depending on scaffolding needs. Writing, in general, provides many opportunities for differentiation. In the second half of this year, what I have found gratifying is that students are now serving as models for each other as they share what they have written before their classmates.

All students benefit from practice and portfolios show nicely the progress that comes with practice. I can and do see students' writing fluency has increased with their *Weekly English Learning Diaries*. Having students journal in the first place, came out of my understanding of what CEFR (2017) defines as the mediational aspects of language development and proficiency. Whether we are speaking, listening, writing or reading, we are trying to make sense of language--we are interpreting---we are trying to understand someone else or make ourselves understood. At first, I wasn't sure if I could ask beginning students to journal. I sensed that students having regular opportunities to express themselves would enhance their language learning, but given the particular challenges involved in teaching beginners, I needed to do some research to make sure I was not doing my students a disservice. I did not want to move too fast toward attempts at

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complex discourse construction when so many words and experiences in English were new to them. I knew production and interaction were important, but reading about the mediational component of language development in the CEFR was eye-opening, instructive, and ultimately inspiring.

There are language-learning benefits to articulating one's reflections following a personal experience. In the act of journaling, a writer is thinking about self and other simultaneously. It is more than a writing exercise; it is a productive, interactional and mediational activity. The writer is at once inside and outside the experience which is described as both subject and object. Students are dialoguing with themselves, deciding what to include and how to say or describe their experiences; they are shaping their own understanding and thinking about how to articulate that understanding to the reader/teacher. And so, my journaling about teaching practice led to students journaling about their thoughts and experiences more broadly. This student journaling, in turn, enabled me to reflect more profoundly on the impact of translanguaging and cross-cultural communication in SLA. And, the totality of this teaching-learning experience is evidence of a kind of symbiosis between teacher and students in the classroom *contact zone*.

Agency

There was a time when language classes were described as Writing, Reading, or Conversation classes. But as Betsy Rymes explains (p. 365) and as the research underpinning the CEFR suggests, oral communication feeds reading and writing. I have found in teaching language, one is not teaching a various set of discrete skills: writing, reading, speaking, listening and grammar. One is strengthening communicative capacities and student voice.

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Over the year, I have experimented with a range of different languaging materials. Chit/Chat dialogue prompts have been a regular routine at the beginning of class. Simple conversation is challenging for most beginning learners. I have tried to cultivate a personal investment in simple back-and-forths so the dialogues, though necessarily repetitive, are not mindless. *How are you? How's the family? How's the weather? How do you feel?* are simple questions but when students are asking each other these questions they become more dynamic. They are invested with the personal. My hope has been to use this chit-chat routine as a stepping stone to more genuine info-gap sorts of communicative activities. In terms of the info-gap aspect of conversation dialogues in a beginning class, understanding the prompts themselves is an info-gap activity. I think beginning speakers need buoys like new swimmers---dual partner repetition of prompts promotes speaker agency.

Familiarity with material fosters independence. Gaining automaticity provides students with the opportunity to experience fluent speech which is coveted by new language speakers who much of the time struggle to find single words let alone feel able to ask questions or converse back-and-forth. I have gone back-and-forth with giving each partner three or four questions or one set between the two before advancing to the point of giving different combinations of questions to each partner. Taking this idea of personal agency further, I have been ruminating on the presentation of the collocation *there is/there are* to beginning ESOL students. I think prompting students to tell *what you see* in a picture increases investment in the exchange. *I see* is an example of personal communicative expression whereas *there is X* or *there are Ys* is just an impersonal textbook exercise. That is not to say that I don't see the value of such prompts as illustrations of singular and plural forms and as a way to practice vocabulary, but the form is impersonal in perspective.

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In general, I have been thinking about the complexity of fostering personal agency in the language classroom. Students need to feel comfortable sharing personal information about themselves. For immigrants in 2018 America, this is asking a lot. Trust between teacher and student as well as between students is built, not blindly given or expected. This recurring reflection about personal agency and the current challenges of sharing personal information has re-energized my effort to introduce discussion of News in my classroom. The News can be a confusing discussion to scaffold, but confusion is central to learning, I have tried to remind myself. Over the course of the year, I have improved (I think) the materials and prompts I use (see iterations included in the materials section.) I have tried to scaffold News conversations so as to allow students to relate their personal and cultural experiences in a comparative way rather than seeming to be prying into their private lives. This idea of trust underscores the truth of the idea of the classroom as contact zone. Students need to have a say in what they will say and want to say. Teachers need to listen to what students are saying even when they remain silent and as they shift the focus of instructional topics in their tellings.

Language activities and exercises don't occur in a vacuum. The question of what communication is needed or required in a particular instance is probed at all times in a language classroom. Language teachers need to acknowledge that students are taking a leap of faith when they agree to share accounts of their own lives and experiences in the classroom.

A supervisor once described what I do to other teachers as teaching “names for things.” For example, she said, that if the curriculum topic were Budget I should just be teaching the names “quarter” and “dime.” I dispute this of course. But I realize that my reflective journaling about translanguaging, transcultural exchange, the classroom as contact zone, critical literacy and communicative language capacities has been a search for understanding about what my teaching

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framework, in fact, should be. Of course, I think literacy instruction needs to take a both/and approach to basic skills and critical response language development. I think both cognitive and sociolinguistic conceptions of interaction and production are valuable to teachers. Learning to break down and simplify language concepts, adapting materials, and grasping the fundamental communicative, dialogic nature of language, all prompt teachers to generate real life interactive language activities for students and by students.

Translanguaging in my classroom

My classroom is a meeting place. Men and women, young and old, worshippers of many faiths, hailing from eight different countries and speaking nine different languages, we all come together to learn English and share a little about our lives for three hours, twice a week in Trump's America. We celebrate birthdays together; share our frustrations with the cold and ice and English grammar, spelling, and pronunciation; we try to make sense of our experiences in the places we now call home. I have used translanguaging to connect with my students and in a similar way my students are beginning to use English to connect with each other.

Translanguaging does not simply mean speaking across languages, it has also meant ongoing and substantive transcultural exchange. Students have been hearing about each other's L1s as well as English. Some key words are bigger than pictures---“need,” “justice,” “celebrate”----and I have periodically used Google Translate to create multi-lingual vocabulary sheets for students. As well, students have been hearing about institutions and cultural practices in the U.S. and in each other's home countries. I have seen shifts in the communicative capacities of my students from the beginning of the year as they have come to feel, at times, as if the floodgates of languaging have not been blocked by monolingual mandates. For example, Shi feels comfortable speaking

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through his thoughts with me in Chinese while simultaneously drawing pictures on the board to communicate more fully his observations about the day's crazy weather---“In the morning it was cold and snowing, then in the afternoon it was warm, and now tonight it is raining.” We translanguaged about the extremely bizarre weather on the day in question. I affirmed that I understood him and he began to take in the phrases for time frames in English I had been teaching. Ashish has had confidence from the beginning of the year that I would be able to understand his English and Bengali patois. We have talked about family and politics, and one day he corrected me when in conversation in some way I suggested that he was Muslim---“I am Hindi, you know.” Kofi shared the realization that he spoke not only English and Amharic, but also Oromo---“My father spoke Amharic and my mother spoke Oromo.” This personal cultural reflection was important for him to share with me and it came as a result of reading about another student sharing that she spoke Oromo and not Amharic. Languages I have familiarity with provide me with opportunities to make cross-linguistic comparisons in pronunciation to facilitate English language learning. In the fall, I journaled about using translanguaging to talk about subject-verb syntax. “Some of my students forget subject pronouns because linguistically subject pronouns may not be marked as a separate word in their L1s. I wrote “hablo” and “Je parle” on the board and asked one student to write “I speak” in Chinese on the board so we could examine different language structures. We then did an exercise in which students noted the position of subjects and verbs in English syntactic construction.” (November 13th, 2017)

Translanguaging takes time and patience but I believe it unlocks greater language facility and it ultimately is a more humanistic teaching practice. Translanguaging is more interactive and reflective and finely attuned to the multiplicity of perspectives in the classroom contact zone.

Conclusion

Through this journaling and action research, over the 2017-18 school year, I have generated my own more particularized list of hoped-for student outcomes and behaviors beyond those outlined in the course syllabus. I have learned how to employ more effective lesson-planning techniques as well as how to better employ literacy and second language acquisition methodologies. I have used this increased knowledge about my field to create what I hope are relevant and engaging classroom materials for my students. In the course of my action research this year, I have gained a fuller understanding of the tensions between monolingualism and translingualism and the subsequent impacts these program orientations have on cross-cultural exchange between and among students and teacher. My teaching has been immeasurably enriched by even my partial and imperfect attempts at translanguaging across eight languages, because the dimensions of my classroom have expanded to include the many worlds of my students. I have also gained a greater understanding of basic and critical literacy teaching approaches. Learning how to read English when it is not your mother tongue is challenging; teaching ESOL to adults with much on their minds is challenging. Moments when feelings, thoughts, and experiences can be shared across languages and when English can be seen as a bridge to understanding rather than as a barrier are energizing to both students and teacher. In the classroom there are moments of clarity and confusion; there are moments of laughter and frustration; there are moments of boredom and interest. There are steps forward and sudden fallings back. The classroom is not static. It is alive with human voice, energy, and contact.

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1. Hi, _____ , what do you like to do?

2. I like to _____ .

Axx likes to _____ .

Wxx likes to _____ .

Rxx likes to _____ .

Uxx likes to _____ .

Mxxx likes to _____ .

Fxx likes to _____ .

Mxx likes to _____ .

Hxx likes to _____ .

Kxx likes to _____ .

Mxx likes to _____ .

Sxx likes to _____ .

Mxx likes to _____ .

Axx likes to _____ .

Jxx likes to _____ .

1. Do you like hot weather?

2. Yes, I like hot weather.

OR

No, I don't like hot weather

Yes

No

1. _____
(name)

2. _____
(name)

3. _____
(name)

4. _____
(name)

5. _____
(name)

**1. Hello, can you please spell your name?
Do you have children? How many? Sons? Daughters?**

2. Yes, I have _____ . [OR] No, I don't have any children.

1. Are your mom and dad alive?

2. Yes. [OR] No, my parents have passed. [OR] Yes, my mother is alive, but my father has passed. [OR]

Name	Children/ How many?	Parents living /passed?
Ex. Megan	yes, 3 sons	mom and dad have passed
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____

Name _____

- 1. How many bedrooms do you have in your home?**
- 2. I have _____ bedrooms.**

1. Please spell your name



Name	1	2	3
-------------	----------	----------	----------

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Who are we?

- 1. A is from Haiti. Her 1st language is French Creole. She speaks French Creole and English.**
- 2. B is from Somalia. Her 1st language is Somali. She speaks Somali and English.**
- 3. C is from Ethiopia. Her 1st language is Oromo. She speaks Oromo and English.**
- 4. D is from Pakistan. His 1st language is Urdu. He speaks Urdu and English.**
- 5. E is from Bangladesh. Her 1st language is Bengali. She speaks Bengali and English.**
- 6. F is from the Dominican Republic. Her 1st language is Spanish. She speaks Spanish and English.**
- 7. G is from China. His 1st language is Chinese. He speaks Chinese and English.**
- 8. H is from the Dominican Republic. Her 1st language is Spanish. She speaks Spanish and English.**

Our Class

Who is from Haiti?

Who is from Bangladesh?

Who is from Ethiopia?

What language does X speak?

What language does Y speak?

Where are *A and B* from?

Our Birthdays---Personal News

C's birthday is December 10th.

D's birthday is March 5th.

E's birthday is May 6th.

F's birthday is September 24th.

G's birthday is January 14th.

H's birthday is February 7th.

I's birthday is February 7th.

J's birthday is December 5th.

K's birthday is February 10th.

L's birthday is March 6th.

M's birthday is December 26th.

N's birthday is January 5th.

Personal and National News for December 2017

NATIONAL NEWS:

In the U.S., the Winter Solstice begins on December 21st in 2017. It is the most dark day of the year. There is a long night. The daytime is very short.

PERSONAL NEWS:

- 1. A's favorite season is summer.**
- 2. B's favorite season is summer.**
- 3. C's favorite season is fall.**
- 4. D's favorite season is summer.**
- 5. E's favorite season is winter.**
- 6. F's favorite season is fall.**
- 7. G's favorite season is winter.**
- 8. H's favorite season is fall.**
- 9. I's favorite season is fall.**
- 10. J's favorite season is summer.**

Talk with your partner:

How many people like spring?

How many people like summer?

How many people like fall?

How many people like winter?

What is the most popular season?

What is the least popular season?

Popular = like a lot

Most = ># +++++

Least = <# -----

Personal News I:

A

What do you do in the morning?

I get up at 7am. Then I dress. I wash my face and I brush my teeth. I heat up the milk with toast and I eat breakfast. Then I do some chores. I go out to work at 9:00.

B

First, I wake up to pray. Then I wake up my daughter. Then I get her ready for school and if I have work, I also get ready to go.

C

First, I get up out of bed. At that time I pray to God. Then I go to the bathroom and wash my hands and mouth. After that, I eat breakfast. Then I walk or exercise on the field. When I get home, I read.

D

I wake up and then I take a shower. I take a walk outside and after I go home and eat breakfast. That is what I do in the morning. I also clean my home.

Personal News II:

E:

My mother lives in Bangladesh. She is very happy. I have four (4) brothers and three sisters. They learned to read in school. I am married. My wife's name is X. She is very nice. I have one son and one daughter. My daughter is a high school teacher and my son is a good student.

International News:

In October in Bangladesh it is hot and raining. The Pakistani political party affects Bangladesh a lot. They quarrel a lot and people leave Pakistan and come to Bangladesh. People come to Bangladesh from Myanmar too. International organizations help the affected people come into Bangladesh. The government of Myanmar did not give people their human rights.

Our Class News for Monday, October 30th

LOCAL News:

There is a man who fixes buildings in Boston. His name is Joshua. He works high up outside. Maybe he will fall. He has a harness. The work is difficult and dangerous. The world Joshua sees is beautiful. He is like a bird in the sky.

PERSONAL News:

**Saturday, October 28th, was A's birthday. A is B's son. He is 5 years old now. Happy Birthday, A!
C's wife is very happy in the U.S. Her name is D.
E's mom and dad live with him in the U.S.**

INTERNATIONAL News about schools

In the Dominican Republic, school is not difficult if you speak Spanish.

In Ethiopia, school is not difficult, but everybody does not go to school. School is expensive (\$).

Now, in Haiti, there are many problems. There is no money for schools. There is no work.

In Bangladesh, school is difficult.

In Venezuela, school is not difficult.

In China, school is very difficult.

Our News for November 27th

INTERNATIONAL NEWS: Holidays around the World

- 1. In China, people celebrate Independence Day on October 1st.**
- 2. In the Dominican Republic, December 25th is a holiday. People celebrate Christmas.**
- 3. In Somalia, people celebrate all the Muslim holidays. They celebrate Eid and Ramadan.**
- 4. In Haiti, people celebrate New Year's Day. January 1st is a holiday. People spend time with family and eat together.**
- 5. May 18th is Flag Day in Haiti. People don't work on Flag Day because it is a holiday.**
- 6. People celebrate Labor Day on May 1st in the Dominican Republic. Labor Day is a holiday.**
- 7. In Ethiopia, people celebrate New Year's on September 1st.**
- 8. In Venezuela, people celebrate Independence Day on April 19th.**

9. In Bangladesh, people celebrate Independence Day on March 26th. People do not work on March 26th because it is a holiday.

Questions:

- 1. What holidays do people celebrate in Somalia?**
- 2. When is Labor Day in the Dominican Republic?**
- 3. What holiday do people celebrate in Venezuela?**
- 4. What do people do in Haiti on January 1st?**
- 5. When is New Year's Day in Ethiopia?**

**Personal News about where we live and work: Monday,
January 29th, 2018**

- 1. A likes the train station in Z.**
- 2. B does his homework at home.**
- 3. C does not have any free-time.**
- 4. D likes the park on Walden Street. It is nice and big. The name of the park is X Park. He reads in X Park and he goes to church with his son on Sunday.**
- 5. E cooked rice for her daughter and she went to the mall last week.**
- 6. F goes to the YMCA with her children.**
- 7. G speaks English at school.**
- 8. H lives in Z. She likes having a job in Z.**
- 9. Sometimes the sink in I's home is slow to drain. This is a problem.**
- 10. Megan teaches English at work.**
- 11. J likes her school in Z.**

12. K thinks it is difficult to get to work when it snows.

International News:

1. L celebrated the holiday of Epiphany at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on January 20th.

Questions:

1. Where does F go with her children?

2. What does D do at X Park?

3. What does Megan do at work?

4. What does B do at home?

5. What does C do in his free-time?

Weekly Diary Shares

February 16th is the lunar New Year in China so I go to a family reunion dinner. Family members eat, watch t.v., watch the spring party because it is the Chinese New Year. Chinese New Year set off firecrackers and lion dance, the celebration is lively.

This weekly English Learning Diary I do not do well, because I am very tired. I see the Olympic games on t.v. during the week. I do homework. I watch people play football. I go to the market. I take my daily walk in the field. All week I feel very tired.

In the wintertime, I cannot go to X Park because there is snow down in the field. It is cold, therefore I cannot go outside. I stay in the house. I talk with my friends.

I went to the Science Museum. The weather was good. I saw a spaceship. Later we go to the mall. We eat Mexican food. I feel very happy.

This week my news is international. My news is about East Africa. Ethiopia was my country for a long time. It is very difficult there, because there is no democracy. Oromia and Amharic younger people are asking questions. They want the government to change. The people ask for elections---Can we have elections? This is a true question, but the government does not give a good answer. The government is killing many people. I am sorry. I am sad.

The Classroom as Contact Zone



Average Boston-area rents fall for the first time in almost 7 years.

Rents in Allston/Brighton and Mission Hill have climbed over the same period with two-bedroom units starting at \$2,500 a month. (BG 1/5/18)



What do you think? What are people doing? Where is this? When is this? Talk about this picture.

The Classroom as Contact Zone



DAY ZERO IN CAPETOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, APRIL 12TH

The Olympics



The Olympics

1. **WHAT** are they?

1. The Olympics are international sports competitions.

2. **WHEN** are the Olympics?

2. There are Olympics in the winter and the summer. There are winter Olympics every 4 years. The winter Olympics are in February. The summer Olympics are in July.

3. **WHO** participates in the Olympics?

3. Young people from all the countries in the world play in the Olympics.

4. **WHERE** are the winter Olympics this year?

4. The winter Olympics are in South Korea.



BEST MOVIE



BEST WRITER



BEST ACTORS

Every year, at the end of the winter, people celebrate movies in the U.S. The name of this celebration is THE OSCARS. People in the movie business vote for the best movies, the best writers and the best actors. In the U.S. everybody talks about their favorite movies. They talk about their favorite stories. They talk about their favorite actors. People have different feelings about what movies are best. THE OSCARS were last night, on Sunday, March 4th.

National News: The president of the U.S. gives the State of the Union to Congress and the people every year in January. He talks about the plans for the country in the Executive arm of government. There are three (3) arms of government in the U.S.. President Trump is part of the Executive arm. The Senate is part of the Legislative arm. The courts are part of the Judicial arm.

Congress—The Legislature / Senate



The Judicial arm



The Executive

Nightly Chit-Chat Warm-Up

Partner 1

Hi, how are you?

What do you think about this weather?

How do you feel tonight? Why?

What's your news?

Partner 2

Hi, how are you?

How was your day?

How is your family?

Excuse me, do you know what time it is?

Partner 1

Hi, how are you?

What do you think about this weather?

How do you feel tonight? Why?

What's your news?

Partner 2

Hi, how are you?

How was your day?

How is your family?

Excuse me, do you know what time it is?

HOMework

Call Megan and leave a message---617-

xxx-xxxx

The message:

"Hi Megan,

This is _____ . I want to

leave you a message. How are you? I

am _____ . I hope you

have a good vacation. I will see you on

February 26th. Bye."

Goals for English Class

I need English _____

1. to speak with my children's teachers

Yes No

2. to speak with the doctor

Yes No



3. to go shopping

Yes No

4. for life in the U.S.

Yes No

5. for work in the U.S.

Yes No

Weekly Learning Diary

This week:

My new words are:

I speak English with _____

my teacher

my children

a co-worker

my doctor

a store cashier

a friend

Name _____

Weekly Learning Diary

This week:

I go to Stop & Shop. I watch my son, G--- play hockey. I help my older son, T---, with his college applications. I prepare for my classes. I write in my journal for school. I walk around Z Pond. I visit with my friends, S---, L--- and M---. I watch Shetland on Netflix. I talk with my husband at dinner. I clean my house because it is dirty!

My new words are:

I speak English with _____ (my teacher, my children, a co-worker, my doctor, a store cashier, a friend)

What was your conversation?

Name _____

Weekly English Learning Diary

Please write about your week.

[Who do you see? What do you do? Where do you go? How do you feel?]

This week:

My new words in English are _____:

I speak English with _____.

School Diary:

What did you do in class tonight?

In class tonight I...

School Diary:

What did you do in class tonight?

In class tonight I...

Directions: Circle the word you hear

1. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
2. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
3. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
4. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
5. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
6. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**

Directions: circle the word you hear

1. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
2. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
3. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
4. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
5. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**
6. **where** **who** **what** **when** **how**

Name _____

HOW MANY???? 1, 2, 3, 4.....

How many months are in a year?

How many days are in a week?

How many letters are in your 1st (first) name?

How many students are in our class?

HOW MANY???? 1, 2, 3, 4.....

How many months are in a year?

How many days are in a week?

How many letters are in your 1st (first) name?

How many students are in our class?

Directions: Circle the SUBJECT and underline the VERB in each sentence.

1. A visits friends on the weekend.

2. B and C do laundry on the weekend.

3. D goes dancing on the weekend.

4. E vacuums on the weekend.

5. F works and works and works on the weekend.

6. G goes to the library with her children on the weekend.

7. H watches t.v. on the weekend.

8. I spend time with my family on the weekend.

9. J sleeps late on the weekend.

10. We don't have school on the weekend.

11. It was not warm on Saturday, November 11th!

12. It was cold on Saturday, November 11th!

Average

English

গড়

Bangla

gara

አማካይ

Amharic

āmakayi

平均

Chinese

Pingjun

اوسط

Spanish

Medio/ promedio

Haitian Creole

mwayen

Somali

celcelis ahaan

Equality

English

sinnaanta

Somali

egalite

Haitian Creole

igualdad

Spanish

平等

Pingdeng

Chinese

ከኩልነት

ikulineti

Amharic

সমতা

Samata

Bangla

مس اوات

Justice

English

বচার

Bangla

ፍትህ

fitihi

Amharic

正义

Zhengyi

Chinese

Jistis

Haitian Creole

Justicia

Spanish

Cadaalad

Somali

انصا

Movies

English

Sinema

Haitian Creole

Películas

Spanish

ፊልም

Amharic

চলচ্চিত্র

Bengali

电影 (Dianying)

Chinese

Filimaan

Somali

Urdu

فلمیں

Plans English

Plans Haitian Creole

计划 Chinese

ከቀደቶ Amharic
(ik'idochi)

পরিকল্পনা Bangla

qorshe Somali

El programa Spanish

To Need

I need

she needs

we need

you need

he needs

they need

bezwan

Haitian Creole

necesitar

Spanish

baahansho

Somali

ከ ቆላጎት

Amharic

ke filagoti

প্রয়োজন

Prayōjana

Bengali

需要

Xūyào

Chinese

ہے ضرورت

Urdu

Lesson Report

Main Focus of lesson:

Time spent:

I decided to teach based on:

I used when I was teaching (visual aides;
explaining concept; presenting student error;
practice exercises (textbook or teacher
created?):

Difficult Moment:

Moment that worked:

Challenge:

General Observations:

Student Comments:

Pre-1 Syllabus

Speaking and Listening

1. Understand and respond to simple greetings. "Hello! Good morning!"



2. Understand and respond to basic questions. "Where do you live? Do you have a job?"



3. Understand and respond to requests. "Turn to page 5." "Stand up." "Sit down." "Please open the window."



4. Talk about everyday topics.



Family



Shopping



TV

5. Ask questions to make something clear.

I don't understand.
Please repeat that.



6. Describe basic feelings.



7. Understand and be able to make simple emergency responses. ("Fire! Call 911!")



Grammar

1. Use subject pronouns.

I
you
he/she/it
we
they



2. Use possessive adjectives.

my your
his her our
their



my shirt
my glasses



your nose



his money

3. Use the present tense of the verb "to be"

is
am
are

I am happy.

He is sad.

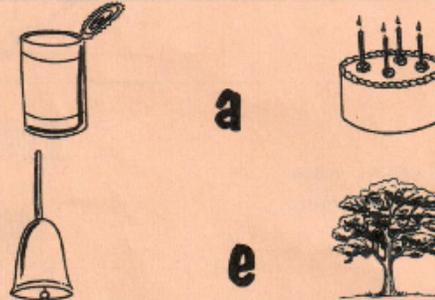
We are in class.

Reading

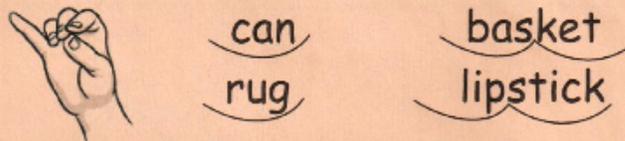
1. Give the letter name and sound of single consonants.



2. Give the letter name and sound of short and long vowels.



3. Sound out 1 and 2-syllable phonetically-regular words.



4. Read everyday sight words and phrases for independence (prescriptions, street signs, etc.).



5. Read and understand a short passage of 4-6 sentences with everyday vocabulary that has been taught in class.

It is 7:25 a.m.
Liz has her backpack.
Ben has his backpack.
Kim and the kids run to
the bus stop.

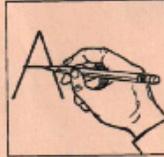


6. Read numbers from one to one thousand in numeral form.

1 **53**
12 **178**
546 **1000**

Writing and Spelling

1. Write letters correctly and in the correct position on the line.



Monday

2. Understand and try to use capital letters and periods.

Today is Wednesday.

My name is Marie.

3. Use letter sounds in spelling.



__ap



__aby



fa__ily

4. Spell your name, the name of your street, and city.

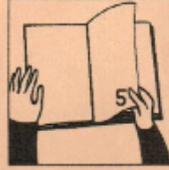
Marie

Western Ave.

Cambridge

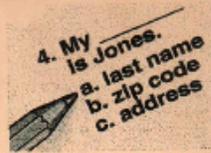
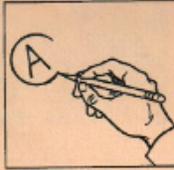
Classroom and Learning

1. Find the page in the book.



2. Understand how to do different exercises.

Circle.
Choose.
Fill in the blanks.
Match.
Underline.



3. Do homework.



4. Keep your work in a binder.



5. Come to class on time with your books and supplies.



