

A. What Is ESL Literacy?

ESL Literacy is a program for individuals who are learning English as a Second Language and who are not functionally literate in their own language for a variety of reasons. They may:

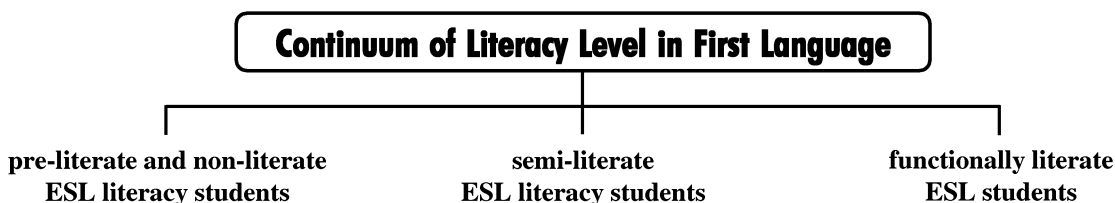
1. Be speakers of a language that lacks a written code, so they may not have needed to know how to read or write until coming to Canada;
2. Have had very little education (one or two years) in their home countries;
3. Have gone to school for up to eight years, although sometimes with sporadic attendance for reasons, such as family responsibilities, ill health, war etc. They understand, to some extent, that the written word signifies meaning. However, they don't usually have the skills to read new words. They probably lack what is often termed "study skills," such as organizing papers in a binder, dating new papers, reviewing new material or doing homework. They may tend to avoid reading or writing whenever possible, and may have preconceived notions of reading and writing that might hinder progress in the class;
4. Have come from a country with a non-Roman alphabet. They will have difficulties learning to read English, adjusting to the new phonetical and syntactic nature of the English language, but have acquired reading and study skills, which can transfer to a second language situation. (Bell & Burnaby; 1984:3-6)

Three other groups of learners may also be in ESL Literacy classes, BUT THEY ARE NOT TRUE ESL LITERACY LEARNERS:

1. Learners who may have learning disabilities,
2. Learners who have been through trauma of some kind, and
3. Learners who are literate in their native language, but who may prefer (for various reasons such as age, health, family situation) to participate in a slower-paced class with a more collaborative approach usually found in an ESL Literacy class.

An ESL Literacy class may have any combination of the above learners. It is crucial to recognize how their life and education experiences and feelings can affect learners' confidence in learning. Experienced ESL Literacy teachers often speak of the need to consider the whole person when developing and delivering an ESL Literacy program. These considerations extend to programming timelines, content and instructional methodologies.

There is a continuum of ESL Literacy learners (see illustration), with commonly used literacy terminology. There is controversy in the field over the use of these terms. They are used here, however, for the sake of clarity.



Pre-literate -

Although this terminology is unfortunate, “pre-literate” is generally used to describe an individual who lives in an oral culture and whose language does not have a written form or only acquired a written form recently. Some people in this category came to Canada in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s as refugees. This term may also apply to some Somali and Ethiopian students whose first language has no written form.

Non-literate -

This describes a person who does not read or write at all in any language but lives in a literate society. This would describe an individual from El Salvador who has farmed all his life and never needed to learn to read and write until he came to Canada.

Semi-literate -

This term describes a person who has some reading and writing skills in her own language but is not functionally literate in her first language. This would describe a person who grew up in the Azores of Portugal and only went to Grade 4 before quitting school to work. This would also describe an individual from Afghanistan who learned to read and write somewhat but whose education was continually interrupted during the war.

Non-Roman Alphabet Learner

Within this category there are at least two sub-categories of learners.

Non-Roman Alphabet ESL Learner -

This learner is already literate in her own language but the language uses a non-Roman alphabet such as Russian, Greek, Chinese and Punjabi. She needs to learn the new writing system, that is the alphabet, left-right and top to bottom directionality, etc. As she is already literate in her own language she should be able to transfer her already acquired reading skills to English once she masters these changes. This learner brings to the ESL classroom the knowledge already acquired in formal educational settings and usually adapts more quickly to the Canadian educational environment.

Non-Roman Alphabet ESL Literacy Learner -

This type of learner is not functionally literate in his own language and can be situated anywhere along the literacy continuum in the non-literate and semi-literate range. There may be interference in learning the new writing system because he is somewhat familiar with his own system but has not yet mastered it. It is important that the instructor find out exactly where on the literacy continuum he is located and identify any gaps in the learner’s repertoire of metacognitive skills. This can only be done by assessing the level of literacy in the first language.

To be effective, ESL Literacy programming must consider the learner as an individual with needs that extend beyond the immediate classroom.

B. What Are ESL Literacy Benchmarks?

The ESL Literacy Benchmarks lay out the progression of reading, writing and numeracy skills for ESL adults who have little or no literacy skills in their first language. The document is also useful with ESL students who are literate in a non-Roman alphabet language and need to learn reading and writing basics in English.

These benchmarks are descriptions of what ESL Literacy students are able to do at various stages of their development. They are not a curriculum, nor are they a test; however, they can be used to inform the development of both.

The ESL Literacy Benchmarks are divided into a pre-reading and writing phase, called the Foundation Phase, followed by Phases I - III.

C. Why Is Numeracy Included?

Since ESL Literacy learners have little or no formal education they may also require basic numeracy skills. These skills are as important in everyday life as being able to read and write. Like reading and writing, numeracy is a communication skill. Numeracy provides a language for dialoguing about quantities, measurement, comparing, identifying patterns, reasoning, and communicating precisely.

Basic numeracy includes addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, decimals, percentages and fractions. Sometimes learners are more comfortable manipulating numbers than words on a page. Developing competence in numeracy can help build the confidence necessary to learn to read and write. It can help adults who may need to deal with situations involving numbers, mathematical ideas, and quantities. Generally, non-Roman alphabet learners, if they are well educated, will not need to learn numeracy skills.

However, if they are not fully literate in their first language this may be necessary. Even learners who have had some exposure to math instruction may have been taught quite differently. Some languages have non-Arabic numbering systems, although usually this is found only in older learners.

D. Who Should Use The ESL Literacy Benchmarks?

The ESL Literacy Benchmarks are primarily intended for instructors to help them determine the developmental level of their students and design appropriate teaching/learning activities. They may also be useful to curriculum, material, or test developers.

E. How Do The ESL Literacy Benchmarks Relate To The ESL For Adults Benchmarks?

The ESL for Adults Benchmarks are designed for use with literate learners. The ESL Literacy Benchmarks are designed to be used with the listening and speaking ESL for Adults Benchmarks until such time as the learner has developed sufficient fluency as a reader to move into a regular ESL program or into a literacy program for native speakers of English, such as ABE (Adult Basic Education).

For the ESL Literacy student, these benchmarks replace the early levels of the ESL for Adults reading and writing benchmarks. The exception is the Foundation Phase, which describes the development of the pre-reading and writing skills and knowledge necessary before beginning Phase I reading and writing.

Adult students of ESL usually develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at different rates. It is not uncommon for an adult ESL student to have Canadian Language Benchmarks assessment scores at different levels in the various skill areas. For ESL Literacy students, while

their oral skills can be described on the same scale as ESL for Adults students, their literacy skills require a different description: one which articulates the specific aspects of their literacy development. *Figure 1* illustrates approximate comparative benchmark levels for the ESL for Adults and ESL Literacy descriptors. However, the diagram does not reflect the significant differences in the rate of progress of students in the two streams.

The end of the Phase III ESL Literacy can be viewed as a time of transition. Those students with higher oral/aural levels may be ready to enter an ABE program. Others,

whose oral/aural level is closer to their literacy level, would probably benefit from participating in a regular adult ESL class to develop their speaking and listening along with their literacy skills.

Figure 1

ESL Benchmarks	ESL Literacy Benchmarks
Benchmark 5	Phase III
Benchmark 4	
Benchmark 3	
Benchmark 2	Phase II
Benchmark 1	Phase I
	Foundation Phase

E. What Is The Content And Organization Of The ESL Literacy Benchmarks?

As mentioned earlier, the ESL Literacy Benchmarks are described in four phases, Foundation, and Phases I - III.

Foundation Phase

The Foundation Phase describes pre-reading and writing concepts and skills that students must develop prior to Phase I. Students who have never attended school before and have no experience with written text usually need to develop some basics before they can begin to read and write. For example, they may never have held a pen or pencil before and becoming comfortable with this skill can take some time, as any of us who have learned to knit or do brush calligraphy as adults will recognize. Foundation Phase students may need to learn to hold a pencil, make pencil strokes and copy shapes, letters or numbers. They may also be unfamiliar with the concept that the printed page carries meaning, that pictures represent concrete objects, or that we move from left to right and from top to bottom on the written English page.

The Foundation Phase begins with an *overview* that provides a global description, sociocultural and linguistic considerations, learning strategies, and pre-reading and writing strategies for learners in this phase of their ESL Literacy development.

The Foundation Phase of reading has been further divided into two progress points, *Initial* and *Developing* to reflect the development of concepts related to the printed page. The information for each of the progress points is presented in a two-page table.

Phases I - III

Each Phase includes the skill areas of reading, writing and numeracy. Each Phase begins with an *overview* that provides a global description, sociocultural and linguistic

considerations, learning strategies, and reading, writing and numeracy strategies for learners in this phase of their ESL Literacy development.

To enable students and teachers to mark student progress, the reading and writing skill areas have been further divided into three progress points: *Initial*, *Developing* and *Adequate*. These terms, also used in the ESL for Adults Benchmarks, provide some coherence between the two sets of benchmarks and help facilitate student transition between programs. The numeracy benchmarks have not been further divided as it is generally recognized that these skills are linked to overall language and literacy development.

Format of the Tables

The ESL Literacy Benchmarks tables are presented in a two-page spread. The following information is described under each heading:

Reading and Writing

Language Competencies - describes a sample of the communicative functions of reading and writing in which the ESL Literacy skills are contextualized. These functions generally incorporate the functions described in the ESL for Adults Benchmarks and provide the context for the literacy competencies;

Literacy Competencies - describes the specific literacy concepts or skills related to the language competencies.

Conditions - describes the characteristics of the context and supports the students need to carry out the tasks, such as the size of the type font or sentence length;

Sample Tasks - provides suggestions of possible communicative tasks in which to contextualize the literacy competencies;

Examples - provides a variety of samples of texts - size of font, layout, etc. in reduced form - that would be appropriate at this point in the ESL Literacy student's progress. N.B. These are examples only and not to be considered the only texts that could be used.

Numeracy

Numeracy Competencies - describes a sample of basic numeracy functions and concepts;

Language Competencies - describes aspects of English and literacy related to the numeracy competencies;

Conditions - describes the characteristics of the context and supports that the students need to carry out the tasks, such as the use of concrete objects and manipulatives;

Sample Tasks and Applications - provides suggestions of possible tasks and activities students can do to apply the numeracy skills and concepts; N.B. These are examples only and not to be considered the only tasks that could be used.

G. How Are Students Likely To Progress Through The ESL Literacy Benchmarks?

Progress through the ESL Literacy Benchmarks is likely to be as varied as the learners and significantly affected by factors, such as age, effects of emotional trauma, motivation, experience with formal education, and similarity of the first language to English. However, because of the additional learning burden - ESL Literacy students are learning literacy skills and developing new physical skills in addition to learning English language skills - progress is often more slowly achieved.

Progress may not be steady and fixed. Interruptions in learning and extended periods of time between re-encountering newly-learned concepts and skills can require

a re-introduction and practice. Inconsistency in performance from day to day is not uncommon.

It is also not uncommon for students to move in and out of ESL Literacy and mainstream ESL classes from time to time. Beginning ESL Literacy students may develop sufficient literacy skills that they are able to move into a regular ESL class. However, if their oral skill development out-paces their literacy skill development, they may feel more comfortable moving into an ESL Literacy class again for a period of time.

Some Learner Profiles

The following profiles represent learners at different stages along the ESL Literacy – ESL continuum

Learner Profile 1

Jorge is a 41 year old from El Salvador who has been in Canada five months. He worked as a farmer in his country. He went to school for six years as a child, although his attendance was irregular due to the school's distance from his village and his need to work on the family farm seasonally. As an adult, he never felt comfortable reading or writing and relied on others in the community to do it for him.

He has a basic vocabulary of sight words in Spanish, which he can read when they are in isolation. He is not comfortable writing much more than his name. He has basic numeracy skills of counting, adding and subtracting, all of which he does in his head.

Since his arrival in Canada, he has picked up some survival English words and phrases. His English is completely oral: he cannot read or write English.

Jorge is just beyond an *initial* point in Phase I of reading, writing and numeracy. His listening is around Benchmark 1 and his speaking is about ESL Benchmark 2.

Learner Profile 2

Amala is from Ethiopia. She is 27 years old and has been in Canada three months. In Ethiopia, she never attended school because as the eldest daughter she was expected to stay home and take care of her younger siblings. She never learned to read or write in Amharic. She counts to 100 and can do very basic addition and subtraction.

Since her arrival in Canada, she has attended English classes and has learned English very quickly. She is able to communicate and understand spoken English in her daily activities. She is just starting to learn the written form of words she knows orally.

Amala is at about a *developing* point of the Foundation Phase of reading and writing. Her numeracy skills are a Phase I and her listening and speaking are around ESL Benchmark 4.

Learner Profile 3

Maria has lived in Canada for over 30 years since arriving from her native Portugal at the age of 16. She went to school as a child for four years, then quit to work in the family business.

Soon after her arrival in Canada, she was hired as a cleaner in a large urban hospital. She works there still, within a group of employees largely of the same background. They communicate in Portuguese to each other and in English to other hospital staff.

Maria speaks English quite fluently, though she has never attended an English class. She never learned to read or write in English. Maria has good basic numeracy skills; she can figure out her change when shopping and manage a basic monthly household budget.

Maria is semi-literate and would be considered working at an *initial* point of Phase II for reading and writing, in Phase III for numeracy, around ESL Benchmark 7 in listening and 8 in speaking.

Learner Profile 4

Samjit is a 45 year old man from the Punjab. He has 12 years of education in his country and worked in a bank until he immigrated to Canada six months ago. Since that time he has had to attend to family concerns and has not yet started English classes. He does not speak, understand, read or write any English.

Samjit is a non-Roman alphabet learner who is literate in his first language. He is placed in Phase I for reading and writing but will progress quickly, either moving to a regular ESL class or upward through the ESL Literacy stream.

H. How Should The ESL Literacy Benchmarks Be Used?

As described earlier, these benchmarks describe what a student can do at various phases of their ESL Literacy development. They are not a curriculum, nor are they an assessment tool although they may be used to develop both.

Using ESL Literacy Benchmarks in Assessment

The ESL Literacy Benchmarks provide the basis for developing assessment tools to assist programs and teachers in placing students into appropriate classes and determining progress. Test developers can use the information provided in these descriptors to design appropriate assessment tasks and performance criteria.

ESL Literacy students may perform inconsistently on assessment tasks from day to day. Performance can be affected by a number of factors, such as the amount of teacher support provided during the task, the similarity of the assessment task to previous practice or the familiarity of the students with test-taking strategies. All of this must be taken into consideration when establishing criteria for assessment performance and deciding upon assessment strategies.

Teachers may also want to use the ESL Literacy Benchmarks to develop self-assessment tools for student use.

Using ESL Literacy Benchmarks in Curriculum Development

Benchmarks are standards by which we measure progress. They are outcomes. The ESL Literacy Benchmarks are the anticipated outcomes at various phases of the student's development and for each benchmark, indicators of achievement are listed. These specific indicators help the instructor to decide if the learner is able to achieve the outcome.

By contrast, curriculum is the means by which learners achieve outcomes. The ESL Literacy Benchmarks do not outline what the teacher does in the classroom to facilitate learning. A program or teacher could use the ESL Literacy Benchmarks to set learning objectives and identify activities and tasks.

The ESL Benchmarks do not describe the contexts or themes in which the literacy skills and concepts can be taught. In a learner-centred program, a needs assessment should be conducted to reveal the contexts that the students need, such as shopping, going to the doctor, finding a job. The development of ESL Literacy skills can take place within these themes using relevant materials and language.

The ESL Literacy Benchmarks also do not prescribe a methodology although there are a number of suggestions implied. For more ideas on teaching ESL Literacy, teachers are referred to the section, **WHAT ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR METHODOLOGY?**, in this introduction. In addition, Jill Bell's book, *A Handbook for ESL Literacy* is a very valuable resource.

Programs may also find the ESL Literacy Benchmarks to be a useful resource in developing reporting protocols to assist teachers in providing feedback to the learners on their progress.

Limitations of using benchmarks to show progression in ESL Literacy development

Benchmarks showing progression in ESL Literacy development have certain limitations and can create some mis-leading conclusions. They may suggest that ESL Literacy learning can be neatly "boxified" into a particular rubric, when, in fact, learning is continuous and fluid. Students may be able to do some things at one degree of competence and function at another level in something else and are thus likely to overlap the boundaries between phases at times.

Benchmarks do not show the amount of time required to learn one thing or another, nor do they show the relative importance of the various aspects of reading and writing or their impact on learning other concepts.

Benchmarks such as these are usually limited in scope to a representative sample of competencies. They tend, therefore to focus our attention on those things which are easily measurable and may omit aspects of learning which are equally important but less easily tested.

I. How Do People Learn To Read?

There has been a lot of controversy over the issue of how we learn to read for the first time. This section provides an overview of the two major theories of reading and a short description of what most researchers now believe is the process of acquiring reading skills.

Phonics

For a good part of this century children were taught to read through phonics. This method is an application of the “bottom-up” theory of reading. Children were often given lists of words and taught to decode them. While some children learned to read this way, some did not. Critics of this method claim that children who learn to read this way get so caught up in trying to decode the sounds of the word that they do not understand what they are reading. In other words, they are not reading for meaning. If they are not reading for meaning, then they are not receiving the message the author is trying to convey and hence, they are not really reading at all.

Whole Language

In 1971, Frank Smith published *Understanding Reading*, which proposed the idea that we do not attend to individual letters when we read nor do we read every word in a sentence. Rather than learning to identify individual sounds, Smith proposed that children learn to read by predicting what words will be in the text by relying on visual and non-visual cues including print, pictures, background knowledge, etc. Part of his research was based on watching good readers read.

Understanding Reading contributed to the revival of the Whole Language Movements. Whole Language methodology is described in many different ways. It often includes ensuring that learners are only given “real” or authentic reading material and that the wider uses of literacy are explored. Whole Language methodology is an application of the “top-down” theory of reading.

Since Smith published his research in the early 1970s technology has improved to the extent that researchers can now accurately follow eye movement as one reads a text. This research shows that good readers do attend to most letters and most words in a sentence. Therefore, “prediction” is not the primary conveyor of meaning, especially in the early stages of learning to read.

Interactive Theories

Currently, the literature supports “interactive” theories. These theories marry Whole Language and phonics, or top-down with bottom-up. An ESL analogy might be to compare communicative approaches to grammar-based methodologies, such as audio-lingual. Interactive theories take what is good from each to produce more effective methodologies.

A good reading and writing program combines the Whole Language approach with the solid development of sequential skills.

Brain-based Learning

Approaches to the teaching of ESL Literacy have also been influenced by research into brain-based learning. Caine and Caine (1997) outline 12 brain/mind learning principles, which basically suggest that learning is enhanced when it involves meaningful, social interaction with the real world. It is also enhanced when learning tasks and activities are varied to respond to the diversity of learning styles within the classroom and tasks are also designed to offer challenge, promote success and minimize threat of failure.

What Are The Characteristics Of A Good Reader?

A good reader can recognize letters, knows the letter-sound correspondences and can identify print conventions so well that it has become automatic. This allows the reader to focus her cognitive capacities on understanding the text. A poor reader for whom this is not automatic will be slowed down considerably and will have fewer cognitive resources to devote to understanding what the author wants to convey.

Cognition And Reading

Cognition and reading research has tended to focus on the study of children learning to read in their native language. However, there are some findings that are of note for teachers of adult ESL Literacy learners. For non-literate learners, research findings may not apply; we cannot assume people learning to read for the first time as adults employ the same cognitive processes as those who were taught as children. Here are four major findings on what makes a good reader, based on research on “poor readers”.

Good readers use a wide variety of strategies to understand the message of the text. Poor readers are less likely to use a wide variety of strategies to enhance their reading ability and comprehension even if they are capable of doing so. Strategies such as phonological decoding and uses of short and long-term memory are all less commonly used among poor readers.

Good readers use their resources selectively and efficiently. Poor readers read more slowly and understand less of what they read. Because they have to expend more effort at the level of decoding, poor readers have fewer resources left over for broader textual interpretation.

Good readers get better, poor readers get worse. For those learners with a history of failure with reading, this downward spiral has an impact on their belief that they can ever read well. In the literacy class, it is a question of the learner breaking free of the downward spiral by developing a wide range of reading strategies and techniques.

Research suggests that the act of reading contributes to the development of many cognitive skills. Many adult literacy practitioners have seen this to be true. An adult’s inability to read will have an impact on how he performs in other areas of learning. Certain processing abilities that good readers reinforce in the act of reading are lacking in poor readers. By practising reading, learners improve other cognitive skills.

For the ESL Literacy teacher, this means you need to teach reading strategies. You also need to monitor learners as they use the strategies to ensure they are able to employ them independently. It is important, too, to look at other cognitive processes, such as use of short and long-term memory or inferential thinking, that someone without a reading background may need to practise.

What Is Metacognition?

Metacognition is literally knowing about knowing. It includes recognizing when you know something or, when you do not, being able to choose when and how to use a different strategy to learn. For example, when you read a text, you may recognize that you do not understand part or all of what you are reading. You then make a decision to employ a strategy that will help your understanding. One technique may be to re-read the text. If the problem is one of vocabulary, you may look up a word in the dictionary. Perhaps, as a preventative strategy you might decide to stop periodically throughout the text and ask yourself

questions about it to check your understanding. All these are examples of metacognitive strategies a reader applies to monitor her cognitive processes, in this case reading. We use metacognition in all areas of our life whenever we make an effort to learn, study or solve problems.

Both researchers and practitioners in the field of ESL Literacy point to the relationship between a learner's ability to employ metacognitive strategies and her overall confidence in learning. Understanding how, why and when one learns best is a powerful, portable tool. Metacognition is an area that underscores the connection between classroom learning and life and learning. The tools and skills that one learns in the classroom can be applied to real life, and the knowledge and skills one brings from other learning experiences can be transferred for use in the classroom.

In ESL Literacy we need to ensure that learners know how to monitor their own learning as they learn to read and write. We also need to encourage learners to think about how they learn.

Debate in the little research that has been done on metacognition in adult learners concerns whether adult learners without formal education bring metacognitive strategies to their new learning. Some researchers claim that when an adult learns something for the first time, she must learn the accompanying metacognitive strategies. Others insist that adults can and do transfer metacognitive skills developed for use in a non-educational environment to the classroom.

There is truth on both sides of the debate. Certainly an adult's previous learning cannot be discounted. It often serves as a solid foundation upon which to build new skills. But we also see gaps in literacy learners' metacognitive abilities. They often do not possess the learning strategies needed to succeed in the classroom or

they may not recognize a strategy they already know when it is suggested by the instructor. Our task then, is to identify which strategies the learner brings and work with her to transfer the skills for classroom use.

J. What Are Some Suggestions For ESL Literacy Methodology?

We learn from each other: learners from instructors, instructors from learners and learners from learners. By getting to know learners, encouraging self-expression, listening actively and joining discussions, the instructor is truly more a facilitator than an ultimate authority in the classroom. This is especially important in an ESL Literacy class where you may need to reinforce learners' confidence, given their lack of experience in formal educational settings.

Overview

Many ESL Literacy learners prefer “experiential” learning and so the connection to real life in both content and skills developed in the classroom is important. As much as possible, think about the real-life applications of any skills you plan to cover.

Timelines are often a source of frustration in the ESL Literacy class. If learners are consistently unable to accomplish objectives set within timelines, then it may be time to reconsider the timelines and closely examine the program content and delivery.

One general caution is not to make assumptions about what a learner knows or does not know. ESL Literacy instruction is based on building a body of knowledge and skills that includes but is not limited to reading and writing. Learners may be unfamiliar with concepts the instructor considers common knowledge, or may not have a sub-skill required to complete a larger task. For example, a learner cannot acquire the language skills related to telling time if he has not yet learned to “read” a

clock. It is important that we check the learner's understanding of what we teach and not make quick assumptions about why someone is not learning.

Remember to teach each skill within a meaningful context. This reflects the thinking behind the interactive reading theories and brain-based learning.

Teaching Reading

We know a great deal about how children learn to read in their first language and we know a fair amount about how adults learn to speak a second language. Very little has been done, however, on second language acquisition in adults who are also learning to read and write for the first time. We suggest that you teach reading skills as laid out in the Benchmarks. A learner will not be able to derive meaning from print until she has solid word recognition skills. She cannot develop word recognition skills until oral vocabulary in English has been developed.

A learner's confidence is integral to the learning process. This may mean having the confidence to speak or write, to work with others in achieving a task, or to choose the topic to be covered next class. There are many ways of fostering this kind of confidence, and it is essential for the instructor to keep it foremost in mind when planning and delivering the literacy program.

Teaching Listening and Speaking

An ESL Literacy learner may have difficulty learning oral language because he cannot reinforce what he is learning in print. He may also never have thought about language as a system that can be broken down and classified. Therefore, he may have trouble learning common grammatical concepts such as sentences or parts of speech. Take a lot of time developing oral vocabulary (particularly survival words) before proceeding to reading and writing.

Teaching Writing

The Benchmarks include the progression of mechanical skills as well as the types of text appropriate for production at the various phases. As with reading, learners need to understand the mechanical skills before they attempt to write for meaning. This might mean spending time just holding a pencil, or drawing shapes to increase comfort level. When learners are comfortable with the mechanics, they can progress to word and then sentence production, and finally to longer text production. The literacy learner must also become familiar with the differences between written language and oral language. Again, early writing should not emphasize writing words outside of a meaningful context. Once comfortable at this level of expression, however, class work should progress to addressing writing conventions and formalities.

Teaching Numeracy

Basic numeracy should be taught sequentially. As much as possible, the skill you are teaching should be incorporated into the development of language skills including reading and writing. For example, themes of shopping, looking for accommodation and even telling time assume some knowledge of basic numeracy. Check to ensure that your learners know the numeracy concepts before trying to teach them the language for covering these themes.

Developing Cognitive Strategies

Poor readers are less likely to use a range of strategies which help the reader attack a text systematically and understand it better. Teach these strategies explicitly using the Benchmarks as a guide. In early reading, learners might focus on phonetic decoding. Once comfortable with some word recognition, they might progress to using the text to aid comprehension. More advanced ESL Literacy learners might work on identifying themes within a text. Strategies learned in this systematic fashion give learners a sense of control and independence in their learning. Cognitive strategies are also used in developing basic math skills.

For example, if the class focuses on fractions, ensure that learners have the skills to recognize when they are unable to complete a problem, plus other strategies they might use in order to solve the problem a different way.

Developing Metacognitive Strategies

Just as cognitive strategies help the learner to learn, metacognitive strategies monitor that learning. The Benchmarks include metacognitive strategies a learner should be able to employ at the various levels. As with cognitive strategies, these need to be taught explicitly. You can do this by consciously including the metacognitive aspect of any strategy or skill you teach in the classroom, whether listening, speaking, reading or writing.

Metacognitive strategies save learners time and frustration. Rather than doing a lot of work incorrectly and relying on the instructor to tell them they were unsuccessful, learners monitor their own learning and employ interventions when they feel they are not learning. In this scenario, the instructor is more a co-ordinator or facilitator and less the ultimate authority of what is correct or incorrect.

The Role of First Language in the Classroom

As impossible or impractical as it might be given your resources, use first language for conceptual work whenever possible. This includes developing cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The connection between first language and comprehension in second language literacy cannot be emphasized enough. First language can serve as a basis upon which new learning is built. This is most obvious with educated ESL learners, for whom learning a second language is often a matter of translating already acquired knowledge into the new language. ESL Literacy learners who do not have educational experience may be unfamiliar with the type of abstract thinking usually taught in school. For these learners, it is not simply a question of

translating information, but of learning about and creating a framework within which to put new knowledge.

ESL Literacy learners, especially those with no formal education, separate the new information and skills they are learning in class from what they already know. That is, they may not necessarily make the connection between what is learned in English and what they already know in their own language. Or, they may have difficulty because they have not yet learned the concept in their first language. Take the example of a learner who is being taught directions – north, south, east and west – for the first time in English. If he never used this method of directionality in his own country, there is no previous experience or quick translation he can rely on in order to understand easily what is being taught. This presents an added obstacle to the instructor, who must struggle not only to teach the vocabulary but also the concept.

As a learner gains more vocabulary and more confidence in his ability to learn in a more formal setting this may become less of a problem. Of course, this occurs with literate ESL students, too, but there is often a flexibility and capacity for abstract thinking that a learner without education may not employ so automatically.

Working with Non-Roman Alphabet Learners

Non-Roman alphabet learners can be divided into two categories. One group is literate in a non-Roman alphabet language and needs to learn the Roman alphabet before tackling English reading and writing. As much as possible, draw on the learner's knowledge of the first language's writing system. For example, it is easier to explain directionality of print to someone who already knows how to read than to someone who is learning to read for the first time.

You can point out that in English we read left to right. This will take some getting used to. If the learner's language does not use an alphabet, he will require a lot of time learning the alphabet and corresponding sounds.

The second group is semi-literate in a non-Roman alphabet language and needs to learn the Roman alphabet as well as acquire new literacy skills. This learner's progress will reflect the stages of a new reader learning to read but may have some interference from knowledge he has acquired about the writing system in the first language.

K. What Are Some Suggestions For Choosing Or Developing Materials?

Appropriate materials are particularly important for ESL Literacy learners. The goal in the ESL Literacy class is that learners will be able to interact comfortably with authentic materials found in the real world. However, at certain phases of their ESL Literacy development, teacher-made and adapted materials may be most suitable. There are two main factors that need to be considered, *clarity of language* and *format*.

Clarity of Language

ESL Literacy learners benefit from having substantial context in their materials. Pictures related to the text and realia (real, concrete items) help learners understand what they are reading. The amount and familiarity of vocabulary are also important features to consider. Introduction of new written vocabulary should follow considerable interaction with the words orally. Introduce new words in limited numbers in written materials with sufficient opportunity to interact with them numerous times. Short sentences are easier to read and complex

structures should be avoided if possible at the earlier phases of development. New readers also find sentences written in the active voice much easier to understand than those written in the passive voice.

Format of the material

Design features of material are critical features of text difficulty. The more white space on a page surrounding the written text, the easier the page is to read. Font size and type are two other important features affecting text difficulty. Larger fonts minimize barriers to understanding in ESL Literacy materials. At the earliest phases, using a 16 - 20 point font is helpful. While occasional words or phrases that might be seen as signs or on forms (STOP, EXIT, NAME, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!) may be written all in upper case letters, sentences written all in upper case are difficult to read. The choice of font type can affect the ease with which an ESL learner can read material. Generally, sans serif fonts are considered easier to read than serif fonts. Choose a font that is basic, similar to printed letters, such as Comic Sans MS, Univers, or Arial. Avoid fonts with decorative features.

And Finally...

Learning English while learning to read and write for the first time is a daunting task. It may take learners quite some time to reach the end of Phase 3. The ESL Literacy Benchmarks provide a framework to help learners move through the stages from being a non-reader to reading fluently. They reflect both "top-down" (Whole Language) and "bottom-up" (phonics) theories of learning to read. In this context we can offer a rich learning environment for people who may never have experienced a formal educational setting.