

Strategies for Teaching Adult Emergent Readers

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Some Descriptions of Literacy Learners

We are teaching a huge variety of students. Some may be able to communicate their needs orally but not read and write in English while others may be a beginner in all skills. In order to better identify where to start and what approaches will work with learners, we need to find out who our students are, their level of proficiency in spoken English, and their history with the written word.

Every student is going to have varying experiences and this affects material selection, task design, instructional focus, and rate of progress. Beginning literacy can be viewed as a continuum.

PRE-LITERATE: Students from an oral language tradition, native language is not written

NON-LITERATE: Non-literate students come from a culture with a written language, but they have had little or no exposure to literacy in their first or second language.

SEMI-LITERATE: Semi-literate students have some but minimal literacy in their own language. They may be very nervous and hesitant and lack confidence in their literacy skills in L1.

NON-ROMAN ALPHABET LITERATE: Students are fluent in literacy in a language that does not use a Roman alphabet.

Some Differences

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

*From Brod

Stages of Becoming Literate

Name of Stage	What Students are Working on
Pre-literate	Visual Literacy (recognition of pictures, graphics, abstract symbols) Auditory discrimination of sounds or Phonemic awareness (the ability to distinguish, isolate, manipulate and substitute sounds) Print Awareness (directionality and paper orientation, correspondence between spoken and written form, printed text carries meaning)

Alphabetic	One to one relationship between sounds and symbols. Up to CVC (Cat) pattern.
Within-word pattern	Learn common patterns CVCe (late) , CVV (blue), CV (go) CVVC (train)
Syllable +Affix	How single syllable patterns combine in multi-syllabic words how late (CVCe) becomes relate. Consonant doubling, 'e' drop
Derivational Relations	How word endings work: -ed, -ing, -ic, -ion, ology,etc

Instructional Strategies

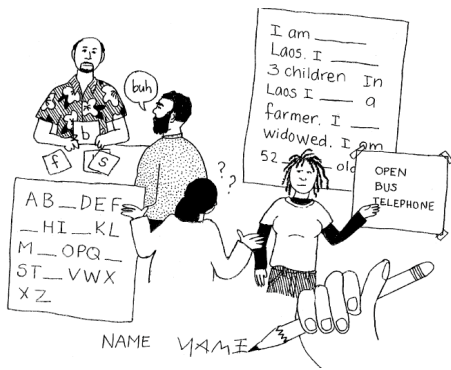
#1 Needs Assessment or Where to Start

While we always want to develop curriculum around students' needs, finding out what these are for non-literate beginning students is more challenging. Using photos/pictures of real places helps students express the places they may need to use English.



Conduct assessment of level through questioning and observation.

- 1 What is the student's comfort level with the sounds of English? Can they mimic accurately? Say any words with distinguishable sounds?
- 2 Can my students write their names in English? Say any letters in their name?
- 3 How much visual literacy does my student have? (interpret stick figures, know any common symbols such as arrows and check marks)
- 4 When pointing to letters of the alphabet, do my students have a concept of what their names are?
- 5 When pointing to letters of the alphabet, do my students have a concept of what sounds they can make?
- 6 Can my students identify any basic sight words or symbols from cards?
- 7 Can my students hold a pen, make shapes, know the place to start on the paper?
- 8 Can my students find a random page number in a book when told?
- 9 Can my students complete an English alphabet cloze exercise? Can they name letters?
- 10 Can my students copy sentences in English?
- 11 Can my students read simple sentences in English?
- 12 Can my students write simple dictated sentences?
- 13 What are my students' educational backgrounds?



#2 Begin with Listening and Speaking

Students need to be able to express some personal information and simple needs in very short learned phrases or sentences before starting to read. Make connections between oral and written language. Only ask students to read something they have spent time practicing orally. Students also need phonemic awareness (not connect to print yet) and visual literacy so that they are ready for literacy work. These skills can be reinforced during oral work.

#3 Start with Real Words

Use student-generated material as a basis to learn sight words. Student-generated material avoids issues of comprehension as the students have given you the oral text such as in the Language Experience Approach. Use teacher generated material to reinforce and practice the new sight words and as a bank of words to extract sound-spelling correspondences and patterns. Include important words students find in their environment or in forms/documents too.

#4 Create a System to Record and Recycle new Language and Sight Words

Create a literacy rich environment of words your students can read; use a sight word wall or a target letter chart. Develop a system for individual students to record their new words; record the words on a list or set of index cards for frequent review.

#5 Teach Word-attack Skills

Students need to learn the sounds that letters make so they will be able to read words that are not sight words. Start with some consonants and short vowels. Build into word families (/a/, /n/ . /a/ +/n/= an, /c/+ an= can, /m/+ an= man, etc)

#6 Use a Combination of Top-down and Bottom-up Processing Strategies in Every Lesson

Students need to grasp whole chunks of written language through exposure to whole but simplified texts. In addition, students need help to sound out combinations of letters and sounds in words they encounter. Include both reading for meaning and work on sounds and letters in each lesson.

#7 Help students See Patterns in Language and Literacy

Our students are learning to read in a language that is not their best. Help students see patterns so they can chunk words together and use strategies such as predicting.

#8 Help students apply and notice literacy in the world around them

It is exciting to see the word 'the' on a real poster or recognize a word, letter or short phrase in a real document. Help students apply their learning and celebrate success. Take short walks and give small tasks to complete outside of class.

#9 Teach study skills and spend time organizing paper work

Non-literate students have little experience organizing paper work. Number and date pages, color code important handouts and sort paper work regularly into units, themes or sets. Encourage and teach learning strategies such as asking for clarification, visualize and repeat, etc.

#10 Be intentional about planning literacy instruction and capitalize on 'found' literacy moments

Literacy students need regular exposure to literacy at their level. This needs to be planned especially if most other students are already literate. Opportunities also arise in listening and speaking activities where students encounter a literacy moment. Instead of having non-literate students copy the dialogue from the board, allow the literate students to copy while you provide a copy for non-literate students and use it to do something more level appropriate. Circle sight words that are known, notice letters and letter combinations, match pictures to the words or have students shadow read with you.

Techniques and Activities

Language Experience Approach (LEA), dictated stories or "The News" activity

They connect oral and written language well and make an easy transition from conversation to writing.

Play games: Bingo, concentration, fly swatter, etc with words or letters

Listen and Write; using known vocabulary give students part of the word and have them complete the rest. Begin with initial sounds move onto ending and medial position sounds.

___ rother, ___ other, ___ ather, ___ on. You can also make it a running dictation.

Use Visual Aids

- Realia, Pictures and Photographs- start with real things and photographs. Transition to pictures and graphics as students begin to read them.
- Magazine pictures- students search for pictures around a key word such as "Winter" or "Work". Connect oral and written language. Describe the pictures and label or write anything to go with the pictures.
- Use letter, number and word cards

Word and Picture sorts. Sort pictures by initial letter, move onto written words.

Visual drills to help develop visual literacy, acculturate to reading in English

Grid activities. Useful for speaking practice, grammar patterning and sentence building

Incorporate technology: Computer and typing time. Sight word games and alphabet games.

Copy for a reason

Limit aimless copying from the board and limit print on the board to reduce this habit. Use the material that students copy in their notebooks. Work on mechanics of writing at specific times with directed work.

Vary activities so that learners employ different modalities. Schedule time to get out of their seats and time for breaks. Include field trips and short excursions out of the classroom.

Tips

- ✓ Use a larger font and one that reflects how we write, for example, Century Gothic and Comic Sans.
- ✓ Have plenty of white space on worksheets.
- ✓ Use visuals, graphics, and icons to accompany written material, use colored paper for key handouts
- ✓ Think: How can I explain, model or respond without writing?
- ✓ Build literacy routines into classroom management. Have students sign-in; write the date, and help with classroom chores to build a community of learners.
- ✓ Create a print-rich environment, labels the room and make word walls if you are able; Use a pocket chart and sentence strips to get students off their seats;
- ✓ Communicate with students in writing. Write a daily message and read it at the beginning of class. **Good Morning. Today we are going to write letter M. Today we are going to learn about food.** Write a page reference on the board as well as telling students orally. **Page 47**
- ✓ Review continually. Recycle known sight words in new contexts. Create games and activities to review.
- ✓ Give hints and clues rather than the answer every time. When a student is trying to read, give the beginning sound as a clue to a word you think they know.
- ✓ When reading longer words, like 'today', cover half the word. Have students sound out the part they know and encourage them to guess from context.
- ✓ Cover up words to make them shorter, so they can read a piece at a time,
Car-pen-ter

A Literacy Lesson Plan

Student Population: Refugees and immigrants. Beginning level speaking and reading.

Theme/Vocabulary focus	Food and food words
Communication focus	Stating likes and dislikes
Grammar focus	Use present simple to describe food buying habits
Letter/sound target	M,
Sight word focus	Content words from unit, sight words #5-10

Literacy Routine: Sight Word work/Journal work/ LEA story work

Literate students write in a dialogue journal/choose from reading library. Non-literate students review sight word lists, read LEA story collection, teacher story collection.

Anticipation

Teacher shows pictures of food and people buying food. Asks questions.

Vocabulary Focus: Introduce food words and food sight words (single words)

TPR (Listen and point)

Repetition drills (say)

Information gap (pair practice)

Phonemic awareness activities with food words

Mouthing: Guess the word

Which words have final /t/

Which words have two parts: meat, chicken, student, fruit, cheese, teacher, (Use yes/no cards)

Introduction/Reception of language in context:

Teacher presents a dialogue about food likes :Teacher uses dialogue frame (limited print)

Practice of new language

Controlled

Students read/practice dialogue

Activities with the dialogue (reading, cloze, ordering lines)

Grid about food likes/dislikes and follow up activities (ncludes sight word work)

Grammar Focus: Teacher presents visual drill of sentence pattern

I like _____

Continue as necessary:

I eat/buy/cook (name of food) two times a week

Students write sentences in the pattern. Non-literate students order index cards to follow the pattern or use sentence frames.

Guided

Board Game (when land on picture/sight word of food item, students state likes or shopping habit)

Free/Literacy Practice

LEA story about food buying/food likes/dislikes or CLL transcript of food conversation

Target letter work

Focus/worksheet provided on letter recognition/formation. Students work with picture sort, letter/word family cards. Teacher can introduce sound/letter connection.

Review/wrap up

New sight words are transferred to individual and class recording systems

Adapting literacy level of classroom tasks

Written tasks ordered with increasing level of challenge:

- Match pictures and single words or sentences
- Give complete text out of order
- Give text with some mistakes for correction
- Give sentence frames for completion or intentional blank-fills
- Complete a cloze text
- Controlled writing activities (Transfer tense, pluralize- only one answer)
- Reconstruct a text (Dictogloss)
- Guided writing activities (first/last line given, answer Q's to form paragraph, etc)
- Free write

Useful Resources

Books for classroom use

Lifeprints: ESL for Adults

Grognet, Allene and Crandall, Jodi, editors. New Readers Press. www.newreaderspress.com

Picture Stories: Language and Literacy Activities for Beginners

Ligon, Fred and Tannenbaum, Elizabeth. Addison-Wesley / Longman. www.aw-bc.com

Literacy Plus A and B

Saslow, Joan. Longman. www.longman.com

Sam and Pat: Beginning Reading and Writing. Hartel, Lowry and Hendon elt.thompson.com

Longman ESL Literacy – 2nd Edition Nishio, Yvonne Wong. Addison-Wesley / Longman. www.aw-bc.com

Teacher resources

- A Handbook for ESL Literacy, Bell, J and Burnaby,A
- *What Non-Readers and Beginning Readers Need to Know: Performance-based ESL Adult
- Literacy Brod, Shirley. Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning. www.spring-institute.org
- Making it Real: Teaching Adult Pre-literate Refugees. Croydon, Alysian.

Websites

Adult health literacy pictures stories. www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/Health/healthindex.html
<http://www.eslflow.com/picturelessonsandteachingideas.html>

<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Andrews-Beginners.html>

https://mnliteracy.org/sites/default/files/community_pre-beginning_week_1_of_3.pdf

<http://carla.umn.edu/resources/working-papers/documents/SuccessfulInstructionLiteracyLevelAdults.pdf>
Successful instruction for Literacy Level Adults Vinogradov

http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/fact_sheets/Teaching_Issues_Fact_Sheet_10.pdf

Course planning for pre-literate and low-literacy learners (2007) AMEP Research Centre