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## Teaching reading to emergent adults: Focus on pedagogical materials

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### Abstract

With an increased number of immigrants and refugees entering the United States every year, many states and non-profit organizations offer English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. How do these organizations find materials that meet the needs of these learners and what type(s) of professional development do the organizations offer to their staff? The research presented is based on a survey of teachers and tutors who work with emergent adult readers. Discussed in what follows are principles to consider when selecting or creating effective materials in the classroom, rooted in the pedagogical framework of Tomlinson (2011), Vinogradov (2008), Beatty (2003) and Kukulska-Hulme (2009); a review of research examining the effectiveness of existing resources for adult English language learners, particularly at the beginning proficiency level, is shown. This research also examines the professional development for teachers and tutors of emergent adult readers and considers their views on materials development principles that pertain to reading and desired professional development opportunities. The research project concludes with implications for materials development and professional development experiences for the professionals working with adult emergent readers.

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TEACHING READING TO EMERGENT ADULTS: FOCUS ON PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

By

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**Abstract**

With an increased number of immigrants and refugees entering the United States every year, many states and non-profit organizations offer English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. How do these organizations find materials that meet the needs of these learners and what type(s) of professional development do the organizations offer to their staff? The research presented is based on a survey of teachers and tutors who work with emergent adult readers. Discussed in what follows are principles to consider when selecting or creating effective materials in the classroom, rooted in the pedagogical framework of Tomlinson (2011), Vinogradov (2008), Beatty (2003) and Kukulska-Hulme (2009); a review of research examining the effectiveness of existing resources for adult English language learners, particularly at the beginning proficiency level, is shown. This research also examines the professional development for teachers and tutors of emergent adult readers and considers their views on materials development principles that pertain to reading and desired professional development opportunities. The research project concludes with implications for materials development and professional development experiences for the professionals working with adult emergent readers.

*Keywords:* ELLs, emergent readers, materials development, professional development

## Teaching Reading to Emergent Adults: Focus on Pedagogical Materials

### Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2009, over 57 million people are nonnative speakers of English – 20% of the population ages five years and older; additionally, 13.5 million do not speak English well or at all (Shin & Kominski, 2010, p.7). Between 1980 and 2009, the population of people who speak a language other than English has increased 148% (Ortman and Shin, 2011, p. 3). The number of nonnative speakers is projected to continue to grow 19.9% by the year 2020 (Colby & Ortman, 2015, p. 3). These numbers will result in an increase in the number of students in adult education programs. An English as a second language (ESL) teacher shares a story from her early days of teaching:

When I first started this job I was so naïve. [The teacher asked,] ‘So, tell me about coming to the United States for you.’ [A student’s response:] ‘I walked two months across the deserts of Mexico, and I had my baby, and my [sibling] drowned crossing the Rio Grande.’ (Jacobson, Degener, & Purcell-Gates, 2003, p. 37)

With an increased number of immigrants, particularly refugees, coming into the United States every year, this traumatic experience is just one example of many that immigrants face as they arrive in “the land of opportunity”.

In order to help immigrants adapt into their new culture, many states and non-profit organizations offer ESL programs. The students who enter an ESL classroom do not come empty-handed: they bring with them the baggage of their loved ones – their family members in America and those left behind in their home country(s) as well as the struggles their family faces on a daily basis – and the need to survive in a new and unfamiliar culture with a new language to

master. Hansen (2009) is quick to remind, “We should not forget that we are educating these learners for a life in parts of the world where illiteracy is, in fact, a social disability” (p. 103); she then emphasizes the importance of developing reading skills as soon as possible: “reading acquisition *should* [sic] be an educational objective regardless of whether the political agenda identifies L2 acquisition as a humanitarian educational project or a means of integration into the work force or society in general” (Hansen, 2009, p. 103). Irrespective of governmental labels, instruction of reading for adult immigrants and refugees without literacy in their native language is no easy feat. Two key aspects play a role in effective instruction: effective materials and well-trained teachers/tutors. It is such well-trained professionals who are best positioned to select and develop reading materials that can maximize their learners’ reading development.

After conducting my own search for materials to meet the learning objectives of beginning-level adult readers and trying to evaluate these materials for “effectiveness,” I was curious to learn how other teachers and tutors reached their emergent adult readers. Having limited experience locating and evaluating materials myself, I was also interested in professional development opportunities that could assist me in the process. I started wondering how other professionals went about improving their skillset in this area, which lead to the culmination of this research. In what follows, I will review existing literature on materials development, outlining key principles that are relevant to developing reading materials for adult beginners. Next, I will discuss the important role that professional development plays in preparing teachers and tutors to work with adult English language learners, specifically focusing on their work with teaching beginning-level reading. I will then report on the results of a survey-based study and discuss the implications of this project. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research on

emergent adult readers and professional development for the tutors and teachers who work with these learners.

### **Influence of Second Language Teaching Methods on Reading Materials**

Effective English language teaching depends, to a large extent, on effective pedagogical materials. Even the best teacher cannot effectively facilitate his/her students' learning without materials that support and motivate students. In the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), materials development has become a key issue of interest. Over the last decades, TESOL scholars have made important recommendations for developing effective pedagogical materials. Not surprisingly, these recommendations reflect trends in language teaching methodologies.

In the last two decades, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) followed by Postmethod Pedagogy have influenced materials development in significant ways. CLT focuses on engaging learners in authentic and functional uses of language for meaningful, communicative purposes. For example, CLT may include teaching parents how to read their children's report cards, understand what is being communicated, and ask questions about their child's performance during parent-teacher conferences. As they are two key features of CLT, authenticity and communicative purpose are currently the primary driving forces behind materials development. In regards to the development of materials, this means reading materials should be derived from authentic texts and include practice opportunities that allow learners to engage with the text for communicative purposes; this could be a journal prompt, a class discussion, or even the creation of a project to represent the material students have learned. Reading and translating isolated sentences or studying words from unauthentic readings irrelevant to students' lives is no longer perceived as effective.

Postmethod Pedagogy aligns with many CLT principles, but emphasizes the role of the local context and the need to foreground sociopolitical issues. Kumaravadivelu (2001), who is seen as the biggest proponent of Postmethod Pedagogy, suggests that for effective language instruction to be pertinent, it must be sensitive “to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). What does such pedagogy of particularity (as Kumaravadivelu calls it) mean for second language reading materials? It means that teachers have to challenge themselves to think carefully about their learners’ needs and interests and select reading resources that are going to be relevant, even if this means that different students engage in slightly different reading materials.

Kumaravadivelu’s concept of a pedagogy of possibility seeks to engage students with their sociopolitical consciousness and to encourage a continual quest for learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). One local adult literacy agency, Washtenaw Literacy, has accomplished this concept by creating a newsletter that highlights the current, civically-oriented events in the community it serves. For instance, the first newsletter was published at the beginning of 2016 and highlighted important events – like the March primary – as well as information that could be important or relevant to adult learners, including the importance of having an ID card, writing a letter to a county commissioner, etc. (Washtenaw Literacy, 2016). These newsletters provide adult students with important sociopolitical issues and encourage them to seek out more information so they can make informed decisions.

### **Effective Pedagogical Materials for Beginning-Level Adult Second Language Learners**

While the general language teaching methodologies help guide materials development, several scholars have attempted to create a more specific set of principles or guidelines for



developing effective materials. Considerably more work has been done on academically-oriented pedagogical materials, with fewer scholars and practitioners focusing on materials development for beginning-level students, especially beginning-level adult readers. Among the few scholars who have championed the needs of adult beginning readers is Patsy Vinogradov, who has long been pointing out that “there is not a great deal available yet from publishers that is as low-level and high interest as required” (Vinogradov, 2008, p. 8). The sections that follow synthesize the key recommendations by Vinogradov (2008) and complement them with effective materials development principles relevant to reading materials as outlined by Tomlinson (2011), as well as materials development guidelines that draw upon computer-aided language learning as discussed by Beatty (2003) and Kukulska-Hulme (2009). As per recommendations by these scholars, materials for teaching beginning-level readers of ESL should follow the ten principles explained in the sections that follow.

### **Principle One: Be Authentic**

A common cry heralded in the TESOL field is the need for more authentic materials, which reflects the extensive influence of CLT. What makes materials authentic? At the very basic level, authentic materials can be defined as “a text which is not written or spoken for language teaching purposes” (Tomlinson, 2011, p. ix). Jacobson et al. (2003) refine this definition a step farther as “materials used in ways that they would be used in the lives of learners outside of their adult education classes” (p. 1). In order to prepare students for communication beyond the walls of the classroom, authentic materials provide concrete examples of language use in everyday life, such as newspaper articles, work emails and memorandums, children’s report cards, and web pages. Jacobson et al. (2003) continue to point out that while a teacher may bring in an authentic newspaper article for the classroom to read, if

the topic is uninteresting or irrelevant to the class or is used to teach a "classroom topic" such as finding main ideas or locating verb tenses, the authentic material is not being used for an authentic purpose and thus degrades the authenticity of the activity (p. 3).

This is an important consideration for creating reading materials for beginners, one that will be explored further when I discuss the need for a balance between bottom up and top down approaches to reading instruction, and reading materials specifically (see *Principle Eight* for more information). It is also worth noting that while using authentic materials is a good pedagogical goal, beginning-level students often do not have the literacy skills and background knowledge needed to effectively use truly authentic materials and teachers often struggle to find a meaningful balance between authenticity on one hand and the need to adapt the reading resources to make them accessible to their students (see *Principle Six* for more information).

### **Principle Two: Be Relevant and Useful**

Materials should be relevant and useful to the students. To illustrate, a beginner-level student whose class is working with a Dr. Seuss (1985) book for an activity about phonics cried out in her frustration, "No cat wears a hat! I don't care about he's sitting on a mat. Why are we doing this?" (Marrapodi, 2013, p. 11). When a variety of topics are present in the texts given to students and the topics are relevant to adult students – as opposed to children's picture books – they are more likely to find a text they are interested in reading and pursue further learning. Another important consideration related to usefulness is that new concepts should be introduced only when learners are ready to acquire this new information. For instance, a language learner cannot be expected to read sentences if they have not yet learned to recognize and read words. Thus, students must have all the necessary building blocks in place before they can begin to add more information to their language structure schemata.

In addition to having sufficient linguistic abilities, students need to recognize the materials and topics taught as relevant and useful. Many teachers tell students the language objectives of each lesson at the start of class; however, teachers often fail to inform students how this specific aspect of language will connect with their needs outside the classroom. As the student's quote above demonstrates, Dr. Seuss and other children's books do not seem relevant to most beginning adult readers; "why!" do adults need to hear about a cat in a striped hat sitting on a mat, talking about this and that? Had the teacher explained that the class was focusing on phonics – even highlighting the primary phonics the class would be studying – and then talked about how this would help the students acquire reading fluency and automaticity, her learners may have been less frustrated with the activity. Materials can become relevant if they will help students complete a short-term task, such as an assignment or a task in their daily lives. Learners will benefit the most if they are wholly invested in their own learning and the processes surrounding it.

### **Principle Three: Make Learners Feel Invested**

Another important consideration in reading materials selection and development involves learner investment. In the words of Tomlinson (2011): "Learners profit most if they invest interest, effort, and attention in the learning activity" (Tomlinson, p. 12). When students are personally invested in the topics presented by materials, they are more likely to retain information and pursue additional learning surrounding the topic. Most learners are more invested when they have a choice in the focus of the materials, control over the topic, and the materials revolve around their needs. Students who are learning English to meet job qualifications will be more invested if the materials they are reading focus on how to obtain a job or how to be successful at work in the United States. Another way to encourage learner

investment is to select materials with topics that are relevant to learners' interests. Students may be assigned to the class because their jobs require it, but students have interests outside of these jobs; using reading materials that have topics of interests about students' hobbies will promote learner investment. For a class of adults who are learning English in order to meet employment qualifications, leveled readers (such as Dick and Jane books) are not relevant or related to the learners' interests. Finally, materials that are student-centered will match students' personalities and interests to the topics the students read.

#### **Principle Four: Draw Learners' Attentions to Linguistic Input**

Teachers should point out linguistic features of the authentic input repeatedly to their students because researchers agree this aids in students' acquisition of linguistic features (Schmidt, 1992; Tomlinson, 2011; Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2009). Aligning with Tomlinson's views, all levels of materials "should provide frequent exposure to authentic input which...vary in style, mode, medium, and purpose, and should be rich in features which are characteristic of authentic discourse in the target language" (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 14). This can be accomplished by asking learners to read a text and notice the different ways a specific word is used in it. Materials themselves can be enhanced by distinguishing key grammatical or lexical features through the use of boldfaced or highlighted text. Most beginner-level materials will limit adjectives or adverbs, and nouns and verbs can take irregular forms as well, but students could be asked to notice how verb endings change when a verb switches from present tense to past tense.

Another consideration with respect to drawing attention to selected linguistic features is the amount of new vocabulary. When identifying key vocabulary to highlight in a lesson, Grabe and Stoller (2001) recommend sorting words into three categories: those that are critical for comprehension and have use in other contexts (called ++ words); those that are necessary for

comprehending the text but not really helpful in other contexts (known as + – words); and those that are not necessary for comprehension or of particular use in other contexts (called – – words). Quite often words will fall into the categories of + + and + –. A teacher could have over thirty words they feel the need to cover, and it is not effective to cover all thirty words in one lesson (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Instead, it is most effective and efficient to focus on four to five key words, because “that number of words is likely to be learned and remembered” (Grabe & Stoller, 2001, p. 192). The same principle of drawing learners’ attentions to only a few linguistic features fits with Grabe and Stoller’s push for teaching fewer vocabulary terms each lesson. Perhaps the saying, “Less is more,” is best applicable in summarizing their beliefs and the goal of this section. For materials developers, this could look like highlighting the four or five most important + + words in a text and then creating activities that oblige students to interact with the selected terms.

#### **Principle Five: Allow Learners to use English for Communicative Purposes**

According to Tomlinson (2011), materials should provide learners the opportunities to use English to communicate and interact with peers. Learners should have opportunities to express their ideas and opinions about the content they read and the strategies they used during read when they have concluded reading. This can be done either in discussions, small conversations, or through a form of writing. Often, reading materials may facilitate these discussions by including reading activities for the different phases – pre, during, and post – of reading instruction. Pre-reading activities typically include pre-teaching of vocabulary and stimulating prior knowledge of the subject through the use of open-ended questions. Meanwhile, post-reading activities could be a list of comprehension questions that can be answered individually, in pairs, or be discussed as a whole class.

**Principle Six: Be challenging but manageable in terms of language proficiency**

Of course, rigorous reading materials often challenge students beyond their comfort levels, and teachers are well aware of the outcomes associated with teaching students concepts they are not yet ready to acquire: feelings of panic, overload, and distress. The materials given to students should be at their proficiency levels; when materials are above their reading levels, students are most likely to become frustrated and develop an aversion towards reading and English. Tomlinson (2011) reminds teachers of the negative effects of premature instruction but encourages teachers to consider Krashen's (1985) theory of comprehensible input,  $i+1$  (where  $i$  is what a student already knows, and  $1$  represents what is available to learn at this moment in instructional time), when selecting materials to challenge beginning-level adult readers. Materials for reading must recognize this need for differentiation among the various students who will use them. Materials with varying levels of differentiation can create situations requiring the use of linguistic features that have not previously been taught; this can assist in introducing some features slightly above lower-level students' current proficiency levels. In turn these learners, having seen more complex linguistic features, may be more attentive to these new features of the target language so that they acquire these features with more ease in future input.

Materials must be accessible to students: they should have access to the physical text, as well as be able to understand and relate to the text without teacher support. Materials that are accessible to beginner-level learners should contain vocabulary that primarily falls under the 1,000 most commonly used words; little academic or content-specific language should be present. Texts should be an appropriate length; texts that are excessive in length can overwhelm students, which can affect their motivation to continue reading outside of the classroom.

Further reading tasks and materials that are manageable in terms of difficulty and as such help develop students' confidence, involve those accompanied with L1 support; teachers can look to materials available in students' native languages (L1s) and English to support English reading development by having students read in L1 for general understanding before focusing in on the English text. Yet another effective way to build students' confidence in reading is through utilization of reading fluency activities and reading materials. Many reading teachers think that every new reading ought to challenge students and include new vocabulary. However, what this means for beginning-level learners is that every reading can feel overwhelming, which can undermine their confidence as second language readers. Reading with the aim of improving fluency utilizes readings already practiced by students. Now that they understand the meaning and vocabulary presented in the text, they can focus on re-reading the text for fluency. According to Anderson (2008), reading fluency means "reading at an appropriate rate with adequate comprehension" (p. 3). When teachers have students practice reading for fluency, they are likely to increase their students' confidence in their reading ability. Prompting learners to reread texts with the focus of increasing reading speed should be the primary goal for reading materials developers. In sum, students will benefit the most from reading materials that are challenging but attainable.

#### **Principle Seven: Offer Balanced Approaches to Reading**

Unlike general English language teaching materials, materials specific to teaching reading must reflect the current theoretical understanding of how teaching is developed. A commonly accepted second language reading theory, emphasized by the work of Vinogradov (2008), assumes the importance of teaching reading in a way that balances out bottom up and top down approaches to reading instructions. Materials that use bottom up practices focus on the

learner gaining understanding of the smallest units of language – the individual sounds, letters, and words. In contrast, materials that use top down models ask learners to focus on context, the overall organization, and meaning of texts. According to research conducted by Burt et al. (2003), “Many of the processes that fluent readers use are bottom up and automatic...however, when automatic, bottom up processes are not enough to comprehend what is being read, top down processes such as getting meaning from context and using syntax clues can be activated” (p. 25). In other words, the combination of bottom up and top down practices are needed in order to fully understand reading comprehension. Materials developed for top down instruction traditionally means comprehension of the text is facilitated through the use of pictures, realia, and hands-on projects related to the text. In contrast, materials intended for bottom up instruction is focused more on building decoding skills, such as learning sound patterns and word families (e.g. “-at” words: cat, hat, that, and mat from Dr. Seuss’s *The Cat in the Hat*), in order to eventually construct meaning from the text (Vinogradov, 2008, p. 4). Knowing this, reading materials that incorporate both top down and bottom up instruction will incorporate pictures and realia to activate the reader’s prior knowledge (top down reading processes) as well as include opportunities to engage in improving phonemic awareness, practicing phonics, and recognizing sight words (bottom up reading processes).

### **Principle Eight: Enhance Appeal through Appearance and Modalities**

When materials catch learners’ attentions, spark their curiosities, or ignite their interests, learners are more likely to feel engaged and invested in their own learning. Reading materials can attract learners in a variety of ways, such as content appeal, visual attractiveness, and the use of different modalities. Appealing content with unusual topics, a variety of text-types from different sources, and alluring presentation of information are examples of materials’ aspects that



can help engage learners (Tomlinson, 2011). Unusual topics could include talking about controversial topics like politics or immigration but could also include topics such as studying the new culture students are now a part of or talking about differences between different jobs. Different text types include literary pieces and informational pieces, as well as different genres like stories, dramas, and poetry. Alluring presentations formats often contain vivid photographs and pictures, bright colors, and could even take a non-traditional format, such as electronic books or websites.

According to Beatty (2003), with current advances in technology, interest in obtaining reading materials for computer assisted language learning (CALL) is growing. CALL can be defined as any process in which a learner uses a computer and improves his/her language learning as a result (Beatty, 2003, p. 7). Many second language readers are naturally drawn to learning that is mobile and interactive; CALL provides students with just that while also aligning with strategic educational goals related to technology, according to Kukulska-Hulme (2009). CALL has also been shown to aid in improving students' retention of concepts and overall achievement level as well as allowing for the differentiation of learning – all of which teachers try to encourage and seek out for their students (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009, p. 157). Reading materials created for CALL are typically found as software on computers or as websites on the internet. Software for CALL has progressed over the years from simply being tasks that require learners to fill-in the blanks to full-blown multimedia presentations equipped with sound, animation, and interactive assignments. Websites, especially those that can be used for little-to-no cost, are of great value to beginner-level adult students who are balancing their language learning class(es) with working and providing for their family because they can be accessed from home on computers or on the go with the development of smart devices. Specific to reading

resources, computer-based learning materials have been shown to provide resources (e.g. supplementary activities, dictionaries, video links, diagrams, etc.) to assist in closing the gap between fiction and nonfiction works (Beatty, 2003). Additionally, says Beatty (2003), using CALL reading materials allows students to review and practice with materials on their own, lending itself to increased learner autonomy since the students can interact with the materials beyond the confines of the classroom.

Another feature CALL is able to cater toward is multimodal learning, for instance, adding auditory components to the reading texts. Do CALL materials with listening components support student development in reading? While the research around this question is primarily limited to studies where L1 children are the subjects, the research has shown that listening while reading does in fact support reading development (Woodall, 2010, p. 187). Rasinski (1990) found that listening while reading improved students' overall reading fluency and the effects could be compared to repeated readings of the same text (p. 149). Another study supports Rasinski's (1990) claim about reading fluency, as it points out that teachers reading aloud early on in a program leads to a higher student retention of larger semantic units (Brown et al., 2008, p. 138). In a study of university ESL students reading *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White (1952), Woodall (2010) found that students who listened while reading outscored their reading-only counterparts on all eight comprehension quizzes (p. 193). Some other benefits of listening while reading, according to Brown et al. (2008), include "increases in overall language proficiency... [and] the ability to acquire a greater sense of rhythm of the language" (p. 138). In Brown et al.'s (2008) study, it is also shown that students are more likely to incidentally acquire new vocabulary during listening-while-reading mode(s) than when silently reading (p. 156). To summarize, reading materials that are accompanied by CALL-enhanced listening components lead to

increased levels of fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition than materials absent of such enhancements.

Finally, learners should be able to use the materials on their own outside the classroom; this means reading should extend from the classroom and/or tutoring session to a student's home. Students with personal electronic devices and those with access to public libraries are able to continue their education beyond the walls of the school. Materials containing pictorial and auditory supports provide scaffolding for students when they are reading outside the classroom. Materials that are accessible to learners are more likely to positively impact the other principles than those that are inaccessible.

In summary, having a principled approach to selecting and developing reading materials helps guide reading teachers and tutors. Beyond following these principles, teachers and tutors should encourage students to read at home for pleasure given that research has shown such practice greatly contributes to reading abilities (Krashen, 2007). Additionally, assisting learners with simple, age-appropriate graded readers that they can use at home helps foster autonomy, which has also been tied to effective language learning.

### **Effective Professional Development for Teachers of Emergent Adult Readers**

In order for L2 literacy oriented programs to be able to offer effective language and literacy opportunities to adult learners, they must provide professional development to their teachers and tutors that goes beyond materials development and descriptions of emergent readers. So, what really needs to be addressed during professional development sessions to ensure tutors and teachers of adult beginning-level readers are equipped to fully support their students?

Before even discussing effective professional development for teachers, it should be recognized that adult basic education (ABE) teachers receive substantially less support for professional development from their program administrators compared to their counterparts in K-12 and higher education. In fact, 33% of teachers cited a lack of support from program administrators as one of their top three concerns with the program at which they work while other concerns included their programs' structure and mission, as well as their working conditions (Smith & Hofer, 2003, p. 121). However, Young (2009) argues that even administrators with little-to-no experience teaching adult ESL students can facilitate effective professional development for their staff working with beginning-level adults.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the characteristics of effective professional development. One characteristic commonly found in effective professional development is that it should be embedded in the reality of schools and teachers' strong connections between the content learned and the teachers' contexts (Clair & Adger, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Since professional development is embedded in the context that teachers work in, it should also be designed with teachers' input (Clair & Adger, 1999). Teachers often know the areas in which they would like extra support, and professional development crafted around teacher input will take their ideas into consideration. Next, professional development should be sustained over a long period of time (Clair & Adger, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Vinogradov, 2012a; Vinogradov, 2012b). These researchers are not calling for month-long conferences; rather, they are supporting job-embedded professional development, which allows for continual learning throughout the course of their work as well as enables them to immediately apply their new skills and knowledge to their practice (Clair & Adger, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Professional development should foster critical reflection of teacher

practices and meaningful collaboration between colleagues instead of just demonstrating techniques (Clair & Adger, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Young, 2009; Vinogradov, 2012b). Critical reflection of practices requires professional development to embrace a pedagogy of thoughtfulness, where participants are treated as scholars and investigators (Vinogradov, 2012a). Additionally, professional development should encourage both meaningful collaboration and extensive interaction among colleagues, with teachers actively learning and participating (Clair & Adger, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Vinogradov, 2012b). According to Vinogradov (2012a), professional development should be conducted with small groups, while Young (2009) argues it can also take the form of peer observation, mentoring, curriculum and materials development, special projects, workshops, study circles, and online learning. Regardless of the format, teachers engaged in professional development should be actively participating in their learning (Vinogradov, 2012a).

Unfortunately, professional development sessions often do not reflect these characteristics. The most common format for professional development is what Smith and Gillespie (2007) call traditional professional development. Traditional professional development includes formats such as conference sessions, stand-alone workshops, lectures, seminars, and webinars, with workshops and conference being the form most often thought of by people when discussing professional development (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). These traditional types of professional development tend to provide an excess of relevant and important information, but no time for participants to practice implementing suggestions and reflect on it. In a study by Vinogradov (2012b), one participant said, regarding conferences:

[They] give a thousand ideas, but no time to really absorb and focus on them. The conference effect, like trying to catch a thousand ping pong balls all being hurled

at you simultaneously...some ideas have extra value to you but get lost in the shuffle. (p. 41)

In these instances, conferences and workshops often feel like they lack content focus or coherence, which makes it difficult for participants to retain the key points the presenter is trying to share.

The other type of professional development is called job-embedded (Smith & Gillespie, 2007), meaning it takes place within the program or local area to encourage ongoing professional communities. Job-embedded professional development often takes the form of study circles or inquiry groups. Study circles are relatively new to the realm of ABE and TESOL, but may be known by educators as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Vinogradov, 2012b; Vinogradov, 2015). They can be defined as “small learning groups of practitioners, usually 8-12 teachers, who meet to discuss issues of relevance to their classroom practice; they’re organized around a specific topic and generally meet for three to five sessions, sometimes guided by a facilitator” (Vinogradov, 2012b, p. 34). Within study circles, participants may be expected to read research articles presenting findings from adult education studies; discuss the relevance of the findings for the students with whom they work; discuss strategies for applying the findings in their classrooms and programs; and make plans for trying strategies or changing their practice (Vinogradov, 2012b).

When L2 literacy teachers attend professional development, the sessions rarely cover topics relevant to those who instruct students with no prior literacy skills – in either English or their native language(s). The most common topics covered that are related to reading include balanced literacy instruction, building blocks of literacy, components of reading, contextualized phonics, extensive reading, learner generated texts, materials development, phonemic awareness,

reading essentials, resource sharing, and visual literacy (Vinogradov, 2012b, p. 6). Materials development and resource sharing are both highlighted as common topics, but one of the often overlooked topics is how to select and evaluate effective materials, thus implying that material selection and evaluation is not a common topic of professional development for beginner-level adult reading teachers. Why is that? There is no reason to reinvent the wheel and create more materials when there are already effective materials available. In fact, Gross (2016) says most ESL teachers “are creating their own instructional materials – often with little oversight...not that teachers want to double as curriculum developers...an overwhelming majority of survey respondents (88 percent) said they have a difficult time finding teaching materials for their students” (p. 1).

### **Purpose of Study**

Undoubtedly, we need to understand more clearly the extent to which literacy teachers and tutors who work with beginning-level adults are able to locate effective reading resources. We also need to know what professional development requirements they have with respect to supporting their learners’ L2 reading development. Given these needs, the purpose of this survey-based study is to examine teachers’ and tutors’ practices in selecting and adapting reading materials for adult beginners, and their experience(s) with professional development specific to teaching adult ESL readers. The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) *What are tutors’ and teachers’ experiences with identifying and using reading resources for beginning-level adult ELLs?*
- 2) *What are tutors’ and teachers’ experiences with engaging in professional development focused on teaching reading and using effective reading resources?*

## Methods

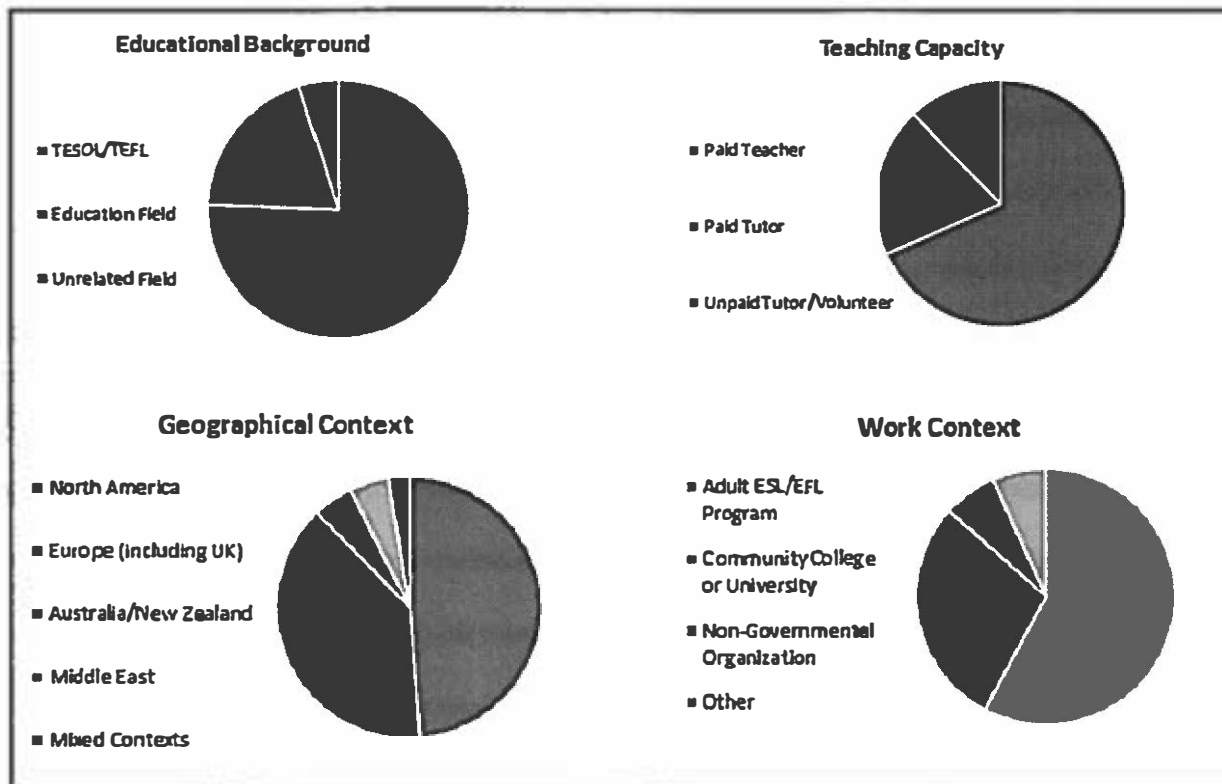
### Participants

The survey for this study was distributed to teachers and tutors associated with at least one of the following professional organizations: Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA), Washtenaw Literacy, International Literacy Association (ILA), or Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA). There were 41 participants who completed the survey (see Table 1). The majority of the participants identified themselves as paid teachers (28 participants, or 68.3%), or paid tutors (8 participants or 19.5%), while only 12.2% (or 5 participants) identified themselves as unpaid tutors or volunteers. Additionally, 75% of respondents said their educational background is field-specific to TESOL or teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), and another 20% said they had background in field-relevant education, such as general education. Only 5% of respondents did not have some form of TESOL/TEFL or general educational background. Almost half (48.7%) of participants have worked with beginning-level adult English language learners for five years or less. Another 38.5% have worked with this demographic of students for a minimum of ten years up through twenty years. Only 10% of participants have worked with beginning-level adult learners for more than twenty-five years. The shortest amount of time a participant has spent teaching these students is one year, with the longest duration of time at thirty-six years.

Respondents in this survey teach in a variety of geographical contexts. Just under half of the respondents (48.8%) teach in North America, while 34.1% claimed Europe as their primary context. Other contexts included were the United Kingdom (4.9%), Middle East (5%), and Australia/New Zealand (5%). Over half of the respondents work in adult ESL/EFL programs (63.4%), followed by 31.7% who teach at community colleges or universities, 9.8% who teach in



**Table 1: Participants' Backgrounds**



non-governmental organizations, and 7.3% who submitted their own contexts: private IEP (individualized education plan), private language school, and private practice.

Within these institutions, 51.2% of respondents identify “newly arrived immigrants, refugees, and/or visitors” as the predominant group of ESL students, while 53.7% identify “immigrants, refugees, and/or visitors who have been in the country for up to five years” as the predominant group of ESL students receiving services from their institution(s). Part of the overlap between these reported numbers stem from participants who work in multiple contexts.

With respect to learner literacy, over half of the participating tutors and teachers (52.5%) work in classrooms where at least half of their students are not literate in their native language (L1), meaning these students can neither read nor write in their L1s. Of this percentage, 76.2% teach in classrooms that have 25% or less of their students literate in their L1s. In contrast,

47.5% of respondents teach in classrooms where at least 75% of their students have literacy in their L1s; 20% of the respondents have classrooms with students fully literate in their L1s.

### **Data Collection**

**Survey.** The research for this study was conducted through an online survey (see Appendix A for the full survey). Questions were asked about the participants' demographics, the contexts in which they work, and the students they service. The survey also included questions about tutors' and teachers' experiences locating, evaluating, and implementing reading materials in their classrooms, as well as their experiences receiving professional development in the area of locating, evaluating, and implementing effective reading materials in their classroom contexts.

**Procedures.** The researcher received IRB approval and was granted exemption for the survey in July, 2016 (refer to Appendix B). Following this approval, an introduction to the survey and consent form (see Appendix C) with a web link was sent via electronic mail to program directors and coordinators of Washtenaw Literacy, ILA, and CAELA, as well as to the electronic list-service of LESLLA on September 27, 2016. One survey reminder was sent on October 20, 2016, and then the survey closed on November 7, 2016. Participants' responses were tabulated and analyzed.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Effective Materials**

This portion of the results looks to answer the question: what are tutors' and teachers' experiences with identifying and using reading resources for beginning-level adult ELLs? Specifically, how do tutors and teachers identify the reading resources they use and to what extent do they find these materials and resources effective?

The survey results indicate that teachers and tutors are most likely to find their materials online, with 68.3% (28 participants) selecting this as one of their responses. The most surprising response was the number of participants who wrote in that they create or write their own materials – 34.1% (14 participants). Many respondents listed this in addition to other choices they selected, but 64.3% (26 participants) of the respondents who create their own materials said this was their primary method of locating effective materials. This finding points to a general discontent with existing materials for emergent readers. Just under half of the survey participants (18 participants, 43.9%) said they use resources recommended or given to them from colleagues or friends. Less than 30% of participants claimed to use book recommendations made by professional organizations or list-services, and less than 25% use a local library to locate resources.

In regard to the ease of locating materials, only 17.5% of participants stated these resources were “easy” or “very easy” to obtain. In contrast, 45% of respondents said obtaining these materials were either “difficult” or “very difficult.” Two-thirds (66.7%) of participants who marked that it is difficult to locate materials work in the adult ESL/EFL context. Teachers and tutors working in non-governmental organizations felt similarly; 75% of them found locating effective materials for teaching emergent reading difficult.

The survey also asked participants about the frequency with which they used the following materials in their work with beginning-level adult readers: textbooks, authentic texts (e.g. how-to manuals, newspaper/magazine articles), simplified texts (e.g. leveled-readers, simplified websites), documents adults need to understand (e.g. forms, applications), interactive online resources for beginning-level adult readers, children’s books, and poetry (see Table 2). Participants most frequently use simplified texts, such as leveled-readers and simplified

**Table 2: Teachers' Predominant Resources**

	1. Rarely	3. Sometimes	5. Regularly	Rating Average	Response Count
<b>Simplified Texts</b>	2	0	22	4.67	24
<b>Necessary Documents</b>	4	1	21	4.31	26
<b>Interactive Online Materials</b>	7	0	17	3.83	24
<b>Authentic Texts</b>	7	1	11	3.42	19
<b>Textbooks</b>	16	0	7	2.22	23
<b>Children's Books</b>	18	2	5	1.96	25
<b>Poetry</b>	26	2	1	1.28	29

websites. Additionally, 53.7% of participants regularly use simplified texts, and 41.5% sometimes use them. Only 4.8% of participants never use this type of materials with their students.

As discussed in the review of literature, materials developers need to consider language authentically in designing instructional materials, even though there are challenges and constraints involved with using fully authentic texts with beginners. When the survey participants were asked about their use of authentic materials, such as newspaper or magazine articles and how-to manuals, with their beginning-level adult students, 83% (11 participants) suggested they used them regularly or sometimes. In contrast, only 17% (7 participants) of participants said they regularly use textbooks with their beginning-level adult readers. Of these regular textbook users, most (71.5%, 5 participants) have taught beginning-level adults for less than five years. It is possible that these teachers/tutors have yet to acquire an effective repertoire of level-appropriate authentic materials for their students to substitute or complement textbooks.

One of Tomlinson's (2011) principles for materials development is to make materials that are relevant and useful to adult learners. Such practice helps learners avoid frustration such as that described earlier in connection to an adult learner reading *The Cat in the Hat*. The focus on

this principle appears to be intuitive to teachers working with adult learners; only 12.2% (5 participants) said they use children's books "regularly". The surveyed teachers' and tutors' recognition of the importance of the relevancy principle is also evident in their use of relevant documents, such as forms or applications adults would need to understand and be able to complete. Over half of the participants (51.2%, 21 participants) responded that they regularly use this type of materials, 2.4% (1 participant) sometimes use these materials, and only 9.8% (4 participants) never use them.

With the world in the midst of a technology boom, the use of CALL technologies in reading instruction was expected to be a regular occurrence. Surprisingly however, only 17% (7 participants) of participants "regularly use" interactive online materials; another 41.5% (17 participants) claim they "never use" these resources with their beginning-level adults. Of those never using technology with students, 76.5% (13 participants) work in adult ESL/EFL programs and 11.8% (4 participants) work in non-governmental organizations. Why do ESL educators seem to reserve interactive, online approaches to learning for only their community college and university students? What is preventing or hindering adult ESL/EFL programs and non-governmental organizations from accessing these online materials? Future research ought to shed light on these important questions in order for us to gain a better understanding of how technology can be used to better facilitate learning of adult emergent readers in adult community-based contexts.

In addition to the types of materials used, participants were also asked how important or unimportant they found each of the effective principles for materials development to be when evaluating materials for use in their classrooms (refer to Table 3 for full results). According to participants, it is most important that materials "be relevant and useful" – 87.8% (36 participants)

found this principle to be “important”, and the remaining 12.2% (5 participants) thought it was “somewhat important” for materials to be relevant and useful. This is the principle that had the most number of participants finding it to be important. Somewhat surprisingly, drawing learners’ attention to language – a core practice in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages – was listed as the least important. This finding was unexpected since it is what distinguishes professionals working with English learners from those teaching domestic students – the ability to help focus learners’ attention on the important aspects of the target language. A possible reason for this finding is the phrasing; if the survey listed this principle in less technical terms (e.g. help students focus on new language), it is possible that tutors/teachers working with

**Table 3: Views on Characteristics of Effective Materials**

	1. Unimportant	2. Somewhat Unimportant	3. Neutral	4. Somewhat Important	5. Important	Rating Average	Response Count
Be relevant and useful	0	0	0	5	36	4.88	41
Develop learners’ confidence	0	0	0	6	35	4.85	41
Make learners feel invested	0	0	2	7	32	4.73	41
Be challenging yet manageable	0	0	2	11	28	4.63	41
Allows use of English for communicative purposes	0	1	2	10	27	4.58	40
Offer bottom-up and top-down practices	0	2	5	9	23	4.36	39
Enhance appeal through appearance and modalities	1	0	2	20	18	4.32	41
Be authentic	0	1	5	16	19	4.29	41
Draw learners’ attention to linguistic input	0	4	13	16	8	3.68	41

adult beginners would assign more importance to this principle. Future research will need to corroborate this hypothesis.

### **Professional Development**

This section covers the responses to tutors' and teachers' experiences with engaging in professional development focused on teaching reading and using effective reading resources. Or, to use the phrasing of the research question: in what types of professional development do tutors and teachers engage in, and to what extent do they find the professional development they participate in effective?

The teachers and tutors surveyed were asked about their participation in the following types of professional development over the course of the last year (see Table 4): attending a national or international conference; attending a state or local conference; attending a conference, forum, and/or presentation held by their organization; presenting at a conference; attending an online webinar; having an in-person discussion with a colleague related to their job; having a discussion via internet with a colleague related to their job; read a(n) article or book related to the field; and disseminate a project related to the field. "Having an in-person discussion with a colleague relating to work" was the top form of professional development, with a 92.7% (38 participants) participation rate from survey respondents. The type of professional development with the second highest participation rate from survey respondents was reading an article or book related to the field – 78% (32 participants) of respondents claimed to have done this in the last year. The third highest, by a narrow margin, is attending a state or local conference, with 51.2% (21 participants) participation.

The three forms of professional development with the lowest number of participants were dissemination of a field-related project, attending an online webinar, and presenting at a

conference, with participation rates of 26.8% (11 participants), 36.6% (15 participants), and 41.5% (17 participants), respectively. Knowing the amount of work that goes into project dissemination and conferences presentations, it should not be surprising that these forms of professional development are in the bottom three. As an avid webinar attendee, I am curious as to why so few participants attend online webinars – could it be lack of interest in the topic(s), lack of need to attend, scheduling conflicts with webinar times, or perhaps something else? Overall, the question could be asked if administrators support these forms of professional development for their teachers or if they tend to disapprove or be unaware of these professional development formats.

In addition to formats of professional development, survey respondents were asked about the perceived effectiveness of the professional development sessions they attended. Experiences

**Table 4: Teacher Participation in Professional Development**

<b>Professional Development Format</b>	<b>Responses (out of 41)</b>
Discussion in person with colleague relating to my job	92.7% (n=38)
Read a field-related article/book	78% (n=32)
Attending a state or local conference	51.2% (n=21)
Discussion via internet with colleague relating to my job	46.3% (n=19)
Attending a conference/ presentation/ forum held by my organization	46.3% (n=19)
Attending a national or international conference	43.9% (n=18)
Presenting at a conference	41.5% (n=17)
Attending an online webinar	36.6% (n=15)
Disseminated field-related project	26.8% (n=11)



deemed as predominantly effective received either 75% or 100% effective rating from participants; experiences deemed predominantly ineffective were rated 50% or less effective by participants. Overall, only 36.6% (15 participants) of participants deemed their professional development experiences effective, meaning the majority of participants (63.4%, 26 participants) found their professional development sessions ineffective. Teachers and tutors who participated in five or more different types of professional development were more likely to find their experiences effective than those who participated in fewer than five types.

Participants were also asked about their satisfaction levels regarding the support they receive from administrators when pursuing professional development. Overall, only 7.3% (3 participants) of participants were completely satisfied with their professional development experiences, and another 7.3% (3 participants) said they were 75% satisfied with their experiences; these are the same participants who also found their professional development sessions to be effective. One of these participants added a comment about the professional development being effective and being satisfied, but was disgruntled because, "it is all my own initiative and my own funding. Many of the most helpful [sic] things are out of my own pocket." Indeed, organizations must strive to search for funding to support teachers and tutors wishing to expand their skillset for working with emergent readers.

In comparison, 85.4% (35 participants) of participants were 50% or less satisfied with the support they receive in their pursuit of professional development experience(s). Current research in the professional development of beginner-level, adult reading teachers has shown a lack of administrative support is one of the primary grievances among these teachers (Smith & Hofer, 2003). Additionally, this study has shown that a lack of administrator support appears to affect

the perceived effectiveness of professional development sessions, although a lack of support does not seem to have deterred tutors and teachers from engaging in professional development.

### **Summary and Implications**

Overall, teachers and tutors understand the importance of using relevant, high-interest materials for their beginner readers. However, many fail to incorporate technology to help them reach these goals. This is truly a lost opportunity because of high-quality, online-based resources for adult English learners accessible to adult English learners. In my own experience with locating and evaluating reading materials for emergent adults, I analyzed a variety of aspects about material accessibility, specifically those discussed in principle ten of the literature review. All resources I analyzed were online materials that could be accessed by adult students on their own, without teacher or tutor support.

One of the reading resources that stands out as particularly effective is a website called Reep World: Online Learning for Adult English Learners ([www.reepworld.org](http://www.reepworld.org)), which provides free, online stories and activities to improve student comprehension and vocabulary acquisition based on the story the reader chooses. Reep World is an effective resource adult beginners because the stories center on adult immigrants and their family members, which means adult learners can relate to these characters' stories and challenges. The resource includes both visual supports (in the form of pictures) and audio supports (in the form of a native English speaker reading the text aloud). It also provides a variety of topics that are relevant to beginning-level adult readers, such as moving to a new country, adapting to a new culture, and learning to survive in a society where illiteracy is a handicap. It also has a range of levels, from beginning-level readers to intermediate-level readers, which means adult students can use this resource for a more sustained period of time and become comfortable with the resource, which could lead to an

increase in student confidence. One of the key accessibility features of this resource is the length of the texts: between 170 and 250 words in a passage, with at least 85% of the words belonging on the list of the two-thousand most frequently used words in the English language. This means that on average, readers will not know maybe 30 words in a text – and quite often, these are words that are repeatedly use in a text and can be learned through context clues or the supplemental vocabulary activities.

Another online resource that is highly effective is Metro South ([metrosouth.org/reading/stories](http://metrosouth.org/reading/stories)), a resource that shares texts with Marshall Adult Education – an equally as effective resource. The prime reason Metro South is an effective resource is the texts themselves: less than 100 words per text, and at least 95% of the words used are found in the two-thousand most frequently used English words, and they contain supplemental vocabulary activities to be used to learn the few terms that are not found in the top two-thousand list. Similarly to Reep World, Metro South caters texts to a range of ability levels, A through J, as they level them. This resource tends to have a phonics-based approach, highlighting two or three specific phonics they focus on in each text. Additionally, all of the texts are on a variety of topics relevant to adult learners. Again, both Reep World and Metro South can be deemed as highly effective resources for emergent adult readers and meet the majority of principles outlined in materials development literature.

Administrators in programs supporting adult English learners' reading should recommend resources such as those described above and engage their tutors and teachers in meaningful professional development. Again, we are in the midst of a technology revolution, and yet few teachers or tutors indicated using technology to participate in professional development opportunities. How can administrators work towards recommending effective professional

development experiences for their employees and assist their staff with implementing the skills they learn from sessions into their curriculum and day-to-day encounters with the students they service?

In regard to both obtaining effective resources and participating in professional development, close collaborations between universities and community programs have the potential to yield positive outcomes. From my own experience at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), there are several experiences that can connect university students with professionals in the field that benefit both parties involved. One such experience can occur through academic service learning courses, which connect university preservice teachers and faculty members with community administrators and teachers. For example, a partnership between EMU and Washtenaw Literacy – a local, non-profit organization focused on literacy – has resulted in a variety of collaborations that has benefited the staff, learners, and university students. An example of such collaborations is Washtenaw Matters, an authentic-like newsletter with a focus on civic literacy but with minor adaptations made to meet the linguistic and cultural access needs for emergent adult readers in the community. This newsletter has articles written by both staff from Washtenaw Literacy and university students enrolled in EMU’s MA TESOL program. Additionally, these newsletters are used by Washtenaw Literacy tutors when working with adult learners; the staff of Washtenaw Literacy and university students work together to write lesson plans and activities to accompany the newsletters for their implementation in a tutoring or classroom setting.

Another avenue that has the potential to benefit community programs serving tutors and teachers working with emergent adult readers is university students pursuing academic projects focused on community needs. This can be done on a course-by-course basis or in the form of

internships. During my own academic career at EMU, I worked closely with Dr. Zuzana Tomáš on an academic project related to the literacy methods course for ESL teachers I was enrolled in. This project involved compiling and evaluating ten online resources that could be used with LESLLA (Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) adult learners. What started as a matrix of ten resources has since almost doubled in amount! Resources were evaluated for the length(s) of texts they provided and the percentage of frequently used English words. The text topics were also evaluated for relevance to adults and provision of various topics related to adult interests. In other words, identifying texts that would give beginning-level adult ESL students an understanding of information they need for survival; we also included some texts with topics pertaining to family or American culture. Enhancements – such as audio recordings and picture support – were also considered during the evaluation process. The range of material levels was also noted for teachers and tutors to use in lesson planning. Since completing this process of resource evaluation, the list of materials has been shared – with great success – to a local program in the ESL community. Materials can be evaluated further to gauge user-friendliness in regards to technologically-savvy users and ease of navigation within each resource. Further research can also shed light on emergent adult readers' perceptions of learning to read using fully online materials.

### **Limitations of Study and Future Research**

A few limitations may have influenced the results of this study. One of the biggest limitations of this study is the number of participants. Having only 41 teachers/tutors out of the expansive field of TESOL professionals working with beginning-level adult reading students, does not allow for a concrete, representative view of materials location and evaluation, or professional development and administrative support received by people in this field.

Future research could delve into the benefits of using CALL technologies with beginning-level LESLLA learners, who arrive with minimal education experience let alone hands-on experience with the vast amounts of technology within reach. Additionally, ESL educators tend to reserve interactive, online approaches to learning for only their advanced community college and university students – why is that? What is preventing or hindering adult ESL/EFL programs and non-governmental organizations from accessing this wealth of online materials and resources, besides a lack of support from administration?

A final area of research could be in regards to tutors' and teachers' beliefs about drawing attention to linguistic input while teaching. This was the most surprising discovery of the survey – the asset that sets ESL/EFL professionals apart from domestic teachers is being able to distinguish between new language aspects – and this is the materials development principle that received the least favorable average score (a 3.68 out of 5 points). A potential reason for this finding is the phrasing – if listed in less technical terms (e.g. help students focus on new language), it is possible that more importance would be assigned to this principle. Future research will need to corroborate this hypothesis.

## **Conclusion**

A variety of online materials for teaching reading to adult English learners is available for use by teachers, tutors, and learners alike. However, as this survey indicated, the teaching professionals need opportunities to engage in professional development in order to learn how to select, develop, and use these resources effectively with English learners. An improvement in the area of professional development for these professionals has the potential to positively impact instruction for adult English learners learning to develop their ESL reading skills. Imagine the

number of English language learners who can benefit from teachers/tutors who are current on their methodologies and access to effective online materials.

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**Appendix A – Survey Questions****Demographics**

1. In what capacity do you tutor or teach beginning-level adult English learners?
  - a) Unpaid tutor/volunteer
  - b) Paid tutor
  - c) Unpaid teacher
  - d) Paid teacher
  
2. What is your educational background?
  - a) Field-specific education (e.g. MA/BA in TESOL/TEFL)
  - b) Field-relevant education (e.g. general education)
  - c) Non-field specific
  
3. In what geographical context do you teach?
  - a) North America
  - b) Europe
  - c) Australia/New Zealand
  - d) Middle East
  - e) Asia
  - f) South America
  - g) Other (please specify)
  
4. How many years have you worked with beginning-level ELLs?  
[ \_\_\_\_\_ ]
  
5. In what context do you work? (select all that apply)
  - a) Non-governmental organization
  - b) Adult ESL program
  - c) Community college or university
  - d) Other (please specify)
  
6. How many of your beginning-level students are literate in their first language?
  - a) 0%
  - b) 25%
  - c) 50%
  - d) 75%
  - e) 100%
  
7. Select the characteristics that describe your institution's predominant group of beginning-level English language learners?
  - a) Newly arrived refugee/immigrant/visitor
  - b) A refugee/immigrant/visitor who has been in the country for up to 5 years
  - c) Literacy in their first language, but not spoken English or literacy in English
  - d) Literacy in their first language, limited spoken English but no literacy in English

- e) Limited spoken English, but no literacy in either their first language or English
- f) Literacy in their first language, some literacy in English, but no spoken English

## Reading Resources

1. How do you go about finding effective reading resources for your beginning-level English learners? (select all that apply)
  - a) I find my own resources online.
  - b) I use a local library.
  - c) I use books available to me by my friends and/or colleagues.
  - d) I draw upon resources recommended by professional organizations or list-servs.
  - e) I use what my institution provides for me.
  - f) Other (please specify)
  
2. Do you consider obtaining these resources:
  - a. Very easy
  - b. Easy
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Difficult
  - e. Very difficult
  
3. Which types of reading resources do you use with beginning-level adult English learners?

	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Textbook			
Authentic texts (e.g. how-to manuals, newspaper/magazine articles)			
Simplified texts (e.g. level-readers, simplified websites)			
Documents adults need to understand (e.g. forms, applications)			
Interactive online resources for beginning-level adult readers			
Children's books			
Poetry			

4. Do you consider the main reading resources you use
  - a. Not at all effective (0%)
  - b. Slightly effective (25%)
  - c. Moderately effective (50%)
  - d. Very effective (75%)
  - e. Extremely effective (100%)
  - f. Unsure/Other (please specify)

5. Indicate how important you consider these principles for reading resources for beginning-level learners: "Reading resources should..."

	<b>Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Somewhat Unimportant</b>	<b>Unimportant</b>
Offer bottom up and top down practices					
Be visually attractive					
Help learners feel at ease					
Develop learners' confidence					
Be relevant and useful					
Make learners feel invested					
Be challenging but manageable in terms of language proficiency					
Be authentic					
Draw learners' attention to linguistic input					
Allow learners to use English for communicative purposes					
Take into account that learners have different interests and personalities					
Other (please specify)					

### Professional Development

1. Did you participate in the following over the course of the past year? Check all that apply.
  - a) Attending a national or international conference
  - b) Attending a state or local conference
  - c) Attending conference/forum/presentation held by my organization
  - d) Presenting at a conference
  - e) Attending an online webinar
  - f) Discussion with a colleague related to my job (in person)
  - g) Discussion with a colleague related to my job (via Internet)

- h) Read an article/book related to my field
- i) Disseminated a project related to my field
- j) Other (please specify)

2. Do you consider the professional development in which you engage:
  - a. Not at all effective (0%)
  - b. Slightly effective (25%)
  - c. Moderately effective (50%)
  - d. Very effective (75%)
  - e. Extremely effective (100%)
  - f. Other (please specify)
  
3. Do you feel satisfied with the amount of the support to develop professionally in the area of teaching reading and using reading resources with beginning-level adult English learners?
  - a. Not at all satisfied (0%)
  - b. Slightly satisfied (25%)
  - c. Moderately satisfied (50%)
  - d. Very satisfied (75%)
  - e. Extremely satisfied (100%)
  - f. Other (please specify)
  
4. Is there anything else we have not asked you about with respect to teaching reading/using reading resources with adult beginning-level English learners that you would like to share?

**Appendix B – IRB Approval Letter**

**RESEARCH @ EMU**

**UHSRC Determination: EXEMPT**

**DATE: July 29, 2016**

**TO: Rachel Turner**

**Eastern Michigan University**

**Re: UHSRC: # 935283-1**

**Category: Exempt category 2 Approval Date: July 29, 2016**

**Title: Tutors and Teachers Experiences with Reading Resources for Beginning-Level Adult English Language Learners**

Your research project, entitled **Tutors and Teachers Experiences with Reading Resources for Beginning-Level Adult English Language Learners**, has been determined Exempt in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46.102. UHSRC policy states that you, as the Principal Investigator, are responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of your research subjects and conducting your research as described in your protocol.

**Renewals:** Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please submit the **Human Subjects Study Completion Form** (access through IRBNet on the UHSRC website).

**Modifications:** You may make minor changes (e.g., study staff changes, sample size changes, contact information changes, etc.) without submitting for review. However, if you plan to make changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a **Human Subjects Approval Request Form** and obtain approval prior to implementation. The form is available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

**Problems:** All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an **Event Report form**, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website

**Follow-up:** If your Exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at [human.subjects@emich.edu](mailto:human.subjects@emich.edu). Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kellman-Fritz, PhD

Chair

University Human Subjects Review Committee



## Appendix C – Consent Form

### Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to identify the resources used by tutors and teachers of beginning proficiency level adult immigrants and refugees and the effectiveness of such resources. This study will also examine the amount of professional development tutors and teachers receive regarding finding and implementing effective reading resources.

### Funding

This research is partially-funded by an Undergraduate Research Stimulus Program through Eastern Michigan University.

### Study Procedures

Participation in this study involves completing an online survey. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey.

### Risks

The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality; however, all results are disassociated with any identifiable information as this is an anonymous survey. Some of the survey questions are personal in nature and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

### Benefits

You may not directly benefit from participating in this research; if you wish to receive the compiled database of effective reading resources for beginning-level adult English language learners, you will be redirected upon completion of the survey to a separate form to share your name and email address with the principle investigator. Benefits to the field of TESOL regarding effective reading materials for beginning-level English learner will occur through the dissemination in conference presentations and publication, including an online database comprised of reading resources for beginning-level adult learners.

### Confidentiality

This is an anonymous survey; we will ask for no identifiable information during the survey. As the participant, you have the option of providing your name and email address to the principal investigator upon completion of the survey; this information will be in a form separate from the survey; abstaining from providing your name and email will not affect the results of the survey. We will keep your information confidential by storing it in a password-protected computer file. We may share your information with other researchers outside of Eastern Michigan University. If we share your information, we will remove any and all identifiable information so that you cannot reasonably be identified. The results of this research will be published and may be used for teaching. Identifiable information will not be used for these purposes.

**Compensation**

Upon completion of this survey, you will be given the option to share your name and email address to receive an online database of effective reading resources for participating in this research study. We will collect your name and email address at the end of the survey in a separate form so that we can send you the database.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Rachel Turner at [rturne24@emich.edu](mailto:rturne24@emich.edu) or by phone at 419-345-7098. You can also contact Rachel's adviser, Dr. Zuzana Tomáš, at [ztomas@emich.edu](mailto:ztomas@emich.edu) or by phone at 734-262-2481.

For information about your rights as a participant in research, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Office of Research Compliance at 734-487-3090 or [human.subjects@emich.edu](mailto:human.subjects@emich.edu).

**Voluntary participation**

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may choose to leave the study at any time with no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.