

## **Session 105**

### A Modified Sustained Silent Reading Program in Beginning Adult ESOL Classes by Sandra Banke & Dominique Brillanceau Portland State University Lab School

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

How does the use of a modified Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program with low-level adult learners of ESL as compared with a conventional, skills-based reading approach lead to differential language proficiency gains?

#### **METHOD- OLOGY (sample, methods, type of data)**

The participants in this randomized experiment (n=182) were adult learners of English (ESL) at Portland Community College. All students were in the beginning (Level A - SPL 0-2/CASAS 180-200) or high-beginning (Level B - SPL 3-4/CASAS 200-215) classes of PCC's four-level program. Students' prior level of education in their native countries ranged from 0 to 19 years, and ages from 17 to 77, with the major language groups Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. In this reading intervention, PCC's conventional reading lesson approach (control condition), which includes both top down and bottom up strategies, was compared with a free reading approach (experimental condition), similar to the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) model frequently used in K-12 settings. Students were randomly assigned to one of these conditions at the time they entered the lab school and remained in that condition for the year-long duration of the intervention (or until they left their A or B level class at the lab school). The two Lab School teachers alternated the condition they taught: Ms. Brillanceau taught the experimental condition in her A and B level classes for six months (fall and winter quarter) while Ms. Banke used the standard PCC approach to teaching reading. During spring and summer quarters, they switched. One hour per class (3 hour classes) was devoted to reading each day regardless of the condition. Making the random assignment comparisons in this manner helped to avoid confounding teacher differences with treatment-control differences. If one method proved to be superior (on a given measure of second language acquisition) to another for both teachers, we would be more confident in attributing differences to method rather than teacher. We used administrative data provided by PCC, in-class measures of learning (such as periodic assessments with the BEST Literacy Test and class writing samples), and in-home assessments collected as part of the Labsite Student Study, the Lab School's annual, in-home interview project, which also includes self-report data on reading practices. The instructors' anecdotal observations of and reflections on student learning gains, as well as on the experience of "living" an educational experiment, were also sources of data.

**INDINGS**

*How does the use of a modified Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program with low-level adult learners of ESL lead to language proficiency gains as compare with a conventional, skills-based reading approach?*

For our initial comparison and analysis of the two conditions, we used the administrative data provided by PCC, which showed student hours of instruction, longevity and progress within the ESL program, as a measure of student learning. Our preliminary findings showed no difference between the students in the two conditions; i.e. the students in both conditions had comparable hours of instruction (average 60 hours), and given students' presence in the experimental (SSR) condition neither impeded nor enhanced their progress through and/or out of the program.

The data from two cycles of the Labsite Student Study, the annual, in-home interviews and language assessments (BEST Plus, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III, and a reading practices inventory), while collected, are still in the process of being analyzed. We expect this to be the most reliable source of quantitative data on language proficiency gains. These results will be presented at TESOL 2005 in San Antonio, Texas.

The instructors' anecdotal observations and reflections on the lived experience of an educational intervention are providing data of a different sort; not on reading instruction itself, but on the effects a controlled classroom experiment have on the instructor, the instruction, and the classroom environment. Both conditions caused the instructors to deviate from their philosophy of teaching and altered the flow of the non-treatment portion of class. This prompted the instructors to question, and crystallize their underlying beliefs that informed their teaching, as well as raised questions about the integrity and effectiveness of experimental classroom research.

**IMPLICA-  
TIONS FOR:  
PRACTICE**

Implications for practice: A sustained, quiet reading time 1) gives students the opportunity to practice skills learned in class in an authentic context 2) structures a time to read, which is difficult to find in the adult learner's busy lives and 3) gives students an opportunity to interact with and learn from the language in a text of their choosing. The post reading activity encourages discourse about a high-interest text and gives an authentic setting for language use in interaction.

<b>POLICY</b>	Implications for Policy: While the preliminary findings point to the fact that there is no difference between the control and the experiment group, we learned that SSR does contribute to language acquisition through reading. Adult literacy programs should have small libraries and curriculum should include more structured reading time to supplement their language acquisition activities.
<b>FURTHER RESEARCH</b>	Because low-level success gains are not adequately captured by standardized assessment measures , there is a need to design other kinds of measures for reading behaviors as they relate to language learning.
<b>IMPOR- TANCE OF THIS STUDY</b>	This study was important for 2 reasons: 1) it showed that even under the best and most controlled circumstances, this kind of scientific design is problematic in the classroom and should be applied to an educational setting with caution and 2) participation in a sustained silent reading, in addition to a regular ESL program, can supplement language and literacy development.
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