The California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO) collaborated with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy and the Portland State University Lab School as part of the Northwest Practitioner Knowledge Institute. After an introduction to the Lab School’s research, practitioners developed and implemented research-based instructional strategies in their classrooms. This brief provides an overview of the project, participating teachers’ first-hand accounts of their research projects, and related resources.

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) sponsored the Northwest Practitioner Knowledge Institute (NWPKI) at Portland State University’s Lab School from October 2004 - May 2005. Participants were teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and professional development specialists from Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. The Institute had two main goals. The first goal was to improve the quality of services provided to adult students in ESOL programs by helping practitioners understand and use the research emerging from the Lab School. The second goal was to improve Lab School research by getting feedback from practitioners about the implications of preliminary findings.

During the first session of the Institute in October 2004, Lab School faculty and staff presented findings from three research projects:

- **A Modified Sustained Silent Reading Program in Beginning ESOL**
  Researchers: Sandra Banke and Dominique Brillanceau

- **Pair Work Interaction in Beginning Adult ESOL**
  Researcher: Kathryn A. Harris

- **How Students Start Their Pair Work Tasks**
  Researcher: John Hellerman

Each presentation included a review of the project’s research goals and methodology and a summary of initial findings. Participants discussed the studies with the researchers, asking detailed questions about the research methodologies, replicability of the findings, and implications for their own practice. Participating teachers and NCSALL’s staff then worked together to develop instructional strategies based on the research findings. NCSALL staff also worked with the professional development specialists attending the Institute to identify new opportunities for staff development based on the research conducted at the Lab School. For example, NCSALL is making video and audio recordings of Lab School classes available online. The recordings will accompany training materials NCSALL is developing, and they can also be used by others who wish to create their own materials based on this research.

After the initial meeting, each participating teacher conducted an intervention or inquiry project, based on one of the Lab School studies, in his or her classroom. Participants created teaching journals in which they reflected on the use of research to make instructional decisions.

The practitioners and staff development specialists reconvened in Portland in May 2005 for a second training. In this session, practitioners described how they had implemented research-based strategies. Participants’ project evaluations and recommendations were posted on NCSALL’s NWPKI Web Site.

Among the research-based interventions were two by California ESOL practitioners. Jennifer Kearns, an adult education teacher in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District, based her research on that of Sandra Banke and Dominique Brillanceau (see p. 2). Kearns investigated the use of modified sustained silent reading in her ESOL class. Bonnita Solberg, an adult education teacher in the Oakland Unified School District, built on the work of Kathryn A. Harris (see p. 3). Solberg focused on the impact of teachers’ interventions on student interactions and small group and pair work in the classroom. Both teachers posted Web log entries about their work, what they were learning, and the hurdles they had to overcome.

### Online Resources

- **CALPRO**  
  http://www.calpro-online.org/

- **Pair Work Web Log**  
  http://calpronwpkipairwork.blogspot.com/

- **Sustained Silent Reading Web Log**  
  http://calpronwpkimssr.blogspot.com/

- **NCSALL**  
  http://www.ncsall.net/

- **NWPKI**  
  http://www.ncsall.net/?id=968

- **Portland State University Adult Lab School**  
  http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/
During the tour, I pointed out to the students the learning that was taking place as it was happening, and I had students comment on what they were learning. Throughout the entire project, I constantly reminded students what we were doing and why we were doing it.

In the early stages of the project, I developed a survey about students' personal reading attitudes and behaviors. This survey served two purposes. First, it set the scene for what we would be doing in the many weeks ahead. Second, it gave me a baseline so I could assess any changes in students' reading attitudes and behaviors that occurred as a result of this project.

To create the library, I decided to choose a few books myself, and then I facilitated a group vote on genres to add. The students' top four choices were biographies, history, children's books, and romance. In purchasing the books, I also considered the students' CASAS reading scores, which ranged between 215 and 232. I bought a mixture of new and used volumes.

After debating with myself for some time, I scheduled reading time at the beginning of the class, two days a week. Then after watching SSR in action a couple of times, I determined that the length of the reading time should be 30-45 minutes. This included time for students to rummage through the library, get their folders, grab dictionaries if they desired, and settle in for true, silent reading. The post-reading period usually lasted about 15 minutes and activities included retelling to a partner, sharing new words or phrases with a partner, talking about one character in the story, and reading out loud to the teacher.

In addition to the structured SSR time, there were many times when I let SSR occur in-between scheduled activities. For example, on a test day, students handed in their tests and then immediately got a book. In this way, the test time flowed naturally into the SSR time. I believe this application of SSR taught students to use their time wisely, and it provided additional learning opportunities for those students who always seem to be ahead of the rest of the class. It is also a way to introduce SSR to students who are hesitant to engage in what they may see as a non-traditional classroom activity.

Within the classroom, I provided students with several tools to help them assess their progress. I created a reading log and a language learning diary for students to complete, and I taught students how to use a filing system to organize these records. This system worked well because it fostered students' responsibility and organization skills. I reviewed comments students made in their personal reading logs on a regular basis. Seeing what students wrote about what they liked or didn't like about their books helped me discern how they responded to SSR. Additionally, I noted the students' language learning diaries. How much they wrote in their diaries told me a lot about whether this process was helping them learn more. I also kept a teaching log that captured my observations of the success or failure of different SSR sessions.

Finally, I revisited the reading surveys that I gave students at the beginning of the semester. I met with each student individually and repeated several questions from the survey. I also asked students about their thoughts on the project as a whole. The overwhelming response was positive. I found students to have an acute awareness of their own learning gains throughout this "period of reading." More than 95 percent of students involved with this intervention were able to specifically identify...
The results of this study suggest that important learning opportunities occur when students deviate from the script of a given task (e.g., a pair work dialogue) and "negotiate" or discuss the language issues involved in the task. In addition, the researcher found that when teachers interact with students engaged in pair work activities, one of two adjustments takes place: the learners revert to that part of the task that they have learned well (perhaps in an attempt to show the teacher what they have learned), or they interrupt the task to ask the teacher for assistance with clarification, confirmation, comprehension, or reformulation.

Over the course of the observations, I found that, although learners did revert to information they had learned well or they asked me questions, they often continued with the assigned exercise when I approached the pair or small learning group and listened without comment. However, intervening without an invitation from students seemed to prevent them from continuing with the task. As a result, uninvited intervention may have taken time away from negotiations that were more valuable than the corrections I made as a teacher. In addition, I suspect that these interventions may inordinately emphasize one correction when, in fact, it is the whole communicative task that is important.

Based on the results of this inquiry project, I have learned that a culture of student negotiations can be created in the ESOL classroom. To encourage students to work through communication problems on their own, teachers can remain distant from the pairs or small learning groups and intervene only when students request input. I have termed this strategy "intervention by invitation." Adopting this approach does not mean that teachers should never take the initiative to intervene, because there are circumstances in which the teacher needs to assist students directly and move them toward success. For example, when students miss practice and instructions at the beginning of the exercise, they are not as able to complete the task without special prompts. Similarly, when a student is completely unable to participate in the task for one reason or another, corrective measures must be taken to insure success.

During my observations it was clear that, when students negotiated with each other, they tended to fall back on the easiest way to get to agreement—using their shared native language. This is often an issue in ESOL classrooms regardless of the teaching methodology used. It was also challenging for me, as a teacher, to wait for students to request help rather than offer assistance without being asked.

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how sustained silent reading contributed to their own language learning. Many students reported on the growth of their vocabulary. Many others reported that their reading speed had increased. They also talked about being able to make a connection between the grammar and vocabulary learned in class and the "written word" in a story. One student talked about being able to recognize and understand the grammar within the context of whatever she was reading. Some acknowledged that their desire to read had increased. A few students talked about how reading proved to be the means to learn more about important figures and events in American history. Along those same lines, others reported that reading increased their knowledge in science. One student mentioned that she didn’t have any other access to books that dealt with these particular subjects. Several others mentioned the lack of time to read at home. Across the board, all students who participated in this intervention said they enjoyed and welcomed the SSR time in class and would like to continue incorporating this approach to learning into our class curriculum.

As a whole, I encountered more supports than challenges while applying the Lab School research in the classroom. The greatest challenge I had was the limited amount of class time I could devote to SSR. When I allowed adequate time for SSR, I would often get behind in our main lesson. Conversely, to stay on track with the principal material would mean significantly cutting back on SSR time, which would make the whole objective of sustained silent reading null and void.

Introducing sustained silent reading requires strong leadership from the teacher. Students must understand that reading is vital to their language learning and be committed to making the most of the opportunity to read interesting and relevant material in class. I plan to continue to use the research on SSR and adult second language learners to support my use of SSR in the classroom. As one who has used this research in a practical way, I will encourage other staff members at my school to try SSR, and I will provide support for them in any way that I can. This has been a very successful and rewarding project for me and my class, and I believe many other classes can benefit from SSR as well.

Relevant Articles Available Online


Interaction and Pair Work  
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I believe the implications of my practitioner inquiry project are the following:

1. Teachers should be present during small learning group interactions, but they should not intrude in off-task learning in general and negotiations in particular.

2. Lessons should include reviews of questions that are useful in negotiating meaning before pair work or small learning group exercises begin.

3. Teachers should model working with a partner and provide sufficient practice to strengthen negotiations in English. Providing this kind of support should help lessen the students’ reliance on their first language during in-class negotiations.

4. Teachers should schedule debriefing sessions at the end of pair work and small learning group tasks. This gives students an opportunity to ask questions of the teacher and verify newly acquired information, thus reinforcing the value of negotiations during the task. Rather than interrupting each interaction or conversation, the entire class may be best served by making this type of intervention with the whole class at the end of the task.

5. Finally, teachers using an “intervention by invitation” approach should explain the strategy to the students. Students used to a teacher-directed classroom may have difficulty understanding the teacher’s intent when they are left to negotiate among themselves. Students need to feel supported when they are working through communication issues, and they should be provided with opportunities to discuss their own responses to what may seem to them a counterintuitive approach to language teaching.

Relevant Articles Available Online


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