

Reading Comprehensively

Through using the latest materials and assessments, *Steven Donahue* and *Marta Menendez* discover the areas where students need extra assistance

ESL is Different

Fifty-five million students, approximately, returned to the classroom this fall, but there was one noted demographic difference. Twenty-two percent will have at least one parent who is foreign born, while five percent will have been born overseas. The news is in the bulge of the numbers: 10 million (one in five) of these students speak a language other than English at home — 70 percent of whom speak Spanish at home. (source: www.census.gov).

Curriculum Associates, Inc. is a Massachusetts based firm that produces teacher-generated materials for bolstering the weak points of American students. These past semesters, Curriculum Associates has supplied the writers with materials to pilot in our various classes at Miami Dade College in Miami, Florida. Founded in 1969, Curriculum Associates, is dedicated to designing research-based instructional materials, screens and assessments, and data management tools. The company's products and outstanding customer service provide teachers and administrators with the resources necessary for teaching a diverse student population and fostering learning for all students.

Below we present some of the unanticipated findings from using these materials with our adult ESL students:

The paced materials resonate with the students, in general. The focus of our initial research pilot was to use the new edition of our research-based CARS (Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies) Series, Level F, with our English as Second Language level five reading students, who are adults. (See Figure 1)

Level "F" is set approximately to elementary grade six and identifies students' weaknesses in 12 standards-based reading strategies, encourages students to use higher-order thinking skills, builds comprehension skills for success on tests, and reinforces understanding of performance through self-assessment.

The Student Books include two opportunities for students to analyze their own performance, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for improving performance. *The Teacher Guides'* reproducible forms (or optional management software) make recordkeeping easier, facilitate instructional planning, and organize the review of the reading strategies.

This series is a valuable instrument that

supplies educators with instant response on students' reading strengths and limitations. By reviewing this information, instructors can spotlight their objectives in order to capitalize on student learning.

Furthermore, we find that learners are stimulated and quickly engaged; therefore, they do begin to use higher-order thinking skills in an effort to acquire reading proficiency.

Uneven Reading Skills

Overall, our students showed strength in finding the main idea, and drawing conclusions and making inferences. Their exhibited weaknesses included understanding sequence, making predictions, interpreting figurative language, and summarizing. However, the level five students showed major weaknesses in recalling facts and details, recognizing cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, finding word meaning, and identifying author's purpose. (See Figure 2)

Approximately 50 students participated in the study, and it was somewhat of an eye-opener to us. First, the adult students observably were tasked by the materials. And the data has borne out their struggle with reading English as a new language. In

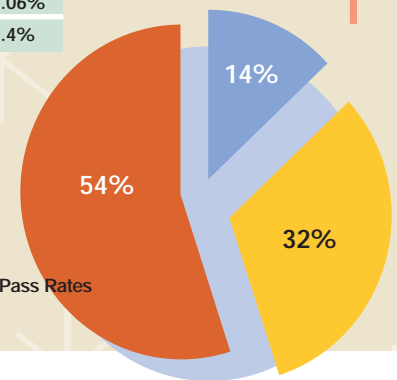
	Book Levels	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Finding Main Idea		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Recalling Facts and Details		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distinguishing Between Real and Make-Believe			X	X					
Understanding Sequence		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Recognizing Cause and Effect		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Comparing and Contrasting			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Making Predictions		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Finding Word Meaning in Context		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Identifying Author's Purpose			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Interpreting Figurative Language			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Summarizing					X	X	X	X	X
Reading Pictures					X				

Figure 1 CARS Book Levels



Percent of Students	Scores
14%	23.1%
32%	52.06%
54%	89.4%

Figure 3 Overall Scores



fact, only 54 percent of the study group was able to pass the sixth-grade “F” series, so to us, this has raised serious concerns about the reading abilities or benchmarking of our adult ESL students and how we should remedy them. (See Figure 3)

The graphical “pie” of this overall pass rate is even more informative as good readers have a basket of skills, which almost half of this class apparently lacked.

Indeed, only 54 percent of the class received passing grades on all competencies; while, 46 were far below. In fact, nearly 25 percent of the class did about as well as complete guessing — as if they could not read at all.

It's the Monosyllables

Direct observations of the students led us to conclude that a struggle with vocabulary going on while students read both the passages and questions. Interestingly, it was the monosyllabic English words which in many cases presented hurdles. Words such as: snout, swift, dwell, and jaw were just not present in the lexicon of many of these students.

The International Reading Association (IRA) depicts vocabulary education as an

extremely important topic needing far more attention than it is receiving (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2004). In a study by Simpson, Stahl & Francis (2004), it is noted that many programs still use the rote memorization method in which students display their knowledge by completing exams that either ask them to match answers or furnish multiple answers for students to choose from. The problem with this system of instruction is that students are merely learning words — not how to use them.

Conclusion

It is the objective of this English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program to academically prepare students for mainstreaming into college level courses. However, with results as irregular as these, we have discovered it is not surprising that students have difficulty passing the College Placement Test (CPT) and; therefore, land in remedial courses after exiting our program.

We intend to continue to use materials from Curriculum Associates in order to assist our students in mastery of English. The materials provide an effective tool that provides teachers with immediate feedback on

students’ reading strengths and weaknesses. This information has allowed us to focus their instructional goals to gain maximum student learning. We noted that students are engaged with their learning progress through meta-cognitive self-assessments. Indeed, almost all students are motivated to think about their reading performance and the acquisition of reading strategies. ❧

References

Cassidy, J. & Cassidy, D. (2004). What's hot, what's not For 2004. *Reading Today*, 21. 3.
 Simpson, M. L., Stahl, N. A., & Francis, M. A. (2004). Reading and learning strategies: Recommendation for the 21st century. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 28, 2-4, 6, 8, 10-12, 14-15, 32.

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