



Labor Force Status	Morning		After
	N	%	N
Employed	38,823	30.1	10,529
Unemployed	59,567	55.2	15,749
Not Employed or Seeking Work	27,495	60.2	8,116

## The Northwest Practitioner Knowledge Institute: Reports and Resources

*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://calpronwkipairwork.blogspot.com/>
- Sustained Silent Reading Web Log** <http://calpronwkipimssr.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/>

### Lab School Research Findings

#### A Modified Sustained Silent Reading Program in Beginning ESOL

Researchers: Sandra Banke and Dominique Brillanceau

Researchers compared students in two integrated ESOL classes. Reading instruction in one class followed the regular skills-based approach; the class other used a modified sustained silent reading approach. Researchers found no difference between students in the two classes on standardized tests, attendance hours, retention, and progress through the program. Teachers reported that even beginning-level students enjoyed the silent reading activities.

### Practitioner Inquiry Project Findings

#### Modified Sustained Silent Reading Report by Jennifer Kearns

Prior to my involvement with this project, I had used sustained silent reading (SSR) as an activity for my students when they were finished with class work. I did this because as a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), I believe it is important to help second language learners establish their reading habits in English. However, over the years, I have seen student resistance to SSR as a classroom strategy.

To explore this resistance, I conducted a teacher inquiry project based on the SSR research of Sandra Banke and Dominique Brillanceau at the Lab School at Portland State University. I wanted to see whether students' attitudes would change if they were told that reading large amounts of English would likely result in greater English proficiency (Renandya, Rajan, & Jacobs, 1999) and were then given more opportunities to read in class. This project allowed me to test my assumptions regarding reading and foreign language learning. As a result, the students had a wonderful opportunity to engage in an unconventional language learning approach and could do so as the navigators of their own learning journeys.

I used a backward-design approach to help lay the foundation for this project. I knew I needed to generate student buy-in, so I focused on fostering in my students an enthusiasm for reading. I identified key elements in this process: gathering student input, creating a class library, brainstorming post-reading activities, and assessing the project as a whole.

To create student buy-in, I explained the importance of reading in language acquisition. I also set up a field trip to a local bookstore and arranged a tour with the manager of the store. The tour highlighted the different genres of books that are available at a bookstore, and students learned how to access information and find books according to subject matter. More importantly, the students were able to immerse themselves in the wonderful world of exploring books as a fun and leisurely activity. 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 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

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### Lab School Research Findings

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

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.

### Practitioner Inquiry Project Findings

#### Teacher Interventions and Student Interaction in Pair Work Report by Bonnita Solberg

Pair work is an important aspect of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) education because it provides opportunities for learners to practice newly acquired English language forms by speaking with another student. Pair work exercises also provide an opportunity for students to negotiate meaning when there are problems communicating. At times, learners are challenged to answer the question, "Why didn't my partner understand me?" Working together, students make clarification requests, perform confirmation and comprehension checks, and try to achieve a common understanding. These strategies are part of all language use; in this way, communication problems in pair work provide real learning opportunities for students.

The focus of my teacher inquiry project was identifying the effect of teacher interventions during pair work activity. Research presented at the Lab School suggested that one of two adjustments takes place when a teacher enters pair work: (1) the learners revert to that part of the task that they have learned well, or (2) learners interrupt the task to ask the teacher for assistance. The research also suggests that important learning happens when students deviate from the script. This challenges teacher-directed models of language pedagogy. The implication is that ESOL teachers can facilitate off-task learning and negotiations by ESOL learners by reducing the frequency of the teacher's interventions in pair work.

I was intrigued by the research, and I wanted to see first-hand what the results would be. I used pair work and small learning groups on a daily basis, with four to ten learners in each group. Harris' findings suggest to me as a practitioner that I must adjust my teaching stance in the classroom to allow learners a broad opportunity to practice their English skills and to reflect on the process of negotiations.

The setting for my classroom inquiry project was the Neighborhood Centers Adult School, Oakland Unified School District (K-12 District). The classes were based in Oakland's Chinatown and were composed of Asian learners (98 percent Chinese and 2 percent Vietnamese) at a beginning low level of proficiency. They ranged from 18 to 84 years old. Many had repeated this level several times. To assess the impact of teacher interventions on student-to-student negotiations, I observed the response of students to my presence during pair and small learning group work. I approached and observed students for varying lengths of time for a total of 32 sessions. I conducted two types of observations. First, during small learning groups, I sat in the center of the room and did not enter the groups. My goals were to observe negotiations in the groups from outside and to note any questions students had of me as the teacher. Second, I observed student reaction to my presence at the fringe of a group or when entering it and noted the course of student negotiations. I recorded the questions students asked, noted whether students stopped performing the task to go to an easier task, and observed the form and frequency of negotiations within the small learning groups. In addition to noting student reactions, I recorded my own responses to the experience. When I wanted to make an intervention, I stopped to think about what prompted my decision to intervene. I also noted my reaction to entering the pairs, particularly if I changed the dynamic by interrupting the ongoing task.

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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## Sustained Silent Reading

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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

Chow, P.H., & Chou, C.T. (2000). Evaluating sustained silent reading in reading classes. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 6, 11. Retrieved December 28, 2005, from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Chow-SSR.html>.

Krashen, S. (2004). *Free voluntary reading: New research, applications, and controversies*. Paper presented at the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre Conference. Retrieved December 28, 2005, from <http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles/singapore/index.html>.

Renandya, W., Rajan, B.R.S., & Jacobs, G.M. (1999). Extensive reading with adult learners of English as a second language. *RELC Journal*, 30, 39-61. Retrieved December 28, 2005, from <http://www.extensivereading.net/er/renandyavietnam.html>.

## Interaction and Pair Work

(Continued from page 3)

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

Lightbown, P. (2003). SLA research in the classroom/SLA research for the classroom. *Language Learning Journal*, 28, 4-13. Retrieved November 9, 2005, from <http://www.itmfl.org.uk/modules/teaching/1a/paper1a3.pdf>.

Mackey, A. (2003). *Beyond production: Learner's perceptions about interactional processes*. Retrieved December 28, 2005, from <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/mackeya/MackeyJER.pdf>.

Moss, D., & Ross-Feldman, L. (2003). *Second language acquisition in adults: From research to practice*. Retrieved on December 28, 2005, from [http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/digests/SLA.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/SLA.html). Washington, DC: Center for Adult English Language Acquisition.

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