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ABSTRACT

The study examines the population of long-term students of English as a second language (ESL), those who are enrolled in ESL programs for four to eight years but have not mastered the cognitive and academic skills in English to compete at grade level, in one New York City (New York) high school, and the efforts being made to address this population's needs. Background information is offered on student entry into and progress in the school system's ESL programs, and possible general factors in the lack of progress of long-term ESL (LTL) students. The procedures for identifying LTL students at the high school in question are described, using student writing samples as illustration. The program of literacy instruction designed to address these students' needs is elaborated, again using case examples. The program includes reading and writing components, note-taking skill development, native language arts instruction, several forms of assessment, and active support of this population by teachers and administrators. (Contains 10 references.) (MSE)

Academic Success for Long-Term ESL Students

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Introduction

Nearly seven percent of the total number of children enrolled in public schools in New York City have been identified as "long-term" Limited English Proficient students (hereafter, "LTL" or "long-term ESL"). These students have been enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for four to eight years, but they have not yet mastered the cognitive and academic skills in English needed to compete at grade level. LTL high school students are particularly vulnerable to dropping out because so little time remains for them to make progress. The issues surrounding these students recently led the New York City Board of Education to form a focus group to examine their educational profile.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the LTL population and the efforts being made at one New York City high school to address their particular needs. At this writing, a study is also underway comparing the outcomes of LTL students in this program with LTL students in another high school with no special program.

Background

Students in New York City who speak a home language other than English and who score at or below the 40th percentile on the Language Acquisition Battery (LAB), a test of English language proficiency, are eligible for English as a Second Language (ESL) services. If sufficient numbers of students from the same home language are present, then bilingual classes are mandated, in addition to ESL. The ESL classes develop and support English skills (both oral and written) so that students can succeed academically in mainstream classes, while bilingual classes continue education in the content areas: native language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, so the students do not fall behind in them.

In a given year, the preponderance of students have been receiving ESL services for fewer than three years. After the third year, the number of students receiving ESL instruction drops significantly, primarily due to attrition, mobility, and mainstreaming. For example, in 1995-6, 117,752 students in New York City had been receiving ESL services for 0-3 years, yet only 18,418 students had been receiving these services for four years. With each subsequent year of ESL instruction, the total number of students enrolled drops: 11,906 were in their fifth year of ESL instruction in 1995-6, and 8,751 were in their sixth year (Bilingual Education Student Information Survey or BESIS, 1995-6).

The length of time it takes many ESL students to be mainstreamed (if they are being mainstreamed rather than dropping out or moving) is not surprising. Many second language researchers would agree that developing proficiency in the academic uses of a language, what Cummins (1979) calls Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), takes from five to seven years (Cummins, 1981). There are recent indications that its full development may take as long as ten years for students entering an L2 school system with no prior schooling in their native language (Collier, 1989). Cummins would distinguish CALP from Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), the prototypically oral, informal language used to facilitate or maintain social relationships. Learners quickly develop BICS, usually within one or two years, and so may seem fluent. However, these same learners may lack the depth of conceptualization and vocabulary in CALP necessary to succeed academically.

In addition, the time needed to develop CALP in English and compete in the mainstream varies with the learner's age at the time of entry into an English language school system and his or her prior development of native language literacy (Collier, 1989). This is reflected in Board of Education statistics: generally speaking, the earlier students enter the school system, the better chance they have of exiting ESL classes in three or fewer years ("Educational Progress," 1994). Ordinary maturational constraints in second language learning which slow down many older children and adolescents (Long, 1990) can

be compounded by impoverished environments. So for poor second-language learners, especially older children, to receive ESL support for four, five, even six years is not troubling at all; on the contrary, it is to be expected.

What is troubling, however, is the percentage of children who have been in ESL instruction for seven or more years—10,775 children or 6.4% of the total ESL population in 1995-6 ("BESIS")—and yet who still lack the literacy skills necessary to compete at grade level. It is these students that the Board of Education has labeled "long-term LEP students" or LTL. It is not that these students do not lack prior education, though their education may have been inadequate or interrupted. Rather, many of them have been in New York City public schools for most or all of their school careers. The Office of Bilingual Education (nd) has identified twelve variables which are related to long-term ESL status: (a) access to pre-school experience (positively related to academic success); (b) late entry into school (negatively related to academic success); (c) age of entry into the English language school system; (d) interrupted schooling; (e) mobility; (f) absenteeism and truancy; (g) patterns of failure in mathematics; (h) L1 literacy (positively related to L2 literacy); (i) premature exit from bilingual education or programmatic misplacement; (j) retention for at least one grade; (k) health problems; (l) students requiring special education services ("Predictive Variables").

Other related factors may include large class size and little individual attention during their early childhood, elementary and middle school education. At some point during their education, for whatever reason, these students missed learning to decode and organize text in grade-appropriate ways. And it is their limited literacy which hinders them from competing in grade-level content courses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these students, frustrated and lost, tend to disrupt class, skip school, and, all too often, drop out altogether. For example, at High School A, one over-age freshman (16 years old) was recently sent to the language department's assistant principal for disrupting an ESL reading class. When asked to read aloud the text that the class had been working on, the student

was unable to sound out unknown words. In effect, he was stymied by his limited knowledge of sight-words that had not yet reached a fourth-grade level.

The traditional conception of ESL student placement—sorting students into three or four levels, based on overall English ability, and teaching the four skills—is ill-suited to deal with LTL students' widely divergent oral and written skills. Bilingual programs are often no better equipped to deal with their needs. Though they often display fluent BICS, LTL students are often no longer strong enough in CALP in their native language to benefit from bilingual content area courses (mathematics, science, social studies) at the high school level.

What is the solution? While Cummins' theories may help explain "what," it is models like Bialystok and Ryan's (1985) model of the cognitive dimensions of language processing that help explain "how:" building on students' strengths. In their model, three different uses of language—conversation, reading/writing, and metalinguistic—are analyzed in terms of the degree of cognitive control and level of analysis that each requires. Conversation, prototypically involving the communicative function of language, is usually embedded in a rich context of relationship, using low-analyzed knowledge and requiring little cognitive control. Reading and writing, because context-reduced, are usually more related to the cognitive function of language, and so require more analysis of knowledge, a higher level of cognitive control and abstraction, and the ability to use language as a cognitive organizer. Metalinguistic skills require the highest level of analyzed knowledge, abstraction, and cognitive control.

In spite of their greater abstraction, however, cognitive and metacognitive functions build upon the communicative function. Exploiting the full cognitive and metacognitive potential of language requires a solid foundation in the communicative function—the shared representations of language, the knowledge about the world, and the values associated with language and literacy use within the learner's social network (Hamers & Blanc, 1989).

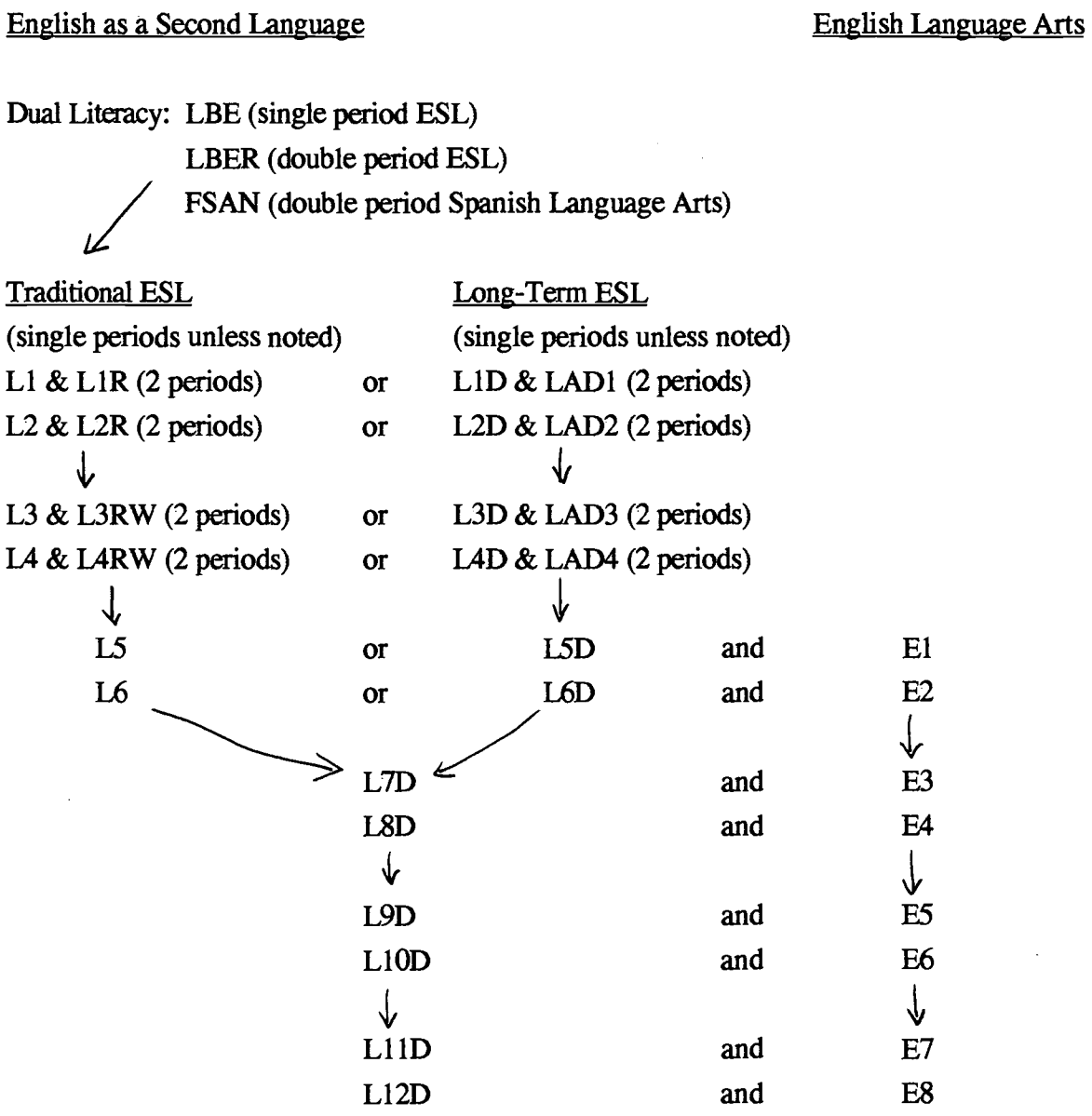
Hence, for LTL students, with limited cognitive/academic skills in either language, successful literacy instruction must begin by building on their more developed communication skills, their existent knowledge of the world, and their immediate concerns and interests before moving on to more abstract, context-reduced uses of language. The LTL strand of the ESL program at High School A in New York City, developed in response to these children's unique needs, takes full advantage of their high basic interpersonal communication skills in English to develop their cognitive and academic language proficiency. Before describing the techniques used in this program, however, it is important to explain how these students are identified and placed.

Identification of Long-Term ESL Students

High School A is a large, urban high school serving largely underprivileged students. Approximately one-third of its population requires English as a Second Language (ESL) services; the vast majority of ESL students are immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries, but a few come from Southeast Asia or Africa. High School A's ESL program consists of two components: one for the "traditional" ESL student, whose BICS and CALP in English are at similar levels of development, and one for the long-term ESL students, who are orally fluent but whose reading and writing levels are comparable to that of elementary school children. Overall program design is shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

ESL Program Design
High School A[1]



[1]Each number increment represents a semester of work; i.e., L1 & L2 are a year's sequence. Courses listed horizontally represent courses taken simultaneously.

Students with limited or no prior education are placed in the one-year Dual Literacy program (Native Language Arts and ESL), which they may repeat if needed, before entering the traditional ESL program. Students from both the traditional ESL and LTL components are integrated in a mainstream English class at ESL level 5. To further insure that the LTL component not become deficiency-based (or be perceived that way), the two ESL components—traditional and LTL—fully merge at level 7.

Placement begins with the administration of a departmental test which includes reading, writing, and grammar sections based on course texts from levels 1 and 4 of the traditional ESL curriculum (scores from other examinations found in the students' records are also consulted). The test is followed by a one-on-one interview with the student where oral fluency, prior education, and other personal data are noted by the interviewer. At this point, several factors may indicate LTL status. First, LTL students display fluent or fairly fluent oral English, but their literacy skills are at least three grade levels below where they should be. Second, they have been in an English-speaking school system for seven years or longer and still receive disproportionately low scores on the LAB (for example, in the first or second percentile when a passing score is above the fortieth). Third, and most importantly, the students' responses to the test further indicate limited reading and writing ability. The writing may need to be read aloud to be understood at all.

Reading ability on the departmental exam is tested by giving the students a short paragraph telling the story of a family and their activities one evening and a series of multiple choice questions about the story. Grammar is also tested through multiple choice questions. Writing ability is tested by a visual prompt, a picture of a young female student looking over the shoulder of a young male student writing at his desk, accompanied by the question, "What is happening in this picture?" The student is expected to write a short paragraph about the picture's content in both English and, if the student comes from a Spanish-speaking home, in Spanish. One student, given the pseudonym Damaris, responded to the prompt in the following way:

[English] She is tenjre [teenager] in her we see man the column of However many different an the class she is teiren or lateita about the at which to me

[Spanish] ya ta telrabo el esutate ni cesta la

An interview revealed that Damaris had been schooled in the United States all of her life and speaks fluent English. In fact, she had attended a nearby intermediate school. But her writing is indecipherable, in both English and Spanish. Some words are spelled correctly, but put together, they do not make sense, even read aloud. She is unable to sound out letters to a word she knows by ear ("teenager"), and there are only two sentence boundary signals: the capital letters in "She" and "However." This student was therefore referred for a Special Education evaluation while she participated in the LTL component. Though a learning disability was diagnosed, which compounded her literacy limitations, it was not until the following year that she could be placed in the Special Education program.

Another student, who had been educated in Connecticut K-2, then in New York until the ninth grade, was also identified as LTL but was a stronger writer than Damaris. The student responded to the prompt in this way:

Wel I think that they ar in the scool. they ar in the clas room. thy are tooking a tes an one of the student ar cooping the tes for the oter student. but the oter student don't no that she is cooping the tes from hem.

One key characteristic of LTL writing is that it can often be understood if read aloud, as is the case with this student's work. Thinking patterns are clearly recognizable though literacy conventions—spelling, sentence boundaries—are missing. This student was therefore not referred for Special Education.

Compare these LTL writing samples with the one that follows, written by a traditional ESL student from Vietnam who immigrated at the age of 11 and had already completed grades 6-9 in the U.S.

On June 95, which was day for all of the final exams. John and Christina were freshman in Bronx H.S.

> Christina was hanging out of school during the school day she nevers reported to classes. However when she took a final exam and she did not known what she been doing that why she started to cheat her friend which was John who now sat next to her. This was very bad of Christina to copy and she did not learn anything

Literacy conventions, such as spelling, paragraphing, and capitalization, are under better control, and the writing does not have to be read aloud to make sense. The student tells a short but coherent story, adding fictional names. As a typical ESL student, he is still developing control of English syntax (most noticeably in his verb forms, punctuation, and sentence boundaries), but his BICS and CALP appear to be developing at approximately the same rate.

Literacy Instruction for Long-Term ESL Students

Traditional ESL students participate in a literature-based program which uses standard ESL methodologies and which focuses on the new New York State English Language Arts performance standards and testing strategies from the new Regents Examination. Writing and reading are taught as processes and are integrated with listening and speaking. Instruction includes drafting, peer feedback, small group work and portfolio assessment.

Although the long-term ESL students learn similar strategies, they begin "where they are at" and are given as much control as possible over what they will learn and how they will progress. There are three levels of courses: one for students reading at grade levels 1-2, one for those reading at grade levels 3-4, and one for those reading at grade levels 5-6. LTL students may skip levels, depending on their personal progress. After the third level, students are fully integrated into the traditional ESL program.

LTL students attend two back-to-back periods of ESL, one with a reading focus and the other with a writing focus. A whole language approach is used, the teachers

coordinate their lessons, and students have a flexible time arrangement to complete work between the two periods. The key question is how to make reading and writing "work" for these students, who, like Atwell's, do not enjoy reading and associate literacy activities with failure.

Reading Instruction. Part of the answer to that question lies in giving students opportunities for success and maximum responsibility for their learning. The reading component consists of sustained silent reading or small book groups, with the students deciding which they prefer. Each classroom has an in-class library with a selection of high/low readers, classic literature, biographies, and non-fiction (including colorful science and social studies books with copious pictures and photographs for building concept knowledge). The goal is to have a variety of materials with engaging topics and visuals and different levels of difficulty to keep students' interest high. The books are at or above the target level of the class. Students pace themselves, keeping logs of their daily reading, and write reports on all the books read. Teachers may occasionally present mini-lessons but spend most of their time working individually with students. They also read to their classes, an enjoyable activity that few of these students have ever experienced.

Students' progress can have a striking impact on their self-concept. One ninth-grader, who had entered the class with a "tough guy" defense and little apparent interest in reading, was gently coaxed to read his first book. Upon completing it, he took the book, slammed it down on the desk, spontaneously jumped out of his seat, and yelled, "I read the whole thing!"

Writing Instruction. The writing component is also tailored to the individual student's needs. Students choose what they will write, but the teachers design and guide theme-based units, including support for content-area courses, creative writing, research, persuasive essays, and poetry. Writing process is paramount, and includes public displays

of students' work: magazines, research reports, and bulletin boards with editorials, poetry and content-based essays. Students maintain working portfolios. As in the reading component, teachers give mini-lessons when needed but mostly spend time working individually with students.

Beyond these general strategies, LTL students need to know how to break down basic academic tasks, such as essay writing and note taking, into small, concrete steps. The value of this cannot be overemphasized, as most high school teachers, not only in language classes but also in other content areas, assume that their students have already developed these skills and use them handily. Teachers at High School A have also found both deductive (moving from general to specific) and inductive (moving from specific to general) strategies to be helpful for LTL students. Deductive strategies help them develop their writing and make it more interesting and concrete. Inductive strategies help them organize their work by creating abstractions and categorizations of specific experiences. The teachers often move back and forth between the two strategies as needed to prepare students for writing. Two examples of how these strategies are used in breaking down academic tasks for LTL students follow.

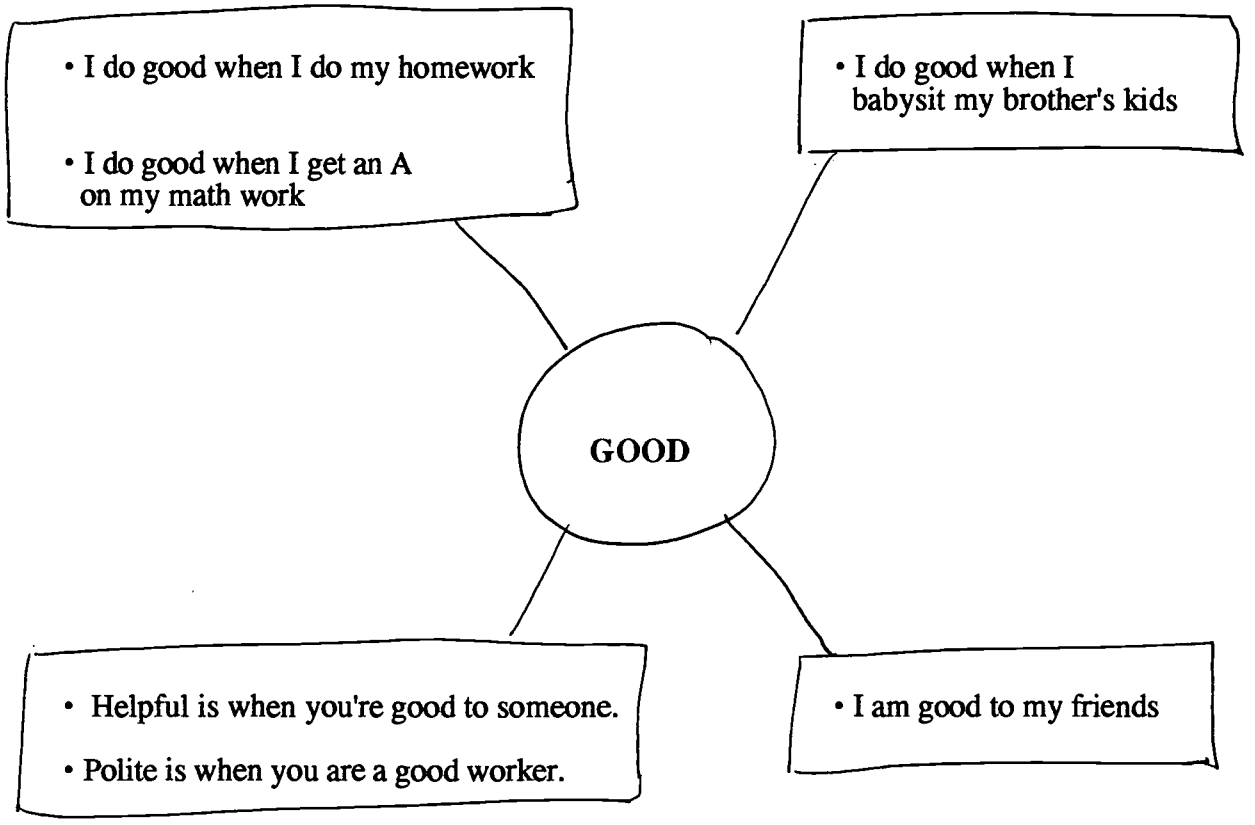
WRITING AN ESSAY[2]

The teacher had asked Damaris' class to write an essay about virtue. She then used four graphic organizers to help Damaris and the others move from concrete, real-life settings to generalizations about virtue on which they could begin to develop and organize their essay. Figure 2 below shows the first organizer, in which Damaris has given examples of when she is "good." These specific instances are linked visually to the word "good" itself, which is a general, but understandable synonym for "virtue" (Damaris' spelling has been corrected for clarity's sake.

[2]The procedures and examples in this section and in the one that follows are taken from the classwork of Patricia Oberman and Gillian Grant, former teachers in the program.

Figure 2

Title: All About Good



The second graphic organizer (Figure 3) breaks down the general virtue, "good," into more specific virtues: generous, responsible, helpful, polite, and hard-working. Damaris links each of these virtues, in turn, to one of her specific examples.

Figure 3

Topics: Virtues

Specific Situation	**Virtue**
1. gave money to a poor person →	generous
2. always prepared at school →	responsible
3. I do my homework →	helpful
4. help my sister →	polite
5. go to work →	hard working

Each virtue is developed by additional supporting examples in the semantic web presented in Figure 4. Once this development is complete, Damaris then selects the "top five" and then, the "top two" virtues, as shown in Figure 5. The top two virtues will form the body of the essay.

Figure 4

Semantic Web/Clustering

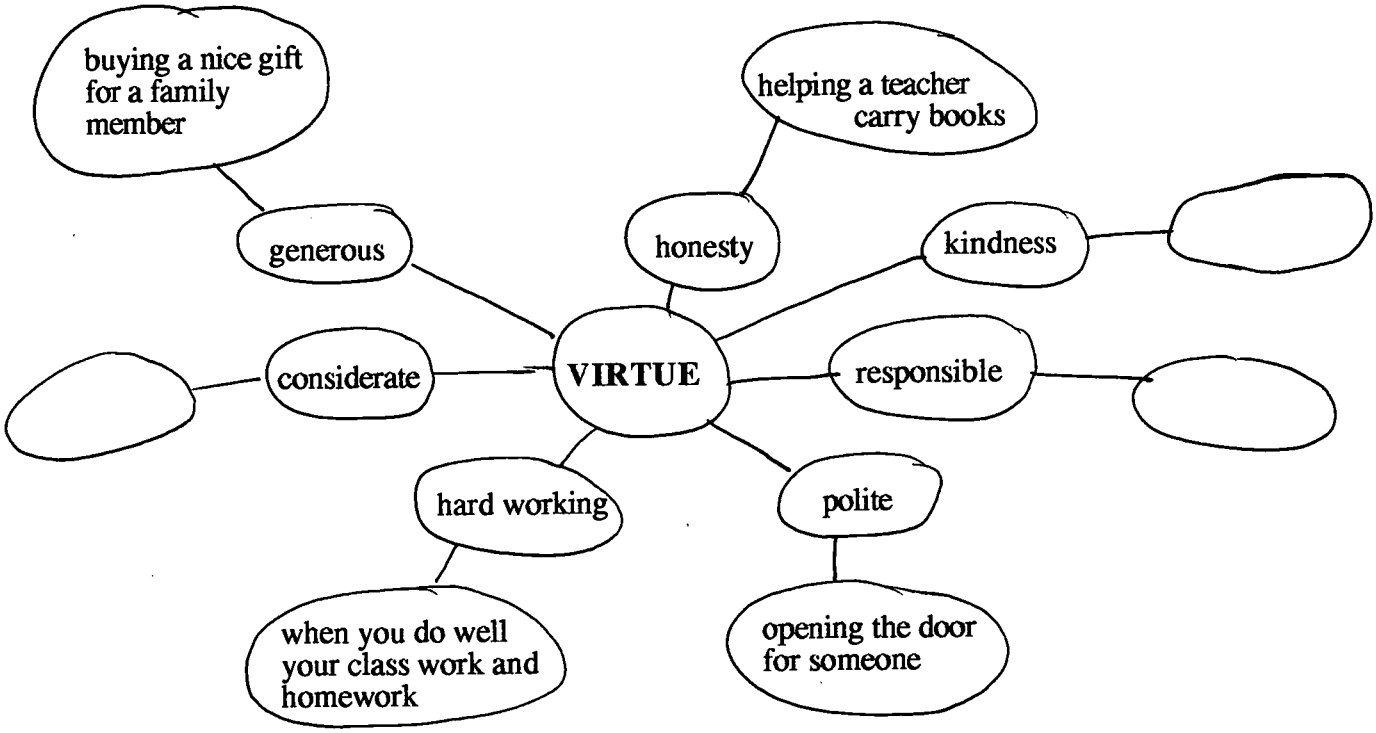
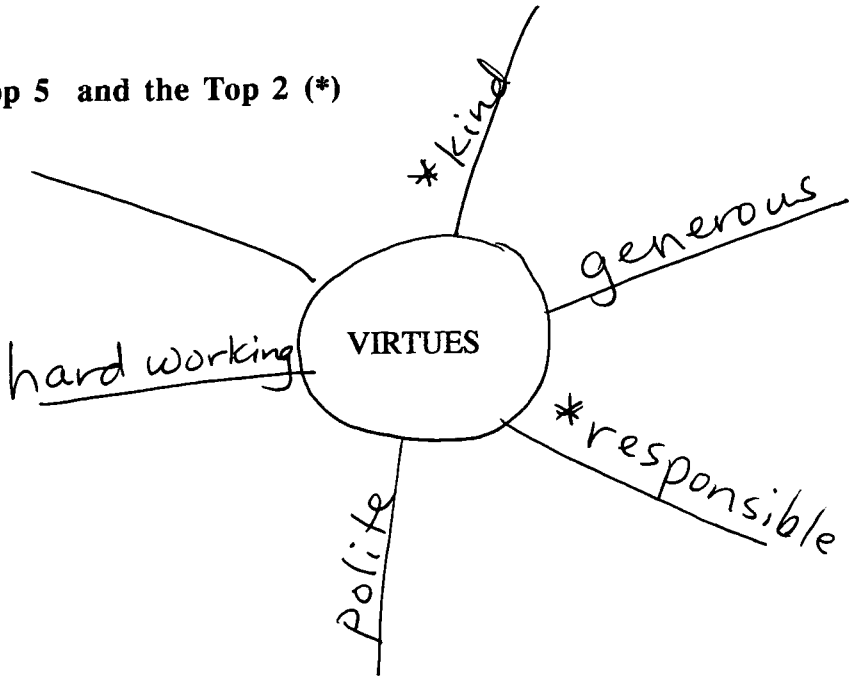


Figure 5

Picking the Top 5 and the Top 2 (*)



1) generous
*2) responsible
3) polite
4) hard working
*5) kind

Damaris selects "responsible" and "kind" as the two virtues she wishes to write about. The next step is to develop each of these sections even more, so the teacher has her and the other students answer the "reporter's questions" (the wh-questions) for each of the supporting situations given to illustrate the virtue. Then, Damaris creates a topic sentence for each paragraph by answering the question, "Why is this virtue important to you?" The template is given below in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Title: Virtue I

Situation I:
Who?
What?
When?
Where?
How?
Why?

Situation II:
Who?
What?
When?
Where?
How?
Why?

Topic sentence: Why is this virtue important to you?

Once the essay body is sufficiently developed, Damaris uses teacher-provided questions to compose her introduction and conclusion. Figure 7 shows these questions as well as the visual representation used by the teacher to help Damaris and the others pull all the pieces of the essay together.

Figure 7

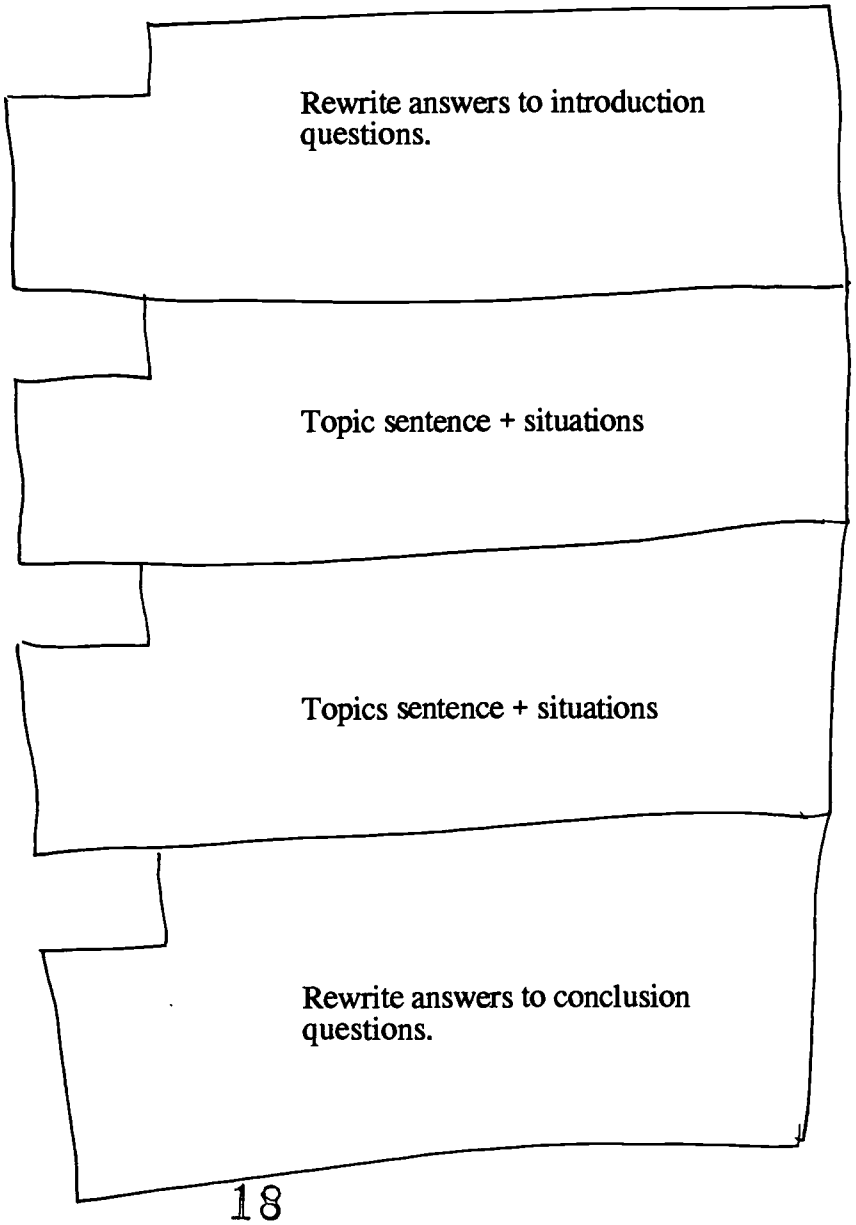
Introduction Questions

1) What are you writing about?
2) What kind of person is a good person? (list qualities)
3) What are the topics of this composition?

Conclusion Questions

1) Can somebody be completely good or completely bad?
2) When you THINK about good things, is it the same as when you DO good things? Why?
3) I would like to become more _____ and _____.
(How do you think you can do that?)
4) What did you learn when you wrote this composition?

Rough Draft



In Damaris' final draft, which had undergone significant revision and proofreading, she writes (spelling errors included):

> I am writing about virtues, being responsible and being kind. Good people are hard working, generons, kind, and responsible. My topics are being respanisble and kind.
>
> If you are not kind to people they are not kind to you. I am kind to my borther. I help him with his home wok. I help him in the liring room in the house. I help him because I love him. I help him in his math home work. I am kind to my sisiter. I am kind by helping her cook. I help her everyday. I am kind by helping her in the kitchen. I help her beacause she doesn't know how to cook. I help her by teaching her how to cook. . . .

Damaris' writing has gone from some indecipherable phrases to understandable, developed (but choppy), organized text, with clear sentence boundaries. Though she continues to make spelling errors and will need to develop alternative ways of connecting ideas, her improvement from the beginning of the year is considerable.

NOTE TAKING

Literacy is a socially mediated phenomenon; in order for students to succeed academically, they must also be able to retrieve information from other writers and use it effectively in their own writing. Hence, note taking is taught to intermediate LTL students in much the same way as the writing process is: broken down into manageable, concrete chunks.

Teaching note-taking begins with students brainstorming on a research topic, using graphic organizers and inductive and deductive generation of ideas, experiences and categories as described above. This helps them establish a research topic and a basic organizational structure. Next, written sources are photocopied and distributed to students (from encyclopedias, newspapers) so that everyone can work from the same sources to cull other details about the topic. The instructor then has students highlight specific information that pertains to the topic, for example, "María Rodríguez was born on March 3, 1967," then shows them how to delete unnecessary information and to abbreviate, two key components of successful and efficient note-taking ("María Rodríguez b. 3-3-67"). They

then place the abbreviated notes in the right-hand column of a T-chart with the corresponding wh-question word in the left-hand column, helping them make an initial categorization of the information (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Wh-question words	Notes	Category
When	María Rodríguez b. 3-3-67	(a)
Where	H.S. and college in NYC	(b)
What	immigrated to U.S. w/ grandmother, Jan. 77	(c)

Once all of the sources have been read and information has been retrieved, reduced, and categorized, then the students are asked to organize the information they have in the form of a preliminary outline. They select important topics for the body of their paper, for example, (a) María Rodríguez and her family, (b) her education, and (c) key events in her life. They then return to the T-chart and build a third column in which they categorize each abbreviated note with an (a), (b), or (c), corresponding to the most appropriate topic.

Native Language Arts Instruction

ESL classes are only one way in which LTL students' literacy is supported and developed. All ESL students from a Spanish-speaking background follow a literature-based Spanish Native Language Arts (NLA) program, which is parallel to the English Language Arts program outlined in the new New York State performance standards. The literacy skills developed there transfer to English and strengthen academic literacy across the curriculum.

The LTL students, with limited literacy in their native language, begin with a course which follows a series of high/low readers in Spanish from Santillana publishers to develop Spanish literacy. In addition, they read and perform research from image-rich

content books in Spanish on science and social studies to build conceptual knowledge. Over the next two years, the students move to more formal texts such as Sendas Literarias, Album, and Encuentros (Segundo Curso). By their senior year, they are expected to integrate into literature-based Native Language Arts courses with newly-arrived immigrants, whose high CALP challenges the LTL students to continue progressing in Spanish. They read such works as Marianela, El Conde Lucanor, Doña Barabara, María, Las Novelas Ejemplares, Bodas de Sangre, El Coronel no Tiene Quien le Escriba, and Mi Primera Memoria. The literacy tasks they are expected to perform—research, citations, reading logs, book reports, critical lens essays—will transfer into English and support their learning across the curriculum.

Assessment

Traditional ESL students are assessed in six ways: (a) teacher-generated, unit-based examinations; (b) comprehensive final examinations for all sections of a course; (c) research projects; (d) compositions and essays; (e) the English Language Arts Regents' Examination, now required for graduation; (f) and portfolio assessment.

The long-term ESL students are assessed on (a) measurable improvement in reading level, required for exit from the course; (b) portfolio assessment; (c) teacher-prepared examinations based on mini-lessons; and (d) the English Language Arts Regents' Examination.

Teachers and Administrators Supporting the Long-Term ESL Student

Teaching long-term ESL students requires a focus on success rather than failure. However, it is unrealistic to expect that each child will succeed immediately. Teachers must balance the expectation that most of their students can improve within the semester with the acceptance that traditional time frames may not be appropriate for defining success. Teachers must guard against demoralization as even the best teaching cannot guarantee

success. In addition to linguistic fossilization, which affects most second-language learners, regardless of background (Selinker, 1972), there is the social erosion created by poverty, family disintegration, and gang violence, and the high drop-out rate, all factors beyond the teacher's control. Rather than blaming the students, the parents, or themselves, teachers should develop a long-term perspective about learning, including a mindset of success.

Administrators also play a key role in sustaining LTL programs and teachers. These children, though a small sub-population, are often the neediest, acting out their academic humiliation and exclusion in the classroom. They are often the least loved of the ESL students and the most in need of experiencing success. The administrators of the program at High School A have found the following factors crucial in encouraging and supporting teachers and students.

First, they give scheduling priority to those teachers requesting to work with LTL students and rotate LTL teachers to the traditional component the moment they express possible burnout. Because the administrators see the "big picture," they can remind teachers that some years will be fallow, and that the fruit of their teaching may not be apparent in students' growth until later. The administrators also keep the LTL student/teacher ratio to a minimum by assigning paraprofessionals and recruiting tutors from a nearby university; their goal is to increase individual attention given to the students.

A formative evaluation of the LTL component at High School A is underway, examining its impact on whether students stay in school, get promoted, and succeed academically. A comparison is being made between students in this program and similar students at a high school with no special program. The results will be used to shape the existing program and suggest other ways to improve LTL students' chances for success.

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