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## Classroom Focus: India

# English Language Teaching Strategies Used by Primary Teachers in One New Delhi, India School

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## Abstract

This study investigated teacher behaviors, lesson delivery and sequence of content and learning expectations used by K-5 teachers at one school in New Delhi, India. This research brings broader understanding of strategies for teaching English reading and writing to students whose first language is not English. The rationale for the study stems from the need to gain greater international perspective of the teaching of English learners. Results reflect analysis of classroom observation field notes, face-to-face interviews with thirty three teachers and administrators, digital photo journaling, and artifacts. The theoretical framework for this study draws from Collier's Conceptual Model, Acquiring a Second Language, explaining the complex interacting factors students experience when acquiring a second language, and the work of Dorothy Strickland outlining effective literacy instruction. Emerging from the data are nine effective teaching strategies that teachers of English learners can add to their repertoire.

## Introduction

> *"English has become the medium of all relevant social interactions and the ability to use English effectively is considered an absolute essential for honorable existence."*
>
> --Quotation from a retired Army Colonel,
> now working as a New Delhi textbook publisher

Many teachers in the United States are faced with the challenge of teaching children to

read and write in English when the students have a heritage language that is not English and they are not yet proficient in English. Making this a more critical issue, several studies (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003; Southeast Center for Quality Teaching, 2003) suggest that teachers are not receiving adequate professional development in effective strategies to address the English learners' literacy development. Thompson (2004), in a recent Title I Communiqué Special Report that reviewed the current research related to quality literacy instruction for English learners, concludes that classroom teachers urgently need to know more about effective strategies for teaching English learners.

As part of the effort to learn more about quality instruction for English learners, educational researchers and teachers in the United States have looked at instructional practices in other countries. When those countries are faced with the same challenge of teaching children in English to learn to read and write in English, there has been greatest transfer of best practices (Clay, 1991; Holdaway, 1978; Frater & Standiland, 1994). Research and close observation of the teaching of reading has been conducted in Australia and New Zealand, and a smaller amount of study in England for the obvious reason that English is the language of instruction.

Literacy instruction in India has not received the same attention, perhaps because English is not the first language of the majority. There are studies that compare and contrast educational practices in India to those in the United States with respect to the goals that teachers have for student learning, the way teachers approach the curriculum and the textbook, the way knowledge is communicated to students, and the way teachers interact verbally with their students (Clark, 2001; Alexander, 2000). There is however, very little literature that reveals current methods and practice in Indian primary classrooms for the teaching of reading to children whose first language is not English.

Interest and curiosity about reading instruction in India leading to this research came about as a result of observation and conversation with two graduate assistants working in a university department of Language Literacy and Culture. These very capable and well-educated young men, after graduating from college in New Delhi, came to a southern California university for master's degrees in Computer Science. They both told of starting kindergarten knowing almost no English, and immediately began to learn to read and write in English. While this experience was limited to observation and interviews with only two people, it stimulated a need to know if their experiences were similar to others, particularly, when it has become noticeable that young people graduating from Indian universities are being recruited to work in the United States. This is most apparent in the field of technology.[1] Responding to demand for Indian technology workers, the United States Senate increased the quota of visas for skilled workers from 115,000 to 195,000 in 2000 (Alarcon, 1999; Saxenian, 2000). Even though obtaining a US visa has become increasingly difficult, Indians still receive nearly 45 percent of visas each year. Furthermore, Indian students are increasingly in demand at universities in the United States (Creehan, 2001).

Several authors (Hakuta, 1990; Tucker, 1999) discuss the need for research studies that develop an international perspective for the teaching of English learners. A number of

international studies, such as the one by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1989) and the comprehensive review of research on the use of first and second languages in education, carried out for the World Bank (Dutcher & Tucker, 1994), have shown that the United States is not alone in experiencing major changes in the linguistic and cultural diversity of its student body. Indeed, many nations of the industrialized world are facing similar issues and hold similar beliefs related to learning a second language. Additionally, we need to go beyond merely describing programs or the start up of programs and instead examine the instructional strategies used by teachers as they help students to acquire a second language with ease and fluency. Toward this goal, this study looked closely at teacher behaviors, lesson delivery and sequence of content, and learning expectations used by teachers of classes K-5 at one school in New Delhi, India. The focus of this work was to build a broader understanding of strategies for teaching English reading and writing to students whose first language is not English.

In this study, questions were constructed to reveal not only the instructional practices but also to learn teachers' beliefs and gain insight into which principles guided their decision making. The following questions provide a more precise statement of the research problem:

- What are teacher beliefs about and guiding principles for teaching English language learners?
- What instructional strategies do teachers use to teachÉ
    - the youngest children?
    - phonics?
    - spelling?
    - comprehension?
    - vocabulary development?
- How is assessment conducted and used?

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study draws from two areas. Considered first was Virginia Collier's Conceptual Model for Acquiring a Second Language (1995), which helps explain the complex interacting factors that students experience when acquiring a second language. The model has four major components: sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive processes. It is crucial that educators provide a socioculturally supportive school environment that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to flourish. That growth is developmental is a central precept of the model. In addition to considering Collier's model--suggesting the parameters for the learning environment--the research was also guided by the work of Dorothy Strickland (NCREL, 2003), which outlines effective literacy instruction as an integration of the following five factors:

1. the construction of meaning from different perspectives,
2. the acknowledgement of context in literacy learning,
3. the use of language for real communication,
4. the use of relevant literacy materials and

5. a focus on higher order thinking skills and problem solving.

## Setting

The research site was a primary level school, kindergarten through level V, with approximately 1500 students, located in New Delhi, India. The primary school is part of a senior school that follows the 10+2 scheme of education or what in the United States would be called a K-12 school. The school is affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education, meaning middle school students and high school students must take and score well on the exam to be able to continue on to university. The medium of instruction is English. Hindi is a compulsory language from third through level X and a third language is introduced from level VI and continued onwards.

The school follows the National Policy of Education for India. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education, India Department of Education (2002) outlines the curriculum for kindergarten through level III to have three components:

a. teach the regional language/mother tongue,
b. mathematics, and
c. Art of Healthy and Productive Living.

The recommended curriculum for Classes IV and V continues these three components and adds a fourth area, d) Environmental Studies. The national policy does not require English to be taught until middle school. While the curriculum of this school reflects this standard, it does include more. Starting in kindergarten, instruction is delivered in English and students are taught to read and write in English. Reading and writing in Hindi begins at Level III. In kindergarten through level III the school practices what they call "the mother system." This means that students stay with one teacher through out the day. In Class IV and V teachers have specialized expertise, such as math or environmental science. Students also have additional instruction in music, dance and computers. Class size ranges from 38 - 42 students.

This particular primary school was chosen because it is a feeder school to one of the highest achieving schools in New Delhi. The measure for this is high performance on the All India High School Exam of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). In 1995, this school received the Best School award from the Delhi Chief Minister, and has continually been ranked at the top by various community and government groups. Many graduates have distinguished themselves in science, industry, and the military.

## Method

### Participants

Teachers and administrators at the primary school, middle school, and high school levels participated. There were 31 teachers and 2 administrators interviewed. A total of 25 teachers were observed. Those teachers observed were all teachers in the primary school. Table 1 shows the instructional level of the teachers and administrators that were observed and interviewed.

**Table 1.** Teachers and Administrators Interviewed and Observed at Each Level

| **Teachers** | **Interviewed** | **Observed** |
|---|---|---|
| Kindergarten | 2 | 3 |
| Level 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Level 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Level 3 | 6 | 4 |
| Level 4 | 4 | 6 |
| Level 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Middle School English | 1 | |
| Middle School Media | 1 | |
| High School English | 2 | |
| High School Arts | 3 | |
| Primary Headmistress | 1 | |
| High School Principal | 1 | |
| **Total** | **33** | **25** |

The selection of teachers to be observed was a three step process. The head mistress assigned the resource room teacher to be the host. She in turn introduced the researchers to the lead teacher at each level. The lead teacher had arranged a schedule that included thirty minute observational time in classrooms and 20 - 30 minute interviews. Most interviews were with two teachers per session and the interviews were with the teachers that had just been observed or would be observe in the next hour.

**Procedures: Data collection**

Data were collected through observation, interviews, digital photo journaling, and collection of artifacts to do what Fetterman (1998) and Shank (2002) both describe as qualitative method that provides sufficient detail for thick description. The researchers spent all day at the school site for one week, starting at 9:00AM and ending at 1:00PM when the school day ended. Each day was carefully planned so that interviews were scheduled to occur during passing time and breaks for children to eat. Each day had a minimum of four classroom observation sessions and four interview sessions. Field notes of observations provided descriptive data and recording of the teachers' exact words, as well as dialogue between teacher and students. Interviews followed a semi-structured format that provided a conversational tone but stayed focused on the research questions. The researchers, even when asked to compare what they observed to their own teaching experiences, resisted the temptation and did not at any time change the focus to comparisons of educational practices in other places.

The researchers collected over 300 photos.[2] These photos were filed as Day 1, Day 2,

etc., through Day 5. A corresponding log was kept so digital photos could be coordinated with the field notes. Douglas Harper (2000) notes that the underutilized qualitative method of using photos to construct visual narrative adds a layer of complexity that also illuminates. Few actual artifacts were collected. A few teachers gave their written lesson plans and samples of student work. This included poetry writing and structured paragraph writing. After doing what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) referred to as exploring issues of entry and rapport, the decision was made not to videotape. In a school setting where resources are very few and where digital cameras were novel, the researchers decided to minimize the use of technology by not videotaping. The setup of microphones and tripods seemed intrusive and time-consuming.

**Observation Protocol**

Both researchers observed in the same classroom at the same time. Researchers took notes and photographs, focusing on the teacher behavior related to instruction. Student responses were recorded not to analyze student behavior or learning, but to reveal the teacher response in developing concepts, modeling, and elaborating. In addition to recording the teachers' words, notice was also made of gestures, body language, and motions. Drawings and diagrams, both in poster form and on the chalkboard were recorded. When teachers used props or objects, these were photographed. Only at the end of the day did the researchers compare notes and attempt to clarify where their notes varied.

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was constructed around seven questions. The questions were designed to learn about the teaching of the various components of reading and language arts instruction. Open-ended questions that allowed teachers and administrators to elaborate on the technique and clarify the process of instruction were used. Both researchers took notes during all interviews. The time and date of the interviews, as well as the teaching assignment of interviewees, were recorded. In the development stage, it was agreed that researchers would be sensitive to the interviewees' desire to explain or go "off on tangents" as this could provide unexpected insights.

Finally, the textbook series was collected as a significant artifact. The selection of the text is a local faculty decision. Before the beginning of the school year, a textbook fair is held and teachers together select the textbooks. Several teachers explained their choice: Because the author is a retired Delhi University educator, he had used his knowledge of the real life experiences of children in Delhi to create passages and exercises that are of interest to the children. The researchers noted that the instruction closely followed the content of the textbook. They decided that collection of the reading and writing textbooks would likely provide more explanation related to teaching techniques.[3]

## Data Analysis

The analysis involved searching for basic themes for meaning-making in the collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research questions guided the selection of instructional techniques that are discussed, but did not limit the reporting of what was

observed and what teachers reported. In most cases the instructional strategy that is reported is told as it was delivered by one teacher. In a few instances the strategy reported is a combination of what two or more teachers did. When this occurs, it is noted. Explanation is given about variation or adaptations. Because the purpose of the investigation was descriptive, the report does not make comparisons between levels or groups of teachers related to effectiveness or perceived effectiveness.

## Results

- **Question 1: What are teacher beliefs and guiding principles about teaching English language learners?**

  It was not difficult to learn of the beliefs held by the teachers at this school. In each interview, teachers readily explained their reasons for choosing their instructional techniques. Interestingly, the researchers were directed by the headmistress and three other teachers to solicit philosophy and beliefs from two highly respected teachers. The first was a kindergarten teacher who had taught at the school for 27 years. The second was the media resource teacher that served both the primary school and the middle school. These two teachers did, in fact, thoughtfully articulate the beliefs and principles. However, many other teachers stated similar ideas without contradiction. Clearly, ten beliefs were common among the teachers and administrators, presented here in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Teacher and Administrator Beliefs about Literacy Instruction

| |
|---|
| 1. includes listening, speaking, reading and writing |
| 2. uses formal and informal methods |
| 3. is structured and unstructured |
| 4. is developmental |
| 5. is holistic |
| 6. is integrated |
| 7. uses repetition |
| 8. uses patterns |
| 9. use questioning |
| 10. happens in a safe and supportive environment |

The ten beliefs and principles were expressed by more than one teacher. To describe these, the actual words of teachers are given, but the names of the teachers are not used.

#### Literacy Instruction

1. **includes listening, speaking, reading and writing**

   **Teacher K:** *In language development we promote listening, speaking, reading and writing and all are equally important.*

   **Teacher M:** *We don't teach receptive skills first, then speaking and writing after that. What I mean is we don't just feature the Natural Method of just pantomime and gestures without reading and writing. We involve the children in listening, speaking, reading and writing, we just move from the simple to the complex.*

   **Teacher A:** *In kindergarten, children recite the names of the letters and the sounds and straight way go to writing the letters. We have them memorize simple dialogue - like everyday useful conversation - "Hello, I am Anu, What is your name?" - and by first grade they are reading and writing that.*

2. **uses formal and informal methods**

   **Teacher M:** *This is formal education, yes. The children are in school with the expectation to sit in their class and learn. They will study grammar and usage and spelling, indeed. But you notice that the lessons are about being a responsible person, like caring for the environment. Environmental studies comes in early.*

   **Teacher K:** *We want to use language that is lively and common and the flavor of everyday language. We try to use our local culture when we create lessons.*

   **Teacher B:** *The old system of just grammar and structure of sentences is not the way now. Oh, I can't say we never think of the exams, but we try to be informal - games and social activities.*

   **Teacher C:** *The children are bringing around sweets to share. For celebrating his birthday! It's OK, we will make an interruption. And you may notice the children come into the class to show, and sometime even to share, (laughter) what they have made in cooking class.*

3. **is structured and unstructured**

   **Teacher K:** *We believe in structured and unstructured curriculum. Depending on the readiness or maturity of the group.*

   **Teacher D:** *We follow our planning diaries and lesson plans, but sometimes we are a bit more relaxed.*

4. **is developmental**

   **Teacher M:** *We need to give enough time to prepare the ground for the process to become a skill.*

**Teacher K:** *Children are thinking in their mother tongue, so I consider this when I decide whether to repeat the lesson or go on.*

**Teacher D:** *We have twenty six languages represented here. Some of our children come from South India. They don't even know Hindi. Some boys and girls have two years of preschool. Others have no preschool. They may come from the rural areas. I watch to learn what they need. You can see why we revise and repeat. Sometimes I can't follow my lesson plan to the end.*

5. **is holistic**

**Teacher K:** *We believe in the holistic approach. You will see that as we go along we have grammar and structure exercises, but also time for dialogue that will be useful in their lives and natural conversations.*

**Teacher M:** *We use a holistic approach for the overall development of a child. Creative activities and cultural activities. Levels IV and V have Music and Art and Dance.*

**Teacher D:** *We have a holistic approach. The reader and activity book promote speaking. The workbooks address the language skills, but have many activities for writing. Free writing, well, a bit of free writing.*

**Teacher E:** *Before the school year begins the teachers sit together and plan lessons. We include many questions that will bring discussion. This is getting the students to reproduce their own thoughts in English and speak during the lessons. We have a philosophy of holistic approach.*

**Administrator A:** *Our approach is holistic approach and interactive approach. Children interact in discussion after reading interesting and informative pages. Of course the language skills are there.*

6. **is integrated**

**Teacher M:** *Our philosophy includes integration. Starting at Level IV the environment education is part of the reading. We are learning about India's environment in English reading. You heard the lesson about the first Indian to climb - Major Ahluwalia climbing Mt. Everest. They were reading a first person account, learning geography and about mountaineering and many other topics. Whatever the teacher wants. Maybe she will discuss not eating for many days, or choosing good shoes for climbing.*

**Teacher F:** *The illustrations in the workbooks show Indian life, Indian clothes and design. Some clothing is Western, also. So for example, the exercise is on pronouns, he, she, it and so on, but the illustration shows a woman in a lovely silk sari. Questioning could bring a lively discussion of features of the chlori and sari and different features of the salwar-kameez*

*worn with the kurta.*

7. **uses repetition**

   **Teacher K:** *Our program has planned and repeated listening to stories, music, sounds. And vocabulary and phrases.*

   **Teacher M:** *Planned and repeated vocabulary is built up in order to enable them to speak in sentences. This improves fluency in speech, using words to form sentences and patterns of sentences.*

   **Teacher D:** *You will often see picture reading and sight reading. Using a few common words needed for stories, repeating over and over again.*

   **Teacher K:** *In teaching the alphabet, we use routines. Nursery rhymes and songs are repeated. Children become experts at this task.*

   **Teacher K:** *The alphabet is merely symbols, so to make it concrete and experiential; repetition of the sounds and the symbols is needed.*

8. **uses patterns**

   **Teacher G:** *In the lower classes the songs and rhymes make patterns. In the higher levels it is sentence patterns and paragraph patterns. Before children are asked to speak, the teacher demonstrates the sentence pattern several times. Children all give a oral response telling a sentence pattern before the writing exercise.*

   **Teacher B:** *Some of our nursery rhymes are from English literature, Jack and Jill, Five little monkeys, but we use Hindi nursery rhymes also. Some sounds are the same in Hindi and English so the repetition of all these nursery rhymes continues - even into Level I.*

   **Teacher C:** *We use patterns and repetition then children learn with ease and confidence.*

9. **use questioning**

   **Teacher M:** *Teachers after setting the topic, follow up asking relevant and creative questions.*

   **Teacher C:** *Questioning makes each activity interactive. The passages are interesting and well illustrated for generating questions.*

   **Teacher B:** *Questioning is a way to bring natural conversation and make the subject matter relevant to the children's everyday lives.*

10. **happens in a safe and supportive environment**

**Administrator A:** *In India it is important for children in primary school to see school as fun and learning as interesting.*

**Teacher K:** *We always give time for games and social activities.*

*Teacher F; Using a variety of teaching methods is important because we want children to enjoy school.*

**Teacher A:** *Each teacher here wants a warm rapport. There is freedom but no one can ridicule or mock.*

**Teacher G:** *The readers are culturally and age-relevant, and have an offering of different styles, short story, poetry, and plays. These hold students' attention and interest and help them to enjoy their work.*

**Teacher B:** *We have many celebrations. We celebrate our holidays, but others also. At Christmas time we place a Christmas tree in the entrance.*

**Teacher F:** *By the time students reach level V, there is a more rigorous academic approach, but we play games, do role playing and sing songs.*

**Teacher C:** *The art, music and dance classes are more relaxed times and when the performances happen, it is lovely occasions.*

**Teacher D:** *Children are not afraid to speak with the teacher. We use the mother system. Children can express their needs.*

One point of clarification is needed. While most of the teachers identified their program as "holistic," it appeared this had a different meaning from what is often referred to as "holistic." The constructivist perspective, meaning that children's engagement in a process of learning depends on their background, interest, and abilities (Stainback & Stainbeck, 1992), did not seem to be the point of reference for what they were calling "holistic." Occasionally, "holistic" is used to describe instruction for special education that recognizes multi-modals of learning or focuses on multi-sensory techniques (MeKenna, 2003; Stockdale & Crump, 1981; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1996). No mention of the needs of special education students was made when describing their holistic approach.[4]

What the teachers and administrators described when they spoke of "holistic" would seem to fit more logically with what teacher educators in India refer to as an "eclectic approach." The term *eclectic* reflects the changes in instructional delivery from an earlier time when teaching of English was primarily grammar translation, stressing of pronunciation and the teaching of receptive skills of listening and reading. The merging of the various methods, natural method, phonetic method, direct method and audio-lingual method, form an eclectic approach. This approach, while not ignoring formal instruction in grammar and language structure, 1) provides immersion in oral language, 2) is contextualized in true to life situations, and 3) attends to appropriate interactions in social context (Thirumalai, 2002).

Perhaps the best explanation appears in the foreword of the textbook series, *Sparkle Multiskill English* (2004); "A sort of consensus has been emerging among the teachers that we need to adopt a holistic approach that combines the solid grammar foundation provided by the structural approach with the impressive fluency given by the interactive approach."

- **Question 2: What instructional strategies do teachers use to teach the youngest children?**

While some primary schools in New Delhi start formal instruction by including a nursery school for four-year-old children, the primary school of this study made the decision a few years ago to no longer offer nursery school and begin instruction for children at the age of five in kindergarten. Before presenting the instructional strategies used in kindergarten, an overview of the curriculum goals are noted. These goals are few:

1. recognize and recite letter names and sounds,
2. write letters of the alphabet,
3. learn nursery rhymes and songs,
4. begin to recognize high frequency words with a limited number of word families, and
5. follow directions and give simple responses.

As noted earlier, instruction is in English and learning to listen, speak, read and write in English is the goal. For the major part of the instructional time the following three strategies were used; *Demonstration*, *Choral Drill*, and *Look and Say*.

#### Strategy 1: Demonstration

*Demonstration* includes the use of real objects, performing actions, using gestures, and facial expressions. It is used for presenting words like *toy*, *bracelet*, or *hat*. *Demonstration* can be used for sentence patterns that stand for concrete ideas. For example, saying "I am looking at my watch," or "I am cleaning the chalkboard" while performing these actions. The teaching strategy includes the teacher doing the demonstration and students practicing with feedback from the teacher.

Kindergarten teachers used *Demonstration* effectively in the teaching of nursery rhymes and songs. In a natural and enthusiastic voice, the teacher said the rhyme and used movement, hand patterns, and motions, pointing to something, touching a part, shaking something, or acting it out. The teacher spoke and acted out the line, and the children chimed in. The nursery rhymes or songs were recited and performed many times. During the classroom observations in kindergarten classes the children recited, with motions, the following: Jack and Jill, Bits of Paper, One, Two, Buckle my Shoe, Traffic Light, Chubby Cheeks and Five Little Monkeys. *Demonstration* was used for vocabulary development of these words; *dancing*, *write*, *together*, and *boxing*. Simple phrases were demonstrated; *Ria's water bottle, Varun's backpack, Rahul's uniform.*

This strategy was not limited to use in kindergarten; in fact, *Demonstration* was seen at all levels through Class V. *Demonstration* was, however, relied on more frequently in kindergarten and progressively used less through the class levels.

**Strategy 2: Choral Drill**

In *Choral Drill* the children all chant together following along as the teacher leads. It is the repeating of poems, nursery rhymes, the alphabet, an alphabet song, sentence patterns, and vocabulary lists. Children repeat the melody and rhythm. Sometimes it is in unison with the teacher and sometimes in an echo pattern. The technique differs from *Choral Reading* in that this is for oral language development. Print is not connected to the activity. An additional difference is in the frequency of use. *Choral Reading* is likely to be used once or perhaps twice in the daily routine, while *Choral Drill* was used for nearly half of the instructional time in kindergarten. This poem was heard:

> School is over,
> Oh, what fun!
> Lessons finished,
> Play begun.
> Who'll run fastest,
> You or I?
> Who'll laugh loudest?
> Let us try. (Children laughed loudly)

**Strategy 3: Look and Say**

*Look and Say* is the technique of students listening to the teacher and looking at the object or print, then repeating a word or sentence after the teacher. Children either watch as the teacher points to the words on the chalkboard or individually point to the print on a page or in a textbook. The reading textbook used in kindergarten has a page for each letter of the alphabet. Each page has several illustrations and gives the word that corresponded to the illustration; for instance, an illustration of a kite and the word *kite*. On the day of observation, all four kindergarten classes at the school had progressed to the page that presented the letter *L*. The *Look and Say* strategy started from the beginning of the reader: A is for *Arm*, A is for *Apple*, A is *Art*, A is for *Ant*, A is for *Astronaut*, *An ape is an animal*. B is for *Bee*, B is for *Bird*, B is for *Birthday*, B is for *Butterfly*, B is for *Bunny*, *A boy on a bus*. The teacher read one phrase while the children listened, then the children pointed to the appropriate picture and repeated the phrase. This continued until they completed the new page for the week: L is for *Ladder*, L is for *Lamb*, L is for *Lady*, L is for *Lamp*, L is for *Leg*, *A leaf on a log*. This exercise of starting from the first page of the reader and continuing to the current lesson was repeated three times. The teacher varied it only slightly by changing the rhythm and the volume. Teachers explained that *Look and Say* of the reading textbook had been a part of the routine of each day since the first day of school.

While these three strategies have similarities, each relates to the principles of

learning in different ways. What appears most obvious is that all three require the mental processes of rehearsal and recitation. However, each strategy contributes to learning in uniquely different ways. Because understanding of the knowledge or concept has to happen first, *Demonstration* is important. *Demonstration* builds connections between new knowledge and what the child already knows. Teachers repeatedly pointed out how *Demonstration* was crucial. One teacher expressed it this way:

**Teacher B:** *First the children must have understanding. That is why I demonstrate and put things in the context of their every day lives. I am demonstrating and talking in short simple sentences.*

In the *Demonstration* strategy, recitation is "chiming in" and is just the beginning of rehearsal. The teacher is listening in or eavesdropping to be able to give feedback.

*Choral Drill* presented speaking aloud and verbatim memorization. This occurred in unison or in the form of echo recitation. The purpose was for transfer to the long-term memory. Current brain research supports the idea of speaking aloud (Haskell, 2001; Mayer, 2002). Speaking generates more electrical energy in the brain than just thinking about something (Bower, 2003; Perry, 2004). Choral drill is also a powerful way to cause over-learning to occur. Over-learning, that is, continuing to recite after something is memorized, creates deeper memory traces that make for longer retention (Banich, 1997; Ridley Smith, 2004).

The *Look and Say* strategy builds on the two aforementioned strategies by promoting understanding, giving more recitation and rehearsal, and continuing the over-learning process. This strategy is more complex, however, in that it adds print to the learning dynamic. The recitation is still oral but the child is now looking at and pointing to the print. Researchers for this project also noted that it was with this strategy that teachers' strengthened retention by spacing the learning in intervals over time. After the alphabet lessons were completed, teachers reported that even though they did not repeat it every day, they did not stop this recitation, but continued to include it in their routine at least once a week. Toward the second half of the year the intervals were increased to two or three weeks.

It is not uncommon for educators to label what was occurring here as rote learning, and therefore dismiss the activities as meaningless, or minimal at best. The learning that was occurring in these classrooms led the researchers to be less critical of this method of teaching content knowledge. While transfer of learning and being able to problem solve by creating, analyzing, and applying is the goal, this does not negate the need to create automaticity of important knowledge. What was observed lends support to the research of Amabile (1996) and Baer (2003) asserting that acquiring detailed content knowledge does not necessarily depress creativity and problem-solving.

- **Question 3: What instructional strategies do teachers use to teach phonics?**

- **Question 4: What instructional strategies do teachers use to teach spelling?**
- **Question 5: What instructional strategies do teachers use to teach comprehension?**
- **Question 6: What instructional strategies do teachers use to teach vocabulary development?**

These three research questions can be addressed together. Six more instructional strategies describe how teachers taught phonics, spelling, comprehension, and vocabulary development.

#### Strategy 4: Pictorial Illustration

Pictorial illustration is the use of blackboard drawings, diagrams, sketches, match-stick figures, photographs, maps, and textbook illustrations. These are used for presenting words and structures that stand for concrete ideas. In Class I, illustrations in the reader are used for the words *cake, snake, gate, face, table, chair,* and *crayon*. After children are guided in reading a story called "Good Morning," which presents two children greeting each other when arriving at school, the comprehension questions require the matching of illustrations. Children need to identify Manan's yellow bag and Anu's pink bag. While some of the illustrations look very similar to what might appear in other parts of the world, such as a toy train or yo-yo, many were uniquely related to life in India. In the story, "In the Morning," Mama is shown cooking at a table top stove and wearing traditional Indian dress, and Grandma is working at a treadle sewing machine. Drawings of the breakfast foods *aloo parantha, idlis, boiled eggs,* and *cheese sandwiches* are labeled in English, matching the name that is most often used to describe the food item. A photograph of street vendor selling peanuts is used with the writing prompt in the follow up activity. The researchers observed teachers using paper figures and match stick figures to represent the activities of jumping and leaving.

In Class V, the stories in the reader related primarily to the topics of environmental studies and science, but a few folktales were included. One folktale, "The Peasant, the Buffalo, and the Tiger," shows expressive drawings of the a with burning pieces of straw and rope stuck to his skin and the buffalo laughing so that he bangs his head against a tree, knocking out his upper teeth. A science lesson, *Plants Can Be Fun,* shows a series of illustrations depicting the rooting of a sweet potato in a jar--first showing the new roots growing and then showing stems and purple-veined leaves growing. Several fifth-level teachers were observed engaging children in discussion of climbing Mt Everest. Children studied the photographic images of Indians that had met the challenge of climbing Mt. Everest.[5]

#### Strategy 5: Verbal Illustration

Teachers at each level used *Verbal Illustration*. Sometimes this was simply giving a phrase or sentence that showed the typical use of the word in context, as in "the sky is blue." Often verbal illustration was used with pictorial illustration to link new knowledge to existing knowledge that had an analogous relationship. An example of

this was a lesson to a group of class V children presented by a guest teacher from a local newspaper. To help the children to understand the concept of advertising and the influence of advertising, she framed the concept in a context that she believed the children would understand. She reminded the children of the slogan "Clean and Green Delhi" and showed a poster with the slogan. She spoke of the several beautiful traffic islands and roundabouts, landscaped gardens, manicured fountains, and tree-lined boulevards. She explained that the signs around the city "Clean and Green Delhi" that promote cleanliness were advertising. Children became sidetracked and talked about the failures of the campaign, describing many areas that were not clean and were in their opinion, "filthy and spreading disease." The guest teacher brought the children back to the concept of advertising by asking if they knew of people that tried to keep Delhi clean. She continued by talking about their influence and how they could influence their friends, their relatives, especially grandparents, because grandparents love them so much.

**Strategy 6: Association**

*Association* was used for presenting vocabulary items. Teachers used *Association* for synonyms, antonyms, and simple definitions. For example, the following words were presented through *Association*:

blossom -- flower (synonym)
diligent -- hardworking (synonym)
fresh -- stale (antonym)
lad - means a boy (definition)

This process of bringing ideas or events together in memory or conceptualizing is a strong strategy for English learners. However, it appeared that the teaching strategy went beyond helping children to make memory connections and actually was an approach to developing deeper understanding by giving examples and non-examples. Children were not left to trial and error in developing the new concept. Teachers, in a well-crafted manner, would name the concept and several synonyms for it and then sometimes present a definition. This led to an accurate communication of the concept and eliminates the possibility of confusion.

**Strategy 7: Questioning**

*Questioning* is another strategy that was used in lessons at all levels. It was used in the introduction. A teacher at level III used this example:

*The title of this lesson is "Beautiful Birds." Can you give the names of some birds which you find near your house?*
*Do you like to watch them?*
*Do some of them sing?*

The most frequent use of questioning was, however, to lead students to discover patterns, put items into categories, and find labels for the categories. To do this, teachers typically used the chalkboard and wrote names of categories across the top.

Teachers would begin by placing example items in the categories, and then ask questions such as:

> *What belongs together?*
> *Can you find something that is similar to this?*

The questioning section of the lessons appeared to be for the purpose of developing thinking processes for concept formation. While using question to monitor comprehension was observed in two lessons, this was not the primary use. In Class III, the teacher modeled for the children the creating of patterns of similarities.

After writing the following sentences on the board, she modeled the thinking process:

> *We will study common names and special names.*
> *First, listen to this: Pingu is a bear. Montu is a monkey. Neha is a girl.*
> *Now, look at this list of special names. When I ask for your response you will give a common name.*
> Teacher: *Paris is?*
> Student: *Paris is a city.*
> Teacher: *Ganges is?*
> Student: *Ganges is a river.*
> Teacher: *A white rose?*
> Student: *A white rose is a flower.*

This use of analogy was evident to several questioning exercises. The teacher presented items that were similar is some respect but otherwise dissimilar. Opposites were used in this same manner: The teacher showed that a morpheme could be reformed or recreated by thinking about the known language patterns:

> *The opposite of lock is unlock.*
> *The opposite of visible is invisible.*
> *The opposite of possible is impossible.*
> *What is the opposite of complete?*
> *What is the opposite of friendly?*
> *What is the opposite of lucky?*

While these exercises that asked students to list, group, label and categorize were deliberate attempts to increase productive thinking, teachers did not neglect other aspects of learning that they valued. In each lesson, children were asked to repeat the pairs of opposites or other answers to the questions. This gave students opportunity to learn through practice.

The *Questioning* strategy resembled the strategies described in the classic work of Hilda Taba (1967), in which she postulates that thinking can be taught. In Taba's inductive thinking model, questioning is used for concept formation, interpretation of data, and application of principle. While teachers were not observed taking students through each of these three processes, it was apparent that concept

formation was a major goal of questioning.

**Strategy 8: Narration**

The technique of *Narration* was observed on one occasion. *Narration* could also be called *Storytelling*. The teacher reported that her purpose was to motivate the children to read the passage that would be assigned and then to write a response. The researchers were told by the principal that this particular teacher was very adept at *Narration* and used it frequently. She mentioned that other teachers also use *Narration*. The story told was a fairy tale with the moral that it is not good for children to be greedy. While motivation was mentioned as the goal, it could also be deduced that comprehension was a consideration. The teacher observed stopped twice during the story to monitor for understanding. She asked:

> *Do you like the story? Do you understand?*

**Strategy 9: Read and Say**

For the strategy of *Read and Say,* students read a paragraph written on the blackboard and responded orally to a set of written questions. Sometimes the passage and follow-up exercise were written on what was called a roll-up board. The roll-up board is heavy paper that can be written on and then rolled up and stored. The students read the exercise written on the roll up board and wrote responses in their notebooks. After writing the questions in their notebooks, they filled in the blank, matched A with B, or completed the sentences. After a given amount of time, the teacher asked children to read their written responses and lead a discussion relating to their responses. During the week of observations, this strategy was observed at levels IV and V. Clearly, the focus was on comprehension of the passage. Discussion centered on understanding and finding meaning in the passage.

- **Question 7: How is assessment conducted and used?**

  It was reported that students at all levels are assessed in reading, writing, spelling, and oral language. This is accomplished through the means of teacher observation during recitation and conversational protocols, the marking of workbooks and writing books, and periodic tests. Students are given grades at the end of each of three terms. Students are not given State Exams until Middle School. While students performance on assessments is considered in curriculum planning, decisions about content and pacing are made through consensus when teachers sit together prior to the beginning of the school year.

## Conclusions

**Limitations of the study**

The present study has certain limitations that need to be taken into account. Certainly, a limitation of this study includes external validity, or the generalizability of the study to other contexts, since it was conducted in just one school. While the school enrolled over a

thousand students, unquestionably, this is a small population of students. Another factor that limits the generalizability of this study is the interaction between instruction and culture. While the researchers did not make any attempt to compare similarities and differences of the school to schools in other places of the world, it is recognized that the culture influences transferability.

**Summary of findings**

This study has revealed some evidence to support the idea that effective instruction for English learners does the following (1) develops proficiency in natural language or conversation through activities that are related to the children's everyday experiences, (2) provides ample opportunity for learning, even over-learning, through recitation, repetition, and practice toward automaticity of knowledge and skills, and (3) scaffolds for understanding and development of thinking skills through the methods of demonstration, modeling and questioning.

**Future research needs**

Relatively little research has been conducted that examines the teaching practices of elementary teachers providing instruction in English in India or other countries where English is the official language, but not necessarily the first language of the majority. This study does reveal some promising practices but more research is needed. Peregoy and Boyle (2000) point out that it is critical that research address reading acquisition and instruction for English language learners, not just reading instruction with students that already read connected text. Looking at reading acquisition and instruction in English in various locations outside the United States can inform instructional practices.

## Notes

[1] Today, approximately one in three Silicon Valley engineers are of Indian ancestry and Indian CEOs lead seven percent of Silicon Valley high-tech firms as founders of a wide variety of companies, ranging from Sun Microsystems to Hotmail.

[2] One obstacle had to be overcome regarding the digital photo journaling; the high temperatures and high humidity caused the camera lenses to fog over. The researchers soon learned to take the cameras out of the cases while traveling in taxis and before arriving on the school grounds so that the lenses were ready to go when classroom observations began.

[3] On the Monday morning following the weeklong school visit, the researchers sought directions and traveled to Old Delhi to the publishing company of the textbooks. At the end of a narrow street hidden away in a crowded publishing house district, and after pushing passed cattle, food carts, business men and shoppers, they found the tiny shop, a shop not much bigger then a hotel room. The publisher, a retired air force major, graciously presented them with a complete set, Levels I through V of both the *Sparkle Multiskill English Reader* and the writing workbook, *Sparkle Multiskill English Activity Book*, as well as a complete set of Teacher's Manuals. The publisher explained that in India today, English has become the medium of "all relevant social interactions" and the

ability to use English effectively is considered" an absolute essential for honorable existence." He further explained that the books are designed on a holistic approach, meaning topics are of urgent present-day concerns like the conservation of eco-systems, the promotion of social harmony and promoting human value.

[4] The Whole Language movement has at times embraced the idea of "holistic." Although Kenneth Goodman made the connection between whole language and the theory of constructivism (Goodman, 1992), many practitioners would explain "holistic" in one of two ways; 1) as the reading and writing connection or 2) the emphasis on whole to part, rather than skills taught first and separately (Daniels et al., 1999). There was nothing said at this primary school to indicate that teachers' beliefs were related to the Whole Language movement.

[5] These photos included the following: Tenzing Norgay of Nepal, who climbed Mt. Everest in 1953, Bachendri Pal, the first woman to reach the summit in 1984, Santosh Yada who climbed in 1992 and 1993, and Dicky Dolma, the youngest woman to climb Mt. Everest at age 19 in 1993.

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