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# Teaching Adult Second Language Learners Who Are Emergent Readers

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Some second language (L2) learners are unique in that they bring low print literacy and limited formal schooling to the language learning enterprise. A range of personal, economic, historical, and political circumstances bring them to highly literate, industrialized societies where print literacy becomes not only desirable but necessary to earn a living and participate in a range of everyday activities. This article is a review of current research related to this population of learners for the purpose of informing educators about their particular teaching and learning needs. While the emphasis is on scholarship focused on adult L2 emergent readers, attention is also given to related research with bi- and multilingual children and monolingual adults who are not print literate. Finally, sociopolitical and historical issues are touched upon with regard to broader policy matters that may have contributed to or perpetuate low print literacy.

Illiteracy is not a permanent condition or characteristic of adolescent or adult second language (L2) learners. Most people can become literate in any script, at any age, and when they do, this descriptor simply disappears. In this sense, illiteracy is different from other individual differences commonly explored in second language acquisition (SLA) research such as sex, age of arrival in a country, or mother tongue, none of which change. Educators working with students from different countries are typically trained and accustomed to teaching students with many proficiency levels, learning preferences, and aspirations, but they are generally less familiar with teaching learners who have not had formal schooling or are learning an L2 without being print literate in any language (Vinogradov & Liden, 2008). Furthermore, most educators became print literate when they were children and cannot recall the experience easily or relate to what it is like to become literate beyond childhood. More importantly, the educational and literacy experiences resulting in differences between teachers and adult students without print literacy can create a profound gap in the assumptions about how languages are taught and learned.



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One of the challenges of writing about adolescents and adults without print literacy is finding the appropriate language to do so. Adjectives such as *illiterate, nonliterate,* and *preliterate*, while commonly used by educators, delimit individuals according to something they lack. Like others, individuals without print literacy have a range of attributes that may better characterize them than one quality that they lack. This article, however, necessarily characterizes them by what they lack because it focuses on the literature, particularly from the past 5 years, that addresses lack of print literacy as a particular learner characteristic. As our title suggests, we propose using the term *emergent reader,* which expresses the sense of becoming literate. For more nuance regarding terminology of this nature, see Burt, Peyton, and Adams (2003).

It is also necessary to offer a brief definition of literacy, however complex this may be. All of the research we are aware of to date regarding literacy development among adult L2 emergent readers focuses on the encoding and decoding of text, in other words, basic reading and writing skills. The studies we know of typically do not take a critical literacy (e.g., Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005) or multiple literacies (e.g., Street, 2003) stance. We are well aware of the both the breadth and the depth of how researchers define literacy beyond (basic) skills and the ideological debates related to how literacy is defined (Lewis & del Valle, 2009; Papen, 2005). Literacy, writ broadly, is complex and profoundly dependent on context; yet, in much of the L2 research related to adult emergent readers, literacy is still framed as a set of skills: alphabetics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (e.g., Curtis & Kruidenier, 2005). In this article, we attempt to strike a balance between the recognition that adult L2 learners must learn to decode words and the need they have to learn these skills through meaningful and authentic instruction. In this article, we explore the nature of what it means to become literate for the first time in a new language as an adolescent or adult, and what sorts of teaching and learning opportunities may help students become literate, on their own terms, as quickly as possible.

## TEACHING ADULT L2 LEARNERS WITH BEGINNING LITERACY

A number of scholarly articles describe instruction that works with emergent readers who are adult L2 learners (Birch, 2007; Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 2008; Freeman & Freeman, 2001; Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik, & Queen, 1998). A professional organization named LESLLA (Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition, www.leslla.org), focuses on adult L2 learners from around the world who begin their formal learning without or with limited print literacy (Faux, 2007; Young-Scholten, 2008). The professional meetings organized by LESLLA and the subsequent publications have yielded a wealth of knowledge about this population (e.g., Condelli & Wrigley, 2006; Faux, 2006; Geudens, 2006; Kurvers, 2007; Kurvers, Vallen, & van Hout, 2006; Kurvers, van Hout, & Vallen, 2007; Peyton et al., 2007; Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2007; Van de Craats, 2007; Van de Craats, Kurvers, & Young-Scholten, 2006a, 2006b; Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006).

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While it is important to examine the emerging body of research with adult English language learners who are emergent readers, many of the findings from research with children who are becoming literate in an L2 may apply to adults, assuming the content and presentation are adjusted accordingly. Just like children becoming literate in an L2, older learners at the same level must also learn the basics of literacy (i.e., alphabetic, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension). It must be cautioned, however, that understanding L2 adult emergent readers through research done with children (often in their first language [L1]) is bound to result in misapplications of findings. With this caveat in mind, this article reviews recent research on adults, then turns to examples of research conducted with children who are emergent readers in the L2, and finally reviews some of the main findings from research conducted with monolingual adults who are not print literate in their L1.

## Research With Adult Emergent Readers

Many adolescents and adults who are new to reading bring with them rich oral traditions from their past. Scholars have long known this and have also recognized that the transition to writing is a process often fraught with struggle and sacrifice, as well as empowerment and emancipation (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981; Freire, 1970; Goody, 1987; McLuhan, 1964/1994; Olson, 2006; Ong, 1982; Rubin, 1980; Tannen, 1982). A recent dissertation by Watson (2010) explores in extraordinary depth the phenomenon of moving from orality to literacy. Drawing from a range of disciplines, Watson described the distance between the lifeworlds of indigenous cultures and those of cultures of high literacy as a semiotic abyss. This highly charged and politically oriented research reveals much in terms of what educators must understand about how to teach adolescents and young adults who come to class as emergent readers. Watson argued for "a pedagogy of reciprocity between orality and literacy" (p. v) in which primarily oral and primarily literate societies share the strengths of each other's ways of being in the world. This reciprocity, Watson reasoned, may be a path to the survival of both societies.

The research literature offers studies in which oral traditions grounded in historical, cultural roots are incorporated into teaching activities. For example, in qualitative research carried out with Sudanese families, Perry explored how personal stories and folktales can be used to teach literacy skills in English (Perry, 2007, 2008). Creating classroom activities that truly embrace the oral literacies of refugee adolescents and adults can be constructive avenues into print literacies in the L2. Similarly, in ethnographic work with Somali adolescent girls, Bigelow (2010) found that one participant was powerfully motivated to convey her favorite Somali folktales to English speakers so that they could learn from them and be entertained by them. She also understood that her folktales, originally told in oral modes in Somali, needed to be carefully written and edited in English for her readers to want to read them. Her motivation to share her stories resulted in many revisions that attended to both meaning and form. This research linking L1 oral traditions to L2 literacy offers new

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pedagogies within Western schooling practices that break down barriers to literacies needed in the new, literate society. That is, by building on community cultural wealth through use of oral traditions, new epistemologies and pedagogies can emerge (Yosso & García, 2007), which can include learners' histories of migration and traditional ways of relaying information, teaching, and entertaining.

Other studies uncover ways in which cultural strengths within immigrant and refugee families can also support educational aims. For example, in a mother-daughter qualitative case study, Espinoza-Herold (2007) described how the cultural *dichos* (sayings) used by a Mexican immigrant mother with little formal schooling supported her adolescent daughter in achieving her educational goals. Similarly, Bigelow (2007) found that a Somali mother with limited formal schooling, low levels of English language proficiency, and low native language literacy was able to do many things to help her children succeed in U.S. public schools. She would facilitate her children getting help with projects by releasing them from household chores to attend bilingual homework help programs or simply to work quietly at the public library. She would also take friends to help her interpret conversations with teachers about how her children were doing in school, who their friends were, and if they were doing their homework. In another study with Sudanese families, Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009) learned, through conversations with parents, that there were many ways teachers could link to the students' home languages and cultures. Such studies illuminate how learners' social and cultural characteristics can inform and enrich instruction in powerful ways. Instead of reducing literacy to a set of skills to be mastered, teachers can take into account the complex processes at work in the classroom and within and among their learners.

Instruction for emergent adult/adolescent readers must fulfill two needs: Adults need contextualized, meaningful instruction that is age and level appropriate, and this instruction needs to be explicit and systematic, focusing on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition. Whole-part-whole instruction is a balanced approach to teaching literacy (see Trupke-Bastidas & Poulos, 2007; Vinogradov, 2008). While focusing first on a meaningful story and establishing meaning, instructors using whole-part-whole instruction then move to specific parts (sounds, sight words, word families, etc.), before returning to the entire story for further study. This way the components or parts of language are never taught without being located within a memorable, interesting, meaningful context. Examples of such instruction for teacher-training purposes can be found in a brief video from New American Horizons (www.newamericanhorizons.org) and also in a publication from the Center for Applied Linguistics (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010).

This section explores some of the well-documented principles related to teaching adults without prior schooling who are emergent readers. We focus on principles because not all of the practices have a robust research base. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) have developed an approach to teaching learners with limited formal education they call the mutually adaptive learning paradigm (MALP). This paradigm asks educators to (a) understand and accept

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the unique cognitive and social orientations of learners without prior schooling; (b) creatively combine processes characteristic of these learners and those of U.S. schools; and (c) focus on U.S. learning activities with familiar language and content. This section explores examples from research that follow this approach.

One of the principles of teaching adults new to literacy that has persisted over time is the importance of using content from students' lives to develop basic literacy through balanced literacy instruction (Auerbach, 1992; Condelli et al., 2008; Crandall & Peyton, 1993; Weinstein, 2006). The use of learner-generated texts, a slightly more specific method that is widely known as the language experience approach (LEA), allows students and teachers together to tap into learners' often more developed listening and speaking skills to build literacy (Geva & Zadeh, 2006). Oral processing skills and print literacy skills are interconnected and interdependent (Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2009), and as learners practice and build their oral abilities, learner-generated texts provide a means to connect these skills and to present oral language on paper. The result is an array of rich and interesting readings for students.

In LEA, for example, students first share a common experience, perhaps a field trip or an experience like making a cup of tea in the classroom. Then, the teacher guides them to retell the experience aloud. Students recall what happened to a teacher or another scribe who writes down their words. Later, these words are used as reading texts. From here, a number of bottom-up techniques can be used to focus on word analysis and particular sounds and structures. Then, students revisit the entire text they have created and perhaps add to it. LEA is an efficient technique in working with emergent readers as it connects what they are able to communicate orally to what they are learning to do in print (Crandall & Peyton, 1993; Vinogradov, 2010).

## Research with Children

The process of becoming literate for adults, it has been argued, is different from that of children. For example, adults have different strategies to draw upon to learn, and they have more life experience to bring to their comprehension of text (Weinstein, 2006). Adults may take longer and have different emotional reactions to learning to read, depending on how much they have been stigmatized for not knowing how to read during their lives (Bartlett, 2007). Adults may also approach learning literacy and language with a sense of urgency, as their family's well-being depends on their ability to find and maintain employment and provide life's basic necessities. Unlike children, adults have many responsibilities outside of school, and attending literacy and language classes is often a luxury of time and resources. However, although adults and children learn differently, adult emergent readers must also acquire the same skills and fulfill the same cognitive stages as children learning to read. Although this process looks different for adults and instruction must also differ, we do not recommend ignoring all research or instructional materials created for emergent L2 readers who are children. For example, Gardner (2008) designed her playful phonological

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awareness curriculum for young emergent readers with the following principles in mind:

1. Teachers should check comprehension because learners may decode, or pronounce text, but not comprehend it. Decoding which results in comprehension is essential.
2. Students should complete tasks and teachers should maintain high expectations of students' work, particularly their discussion about text.
3. Students should become accustomed to justifying answers to questions about text.
4. Teachers should expect that discussions about texts are designed to be meaningful.
5. Teachers should use formative assessment to monitor progress. (pp. 265–266)

A detailed examination of a short lesson using a prescriptive curriculum showed that these principles resulted in instruction that had a range of features including language play, whole-class shared imaging of the text, valuing the children's thoughts, opening up the communication to a two-way process where there is space for learning, connecting learning to students' lives, and legitimizing home languages and cultures. Even in the unlikely context of a prescriptive phonics lesson, this transformative, meaningful, and contextualized language instruction was possible. These outcomes are certainly what we hope can occur for adults who are also learning skills such as sound-letter correspondence.

Other research with children is relevant to consider when devising instruction for adult L2 learners without print literacy. For example, ways that oral language development assists in literacy development is another area that has been explored with children acquiring an L2 (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; de la Piedra, 2006; Geva & Zadeh, 2006; Gonzalez & Uhing, 2008). Teachers should work to develop L2 oral skills while developing literacy skills; language skills are interdependent, and oral skills pave the way for literacy. Likewise, reading skills transfer between L1 and L2(s) among children (Bialystok, 2007; Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005). The skills related to grapheme-phoneme correspondence can be applied to any alphabetic language. We believe that this phenomenon of transfer occurs among adolescent and adult language learners as well, although this assumption must be empirically verified. Work exploring the parallels and differences between emergent writing in L1 children and emergent writing in L2 adults without print literacy was recently done by Kurvers et al., (2007). Their study implies that while preliterate adults and children appear to follow similar stages as they learn to write, adults bring a different kind of print awareness to the classroom. Although the adults in the study were able to recognize many words on sight (they had lived in a print-rich environment for many years), they still needed direct instruction to connect oral language to writing and to access the "inside of the written code" (Kurvers et al., 2007, p. 885). However, the adult emergent readers had knowledge of print, and they brought to instruction knowledge of the functions and uses of print that the children did not. Adult literacy

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teachers need to keep in mind that learners are not naïve about writing and literacy instruction does not need to begin "from scratch" (Kurvers et al., 2007, p. 885). Such studies comparing the literacy acquisition of L2 adult emergent readers and L1 children are rare, although there is much to learn. Research with monolingual students is much more common, and we examine such learners next.

### Research with Monolinguals

In the same way we can turn to research with bi- or multilingual children in an effort to understand the processes adult L2 learners go through to become literate, we can also turn to research done with monolingual adults in their L1. This work makes few and broad explicit links to teaching, but we believe that it is beneficial for educators to be aware of it to understand three main points: (a) The human brain in normal adults changes with the advent of specifically alphabetic (not logographic) print literacy; (b) these changes have been explored with research methodologies that measure a narrow range of language processing skills; and (c) the knowledge produced within these lines of research suggests that educators of adolescent and adult L2 learners should challenge the popular and well-documented assumption in research with children that phonemic awareness (e.g., the ability to distinguish sounds, syllables, and rhymes) must come before the ability to read. In recent years, the field has moved to accept that the relationship of phonemic awareness and achievement in reading appears to be reciprocal (Yopp, 1992). The literature relevant to adult emergent readers regarding brain changes and alphabetic literacy development, language processing, and phonemic awareness is summarized briefly here, because it has already appeared elsewhere in greater detail (Bigelow & Watson, 2011; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005; Tarone et al., 2009).

Cognitive scientists have provided a fascinating and relevant body of research that explores how lack of alphabetic print literacy affects how adults perceive, repeat, and manipulate oral language. This research has been done with monolingual adults in their L1s (Adrian, Alegria, & Morais, 1995; Bramão et al., 2007; Dellatolas et al., 2003; Reis & Castro-Caldas, 1997; Reis et al., 2007; Reis, Guerreiro, & Petersson, 2003). It suggests that even a small amount of literacy can make a difference in the performance of certain oral tasks. In these studies adults with some print literacy could manipulate language units such as phonemes and syllables, while adults without print literacy performed significantly worse on these oral skills. Dropping the first sound from a word (e.g., take /ka/ off /kade/) and flipping syllables in a word (e.g., /keda/ becomes /dake/) was much harder for illiterate adults than it was for those with alphabetic print literacy. On the other hand, participants performed similarly on oral tasks involving rhyming or generating lists of semantically related words. It seems that basic alphabetic literacy offers adults a strategy for visualizing encoded oral language in order to manipulate it phonemically.

Research carried out with Chinese-speaking participants corroborates independently the findings of the previous research. Charles Read and his colleagues

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(Read, Zhang, Nie, & Ding, 1986) found that individuals who were literate only in the logographic Chinese script, not the Romanized script, performed similarly to adults without alphabetic print literacy. This suggests that there is something unique about becoming literate in an alphabetic script, as opposed to a logographic, or character-based, script. Interesting, too, are the results obtained from de Gelder, Vroomen, and Bertelson (1993), who studied bilingual Chinese adults residing in the Netherlands who were all able to read Chinese logograms. The group was divided into two groups: those who could read an alphabetic language (Dutch) and those who could not. There were significant differences between the groups in terms of the ability to delete word-initial consonants (e.g., /stan/ becomes /tan/) but no difference in rhyming tasks, similar to the studies described earlier. Researchers also tried to teach participants without alphabetic print literacy how to segment speech, but participants were not able to do so after the instruction. Again, alphabetic print literacy seems to promote awareness that utterances can be segmented and promote the skills to do this sort of task.

The cognitive neuroscience research done in Olhão, a fishing village in southern Portugal, warrants some elaboration here. (See Petersson, Ingvar, & Reis, 2009, for a recent summary.) This robust and active research program spans more than a decade in its attempts to isolate the cognitive processes that are consequences of literacy among adults, albeit in their L1, not an L2. Findings support the idea that formal schooling and alphabetic literacy acquisition is not only a process for cultural transmission but also a mechanism that changes the physical makeup of the human brain and the way the brain processes oral language.

The context of this research in Portugal is a socioculturally homogeneous community with low mobility. Causes of illiteracy in this context were due to sociocultural circumstances, not individual causes such as a learning disability or brain injury. In this village it was common to find families in which the older daughters did not attend school and the younger children did, although only for approximately 4 years. Researchers observed that illiteracy was not understood as problematic socially, and literate and illiterate individuals led similar lives working in agriculture or fishing. Therefore, it was possible to match participants who were literate with those who were not.

In one study, literate and illiterate participants from Olhão were asked to repeat words and pseudowords, because this task is a good measure of phonological processing. PET (positron-emission tomography) scans showed that literate participants had much more brain activation, occurring in more regions of the brain, during pseudoword repetition than did illiterate participants. Researchers explain this phenomenon as being in part due to the notion that verbal working memory is supported by the ability to store visuospatial information. In other words, the way that oral language is processed and stored is influenced by alphabetic literacy and aspects of subsyllabic phonological structures within literate participants. In another study by Reis et al. (2007) and a following study by Kolinsky, Cary, and Morais (1987), literate and illiterate participants were asked to listen to words and pseudowords during a task in which they had to

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decide which word of a pair was the longest (e.g., /stan/ or /tan/). The literate participants showed no difference between their ability to determine phonological length of words and pseudowords. The illiterate participants, on the other hand, performed better when identifying the length of pseudowords than words. The researchers explain these apparently contradictory results by arguing that illiterate participants struggled more to inhibit the influence of semantic interference in their decision of which word or pseudoword was longer. In other words, when illiterate participants were able to concentrate only on length (not the meanings of words they knew), they were better able to discern word length.

This team of researchers has carried out numerous other studies exploring the role of alphabetic literacy in phonological processing. For example, they explored the role of literacy in processing lexical items within a sentence context and found that explicit knowledge of words as independent units is dependent on literacy. Emergent readers may not be able to identify closed-class words or words without semantic content (determiners, prepositions, pronouns) as easily as adults with literacy. In another study, they explored the role of literacy in identifying black and white photographs versus colored drawings, with the literate group outperforming the illiterate group. Color, the researchers argue, is related to the semantic value of the images. Color and realistic images enhance the interpretation for adults without formal schooling. Researchers are quick to admit that it is problematic to use tasks that resemble those commonly performed in classroom settings, because the literate group would be advantaged. This problem was described in Luria's (1976) foundational research with illiterate adults in Russia.

The idea that even a very low level of alphabetic print literacy may facilitate performance on some phonemic awareness tasks has implications for teaching and learning. For example, teachers must know that it is entirely normal for adult emergent readers to have much more difficulty manipulating phonemes in oral language than adults with even minimal alphabetic print literacy. Likewise, some phonemic awareness skills may come after learners have begun to acquire basic literacy concepts, rather than before, an order that is assumed by many scholars of child L1 literacy. If being able to perceive phonemes in the speech stream depends on literacy, perhaps those with low literacy will not be able to use corrective feedback related to the manipulation of phonemes as efficiently as those with more print literacy. Teachers may also take from this research that it is very important to reduce the level of abstraction of materials—visually and linguistically. Images should be discussed to establish meaning within them (e.g., discuss how the pictures of the peach and the apple differ with students). Pictures should align with real life as much as possible (e.g., pictures of foods should closely resemble what they supposedly represent and ideally appear in color). Finally, authentic instruction that relates to learners' lives and does not depend on knowing how to do activities learned in school (e.g., multiple choice questions accompanying a reading) will help those who have not had formal schooling stay engaged. It will also make them feel capable as they embark on L2 initial literacy.

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## EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND L2 LEARNERS WITH LIMITED LITERACY

There are always larger social structures and policies that impact education across contexts. Adult L2 emergent readers' opportunities to learn may be facilitated or hindered by factors far beyond their control. Menard-Warwick (2005) explained the low print literacy of her participants (Central American immigrant women). She found that immigration laws, welfare status, and the economy impeded participants' ability to sustain their enrollment in literacy programs. The women's motivation was also influenced by their parents' views of education and their experiences, such as having the opportunity to attend school. An example of a literacy campaign initiated at the national level is offered by Warsame (2001). He explained how the Somali government promoted literacy by dictatorial mandate in the 1970s. This effort, under the mandate that everyone should be either teaching or learning, increased literacy among both rural and urban populations enormously. These efforts were dismantled by the civil war in Somalia and resulted in widespread inaccessibility to formal schooling and basic literacy and numeracy.

In some immigrant communities, adults may be hesitant to attend literacy classes, because doing so may jeopardize their status in their family or cultural community. For example, the religious beliefs of the Kurdish Yezidis, according to Sarroub (2008), advocate avoiding print literacy. Similarly, Levinson (2007) described resistance to literacy among English Gypsies (Roma). Saki, a participant in Levinson's study, lamented, "Education has divorced me from my community" (p. 30). Saki reported that his older brother said that he had betrayed all that his family stood for by becoming educated. Other participants said that if they wished to attend adult literacy classes, these classes must be outside their community, so that even their closest relatives would not know they were attending class.

Classrooms and programs are not neutral actors in the process of building literacy among adult L2 learners. Warriner (2007) demonstrated how the transnational movement is "conflated with bureaucratic sorting mechanisms that result in heightened surveillance and arbitrary distinctions that have lasting material consequences . . ." (p. 323). Warriner's analysis of students in an adult ESL (English as a second language) literacy program shows that although programs may be unfolding exactly as planned (i.e., to train low-wage workers), they may inadvertently construct the labor that students do as contributing to the global economy with little benefit to the workers themselves. In this sense, programs and even educators participate in a sort of policymaking enterprise that in turn plays into larger socioeconomic structures. For example, by teaching so-called survival English, programs may be contributing to learners' economic marginalization (Tollefson, 2006). Menken and Garcia (2010) illustrated how educators in particular are important actors in the implementation of or resistance to educational and political policy.

In sum, there is ample research showing how understanding literacy in its social context can contribute to a more complete understanding of literacy across cultures and contexts (Reder & Davila, 2005). Research also shows that

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adult L2 learners without print literacy are diverse and that reasons for lacking print literacy vary widely among individuals.

## CONCLUSION

Educating adult L2 learners who are emergent readers requires paradigm shifts in a number of areas. First, preservice teacher education programs must recognize that these learners exist, that educating them is important, and that their needs require teachers prepared to reach across the experiential and literacy abyss to educate them in ways that are thoughtful and effective. Second, programs must attend to the needs of practicing teachers who wish to create separate curricula for adult emergent readers, revamp their assessment and placement procedures, or make their literacy curriculum more balanced between top-down and bottom-up reading processes. Third, there is a need for better educational policies worldwide that do not stand in the way of adults who are seeking print literacy. There are still many contexts in which children do not have access to primary schooling, which leads to projections that in 2015 there will be 29 million school-age children who will still be out of school. Nigerian and Pakistani children are projected to have particularly slim changes of attending school in 2015, with 7.6 and 3.7 million out-of-school children, respectively (UNESCO, 2009). While we hope that lack of print literacy does not persist until adolescence or adulthood, any learner should have the opportunity to become literate through high-quality formal instruction.

The ways adult emergent readers differ also requires the examination of educational policies and possibly advocacy for recognition of this population. For example, it is common to find state policies in which students enrolled in high school programs are not permitted to continue working toward graduation because of their age. Then, paths to adult diploma programs are unavailable or difficult to access. Typical educational policy simply does not afford them enough time in school to build the literacy needed to finish all of their high school requirements. Another common policy problem is adequate federal and state allocation of funding to programs for emergent readers, adult diploma programs for learners who started high school late, and adult basic education programs for English learners who may need instruction that will continue to develop their everyday English proficiency or vocational English skills.

This review has outlined the issues in educating L2 adolescent and adult emergent readers by exploring relevant scholarship (studies as well as articles suggesting promising practices) on this unique population. We have expanded the review to include a wide range of studies done with children who are becoming bi- or multilingual, and monolingual adults who are not literate in their home language. We hope to have shown, however, that this is a heterogeneous population with a unique set of strengths and needs that require a range of educational approaches. Finally, this is a population that requires advocacy—advocacy for appropriate instruction and advocacy for educational policies that allow them to pursue unconventional paths to employment and productivity.

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This book chapter offers a comprehensive survey to date of research, programs, and issues related to educational level and second language learning. The authors not only called attention to the body of current research findings and the need for increased focus on older ELLs (English language learners) with limited formal schooling and low print literacy but also began to frame the issue in its epistemological and ethical dimensions. By taking this critical approach, the authors asked readers to consider both the instructional needs of learners who have come of age in orality and also the deeper cultural and epistemological characteristics and implications of orality and the way of life that often accompanies orality. Specifically, the authors recognized that the presence of many of the refugees and immigrants in many industrialized countries such as the United States is the result of political and military might and that the judgment placed upon their lack of print literacy is evidence of privileging certain ways of being in the world.

Birch, B. (2007). *English L2 reading: Getting to the bottom* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Birch's book offers a compelling argument for balanced literacy instruction that includes both top-down (focus on meaning and comprehension) as well as bottom-up (focus on smaller linguistic units such as letters and words) approaches. However, this book focuses on bottom-up strategies because this knowledge base and skill set are so often neglected in adult ESL teacher preparation. Birch delved into topics such as writing systems (logographic vs. alphabetic) and phonics instruction and offered a number of teaching ideas for each skill area. This book is best suited to teachers with some background in linguistics and language teaching, but for those who need more guidance, there are diagrams, ample examples, prereading questions, and study guide questions built into the structure of the book as learning aids.

DeCapua, A., & Marshall, H. (2011). *Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal schooling in secondary schools*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

This book explores the cognitive and social profile of students from oral traditions and offers specific instructional approaches based on that profile. The authors were careful to distinguish between Western values such as individual autonomy, abstraction, and the primacy of literacy and the common orientations of oral societies such as face-to-face communication. This work emphasizes the fact that older students who are new to formal schooling and print literacy have different ways of understanding the world and asks educators to develop intersubjective understanding with regard to how they approach such learners. The authors introduced an intervention they call the mutually adaptive learning paradigm (MALP).

Reder, S., & Bynner, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Tracking adult literacy and numeracy skills: Findings from longitudinal research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This book is a comprehensive collection of outstanding chapters that explore a wide range of issues related to adult literacy and numeracy across many different countries and educational settings. The research presented in this volume is not limited to L2 learners, but much of it is highly relevant to L2 teaching and learning. For

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example, the book includes chapters on the development of literacy and numeracy, teacher attitudes, workplace teaching and learning, identity and literacy, and the evaluation of programs. As the title suggests, the research presented in this volume is longitudinal. Some of the important and much needed issues explored include how adults' educational development interacts with their social and economic performance as well as how their private and social situation in the family and community may enhance or obstruct their progress.

Tarone, E., Bigelow, M., & Hansen, K. (2009). *Literacy and second language oracy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

This book examines the relationship between low alphabetic print literacy and L2 oral language process. Findings, which are mainly based on a partial replication of Philp's (2003) study, show that some of the language-processing abilities that have been considered inherent, universal human abilities may actually be the specific consequences of alphabetic print literacy. These include the ability to notice oral recasts and the accuracy of recall on elicitation/imitation tasks involving grammatical correction. Another chapter of the book finds that certain morphosyntactic characteristics of learner interlanguage are used more with participants with higher levels of print literacy. This book offers a theoretical rationale for including learners with low print literacy in SLA research and sets out a thorough list of questions to develop this research agenda.

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