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Examining English as a second language: Textbooks from a constructivist perspective

Juliana Theresa Reineman

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EXAMINING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

TEXTBOOKS FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in English

by
Juliana Theresa Reineman
September 2002
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TEXTBOOKS FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST
PERSPECTIVE

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8/27/02
Date
In this project, I examine current entry-level adult ESL textbooks from a constructivist perspective. Constructivism is not a new methodology, but rather a different manner of how we define learning. Rather than viewing learning as the culmination of isolated skills or memorized information, it is the understanding that learning takes place when students are able to make connections between new information and what they already know. Research indicates that this process requires the active participation of the learners in the construction of their own knowledge. However, I perceive a great discrepancy between what this research indicates about learning in general, and more specifically second language learning, and the methodology that is found in the textbooks used in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms.

The purpose of this thesis is to question the methodological practices of ESL textbooks. In order to accomplish my research, I adapt a model developed for first language literacy to serve as a standard for evaluating textbooks. This model is based upon a
constructivist ideology, and I apply it to five entry-level ESL textbooks, to determine how well the textbooks reflect the principles of this model.

Using the same model, I then propose a sample textbook unit, based upon a topic that appeared in two separate adult education programs which elicited student input in curriculum: domestic violence. Additionally, I discuss the results of a survey I conducted through a list-serve for Teachers of English as a Second/Foreign Language, inquiring as to how instructors feel about including such a topic in their ESL curriculum. I conclude with suggestions for language instructors and textbook writers.
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CHAPTER ONE
EXAMINING ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

Introduction

This thesis is about textbooks. I do not believe that current language instruction textbooks reflect what research indicates about language learning. However, they do reflect the belief system that has been in place for nearly 100 years: specifically, that practice makes perfect, that "learning is the result of teaching, piece by piece, item by item. The whole, reading [language] is the sum of the parts, words and skills. Learners are passive and controlled" (Goodman et al, 1988, p. 99). I believe that learning a language is much more than the mastery of linguistic skills; therefore, the tools we use to teach language should provide more than skills practice.

My research is an analysis of entry level ESL textbooks used in adult education programs in the San Bernardino area. As textbooks constitute a main element in the second language classroom, I believe they should reflect current knowledge of second language acquisition
and second language pedagogy, based upon research in these fields. Nunan (1999), Savignon (1987) and Richards (1998) all state that textbooks have changed dramatically since the 1970's to reflect current beliefs about language teaching. I believe my research will indicate that they still have much room for growth.

Overview of Thesis

My thesis consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, I present the problem: it appears that a noticeable discrepancy exists between theory and practice in ESL textbooks. I also give a brief historical background of the development of language arts textbooks in the United States. I follow this with a discussion of what may be considered some of the most important changes in teaching philosophies over the past few decades: communicative competence, whole language, and critical literacy. I then explain how those three movements all fit under the umbrella of constructivism, and what that means.

In chapter two I provide a literature review of the perceived discrepancy between second language learning theories and ESL textbook practices. The majority of the
little research conducted on ESL textbooks has focused on the lack of authenticity in textbook dialogues. The studies I include in my review compare textbook dialogues with real life dialogues, and find the former very different from the latter.

Chapter three presents my own analysis of ESL textbooks from a constructivist perspective. Specifically, I apply the guidelines of a model of literacy proposed by H. Gorden Wells (1987) to five entry-level ESL textbooks used in local adult ESL classes, in order to evaluate how well textbooks reflect constructivist principles. Wells proposes that students in an educational program should participate in topic selection; activities should be meaningful, communicative and promote critical thinking; and students should use prior knowledge and experience to construct their social identity through narrative.

In chapter four, I discuss the findings of my research, and further explain the importance of some of the guidelines Wells (1987) proposes, including the need for including narrative in ESL curriculum. Based on my analysis of current textbooks and my understanding of a
constructivist curriculum, I propose a possible unit for
textbooks with a variety of activities that adhere to
constructivist ideals and to the same guidelines I use to
evaluate other texts. However, in order to determine what
lies ahead, it is important first to reflect on the past
and the present.

Introduction to the Study

Byrnes (1988) said that "no matter what the lofty
discussion in language acquisition research or foreign
language pedagogy, reality is found in the classroom. And
a good part of reality can be ascertained by a look at
textbooks" (p. 29). Raimes (1993) adds that in order to
determine what we know as well as what we do we should
begin by "scrutinizing our textbooks, our professional
literature, and our classroom practices" (p. 537). In
this thesis, I focus on two of these three areas,
specifically professional literature, and textbooks. The
literature I discuss includes a focus on constructivism,
which encapsulates the themes of my textbook analysis.
However, it should be remembered that classroom practices
do in fact drive textbook production; that textbooks are
written to meet the perceived demands of the practitioners using them (Byrnes, 1988; VanPatten, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

This project began in the summer of 1998 with a visit to a local ESL classroom. I watched as 20 Hispanic students stood and read aloud to each other from their textbooks: "My brother and I look very different. I have brown eyes and he has blue eyes. We both have brown hair, but I have short, curly hair." I could see for myself that most of them had black hair, some very long and straight, and I doubted that each of them had blue-eyed brothers. The activity bothered me because I considered it to be fake. I had recently read research on how the brain most readily assimilates information that is relevant and interesting to the learner (Caine & Caine, 1991), and I could not see how this activity sparked any interest in the learners. Two weeks later I was in charge of the class and the director gave me a copy of the textbook they used. After a brief perusal, I doubted that I could effectively teach my students to communicate from that text.
The next several teaching opportunities I had repeated the same scenario: it did not matter whether I was teaching ESL to immigrants, EFL to businessmen, or English composition to international students; I found the existing textbooks lacking a crucial element: creativity. I believe the purpose of language classes is to help students learn how to create with the language, to express themselves, to communicate effectively with other speakers of that language. Yet as I attempted to explain my frustration, I could never put my finger on what it was exactly that bothered me. I struggled to explain that the activities were not realistic or authentic. I was asked to define real and explain authenticity. I said they were not meaningful or relevant, and I was asked how I knew that. I finally said, "They're boring!" and I was told, "Perhaps, but they are effective," which led me to question, "How effective are ESL textbooks?" To begin to answer this question, I should begin with both the purpose and background of textbooks in general.

**Purpose of Textbooks**

Program administrators like having textbooks because they provide program consistency. The larger the program,
the more important it is to have consistency. With a single textbook, administrators know that every class will cover the same materials, and every student will exit a class with more or less the same level of proficiency. Such uniformity, however, does not take into account the individual personalities of a class, or the individual learning needs of the students or teachers.

Teachers like having textbooks for a variety of reasons. Primarily, textbooks reduce the workload of coming up with original lesson ideas and activities on a daily basis. Teaching can be a very time consuming job, and there is certainly no need to reinvent the wheel of planning curriculum if someone else has already done it. Teachers expect that textbooks will assist them in teaching in an accepted pedagogical manner, by providing information in a logical order, and offering an appropriate amount of instructional support and engaging activities to practice the instructional point. Most teachers would not expect the textbook to provide the entire program, simply to serve as a foundation which they can augment to fit their own teaching styles, and the individual needs of the students.
Students also have expectations of textbooks, although they may not realize it. They expect textbooks to provide interesting information and stimulating activities in a visually appealing format. They expect textbooks to be reasonably priced. Additionally (like teachers) they expect textbooks to assist them in learning the material.

In general, all of these expectations are rather superficial. If we merely expect our textbooks to provide a standardized program, with explanations and exercises in an attractive yet affordable package, then the texts that are currently being used are in fact effective. However, I believe that textbooks should offer much more. Nevertheless, before I continue with my expectations of textbooks, I will briefly explain the history of language arts textbooks in the United States.

The Laws of Learning

Using textbooks to facilitate learning is certainly nothing new. In the U.S., textbooks have evolved to support public opinion on what should be taught in schools, and how it should be taught. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reading textbooks
for school children included primarily Bible verses, with the goal of teaching children to resist temptations (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman & Murphy, 1988). By 1897 textbooks had become a $7,400,000 business, which grew to $17,275,000 in 1913 and $131,000,000 by the end of World War II (Luke, 1988).

A combination of the success of the industrial revolution, and scientific studies in both psychology and behavior led Americans to believe that the most efficient way to learn was to break the desired end result down into a sequence of smaller (more manageable) skills. After the learner mastered one skill (with greater speed and fewer errors) they could move onto the next, until they had completed a given sequence and would have a perfect end result (a competent reader, a civic-minded citizen, etc.) (Luke, 1988). Schools were seen as the factory to which children were sent (for protection from child labor or parental indulgences) and textbooks were the scientifically designed machinery that would carefully control the amount and rate at which students learned (Goodman, et al, 1988; Luke, 1988). Adult education (night schools) did not have as firm of a purpose, but
mostly because the strongest advocates of education at the time did not see as much potential for adult students as they did for young learners.\textsuperscript{1} Adult education did, however, follow the same model of children's education, both in purpose and in the style of curriculum used.

One of the most powerful voices in educational curriculum formation during the first part of the twentieth century was Edward Thorndike. He was a psychologist at Teachers College, Columbia University, and his studies on behavior, learning, and intelligence had an indelible effect on the education system, especially in the areas of textbook creation and language arts testing. Based upon a battery of tests measuring learning behaviors

\textsuperscript{1} Thorndike (1928) states that, "Men and women of the dull half of the population will not at any age learn after the fashion of high-school pupils, who are almost without exception from the bright half. Individuals in this country who leave school to go to work at fourteen are in general much duller than those of the same community who leave at later ages" (178). He goes on to state that those who return to school as adults are probably "much brighter" than those who do not, and that immigrants who are willing to attend night school are probably above average for their race (178). Thorndike basically believed that adult education was for the high-end of the "dull half" of the population.
done by himself and others,\textsuperscript{2} Thorndike proposed certain Laws of Learning:

1. Learning is ordered, and efficient learning follows one best sequence.
2. Practice strengthens the bond between stimulus and response.
4. The learning of a particular stimulus-response connection should be tested under separate but identical conditions in which it was learned (Goodman, et al., 1988, p. 12).

This set of beliefs became the foundation for educational and textbook standards in the United States. The most noticeable changes in textbooks took place in literacy instruction texts. Traditional folk tales and stories of adventure, historical figures and progress were replaced with carefully chosen vocabulary lists (based upon frequency counts) which became the center of stories whose sole purpose was to introduce and reinforce that specific vocabulary (Luke, 1988). The main purpose of this style

\textsuperscript{2} Tests included, among other things, repetitively throwing shot into a glass, juggling, adding columns of double-digit numbers, typing with/without looking at the keys, and practicing penmanship using the writer's weak hand (Thorndike 1928).
of literacy instruction was to help learners avoid errors. Thorndike (1928) believed that time spent "unlearning errors is a most wasteful form of learning" (p. 183). Practice would make perfect, and testing was not designed to see what students had learned, but to insure that errors had been eradicated.

It is imperative to recognize that this foundation for reading instruction in the early part of the twentieth century became a model for virtually all language arts textbooks: adult literacy, foreign language and ESL textbooks included. Thorndike's philosophy also remains at the core of standard pedagogical sequencing practices which carefully control the order in which items are introduced and protectively simplify language input in textbooks.

English as a Second Language Textbooks

The history of textbooks designed for ESL instruction is much shorter than that of first language literacy texts for children. While children's literacy textbooks date back to the revolutionary war, it was not until shortly after World War II that the U.S. began to take seriously the need to teach English to immigrants, and the first ESL
textbooks began to appear. The topics of those first books are basically the same as those in today's textbooks: getting a job, going to the doctor, going to the store, etc. (T. Carver, personal communication, August 7, 2001). The format of the textbooks followed the already accepted pedagogical practices found in literacy texts, with carefully controlled input (vocabulary, level of difficulty) and skills exercises guiding students from small to large (i.e. from words to sentences to paragraphs). Again, the emphasis was on avoiding errors that might become ingrained in the student's language, and focused on the surface aspects of the language.

Shuy (1981) describes the surface aspects of language as those which are "visible and countable," which refers to grammatical forms, phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. These aspects comprised the main elements of the first ESL textbooks in the U.S., and they continue to facilitate standardized testing on items such as knowledge of the parts of speech, verb conjugations, and vocabulary. Shuy (1981) says that although research indicates language is best learned by going from deep structure to surface structure, "for reasons unclear and almost
comprehensible, we have developed a tradition of
teaching reading, writing, and foreign language which goes
just the opposite direction—from surface to deep, from
form to function, from part to whole” (p. 107). Deep
structure items are much more difficult to see and
evaluate. They include "those aspects which deal with
meaning relationships (semantics), language use
(pragmatics) and text structure (cohesion)” (Shuy, 1981,
p. 104). He goes on to say that language learning
naturally progresses from function to form. For example,
the phrase, "I go to the bathroom" certainly lacks correctness in
form yet functions quite well foremost toddlers wishing to negotiate meaning with the language. Shuy (1981) from
describes the function of negotiating with the language as
the deep structure and the correct form as the surface
structure of the language. These aspects which deal with
mean propositions ESL textbooks focused predominantly on
surface structure items; however, research on second language learning indicates that this may not be the ideal
manner to teach a second language. For example,
the phrase, "I go to the bathroom" loses correctness if
not, yet functions well with bridging students wanting to negotiate meaning with the language. Shuy (1981)
describes the function of negotiating with the language as
the deep structure and the correct form as the surface
structure.
Recent Developments in Second Language Teaching

In the 1970's, beliefs about second language learning and teaching changed significantly. In this section I discuss a few of what may be considered the most important changes in language teaching philosophies over the past few decades: communicative competence, whole language and critical literacy. Advocates of communicative competence state that students should be able to do something with the language; that it is not sufficient to know about the language, or merely be able to memorize chunks of language, but that they must be able to create with the language, and be able to negotiate meaning. Additionally, communicative language teaching asserts that language is learned through experiencing language use. Whole language advocates argue that not only must students be able to do something with the language, but that it must be done in meaningful activities. Students should not merely be doing activities in the classroom simply to practice "doing something" with the language. Their activities should have a purpose that extends beyond the walls of the classroom, and connect with the lives and interests of the students. Critical literacy activists claim that even
this is not enough: each student should be taught that as they acquire new language skills, they should question their role and improve their status in society. Critical literacy includes the practice of problem posing and the concept of empowerment. All three models encompass the constructivist ideology of the "rejection of traditional transmission-oriented views of learning, as well as behaviorist models of learning" (Reagan, 1999, p. 414), prevalent in the history of language teaching and language textbooks, and each deserves a closer look.

**Communicative Competence**

In 1972 Dell Hymes suggested the term "communicative competence" meaning knowledge of rules for understanding and producing the language, as well as an understanding of appropriate language use within different social contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980). In other words, the speaker must have more than grammatical knowledge to communicate competently; a perfectly grammatical statement may be socially unacceptable. For example, if a student is asked what their new teacher is like, "Oh, she's very ugly!" is a grammatically correct yet socially inappropriate response. Christina Paulston (1974) adds that,
"Communicative competence is not simply a term; it is a concept basic to understanding social interaction" (p. 349). As such, it is important that language teaching include the social function of the language in addition to the grammatical one.

In relation to language learners, Shuy (1981) says:
Research shows that good language learners begin with a function, a need to get something done with language, and move gradually toward acquiring the forms which reveal the function. They learn holistically, not by isolated skills. Such learners worry more about getting things done with language that with the surface correctness of it. (p. 106)

In other words, without instruction, language learners do not begin with small parts of the language, mastering each one before moving on to a more complicated skill. They start with a need to communicate something (Me Tarzan, you Jane) and later work to fill in the correct forms (Hi, I am Tarzan. Nice to meet you, Jane). It is this need to communicate that drives language use.
In 1980, Canale and Swain wrote a seminal article, defining what they believed to be the guiding principles for a communicative approach to language teaching, and asserted that communicative competence should minimally include competencies in the following categories: grammatical (concerned with the rules of sentence level grammar and semantics), sociolinguistic (rules for determining social meaning and appropriateness of utterances at both the sentence and discourse levels), and strategic (strategies, both verbal and non-verbal, used to compensate for lack of grammatical and sociolinguistic competencies) (Canale & Swain, 1981).

One of the main characteristics of communicative language teaching (CLT) is the belief that students learn the structure of the language by creating (albeit imperfect) dialogues, rather than by memorizing perfectly structured sentences. The main theory that underlies such teaching practices is that activities that involve real communication and are meaningful to the learner promote language acquisition (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), unlike traditional drills, in which teachers ask questions to

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3 Citation from a 1981 revision of the article.
which they already know the answer. According to Canale and Swain (1981), communication requires interaction, and should "involve unpredictability and creativity, take place in a discourse and sociocultural context, ... involve use of authentic (as opposed to textbook contrived) language, and be judged as successful or not on the basis of behavioral outcomes" (p. 32).

In its weakest sense, communication in the ESL classroom is understood to include any grammatically correct form of asking and answering questions, or making statements, such as "What color is your hair?" "My hair is brown." Most proponents of CLT, however, would argue that the above dialogue is not communicative, as there is no transfer of knowledge. If one student can determine the color of hair and clothing of the other by merely looking, then there is no need to ask for the information. A radical view would go so far as to say that, even asking unknown information, for example, "What is your father's name?," it is still not communicative in nature, as the students are asking questions they (usually) have not made up, and they receive an answer "that makes no difference to them whatsoever" (Raimes, 1983, p. 542).
In between these two extreme definitions of communication lies the concept of communication as bridging an "information gap." According to Liao Xiaoqing (1997), "Communication occurs when the receiver does not already know the information in the sender's message. In other words, there is an information gap, which is filled by the message" (p. 1). This information gap requires that the person asking the question be seeking unknown information, otherwise the message is neither meaningful nor communicative in nature (Kramsch, 1987).

**Whole Language**

In the late 1980's and early 1990's the idea began to grow that language should be taught as a whole rather than being broken down into separate topics (grammar, vocabulary lists, etc.), because "if language isn't kept whole, it isn't language anymore" (Rigg, 1991, p. 522). While this movement began with teaching reading to L1 English children, it greatly influenced adult ESL instruction.

Many of the tenets of whole language are similar to those of communicative language teaching. For example, according to Rigg (1991), some of the main principles of
whole language teaching as they relate to second language instruction are: 1) The belief that knowledge is socially constructed, meaning there is no right or wrong answer, either in the text or the teacher. 2) The major purpose of language is the creation and communication of meaning. We use language first to think, then to create and communicate our ideas with others. 3) Language is always used purposefully. While this last principle seems so obvious it doesn't warrant mention, the implications are important: "whole language curriculum demands that language functions always be authentic, always be meaningful" (p. 524). For example, apologies are a function commonly practiced in ESL classrooms, although the students are not really apologizing to anyone for anything. Rigg states that whole language teaching requires that the situation be authentic in which there is a "real" need to make an apology. She defines real activities as those:

relevant to students' interests, lives and communities. Activities designed to practice behaviors or skills that will someday be needed are not considered real under this model: Why ask
students to engage in practice runs when they could be working on something immediately and directly relevant? (p. 524).

Whole language also insists that writing be real (Rigg, 1991). In the classroom, students decide what and to whom they write. They select their own topics and purposes for writing. Consequently, each student in the class may be working on a different project in which they are expressing themselves through the language. Audience is very important in whole language writing, as also it is in speaking.

Just as CLT emphasizes the importance of understanding appropriate language use within different social contexts, whole language teaching reminds students that language is both socially constructed and used in social contexts. Often, what is said is determined by who is saying it, to whom are they speaking, where and why it is being said. Students are encouraged to consider not only the purpose of the message, but also social relationships between speaker and hearer, and the setting in which the message will be delivered. Again, the focus of language instruction is on the purpose of language use,
which is to effectively communicate ideas. During the 1980's, in addition to changing the way we viewed language, we began to question how we defined literacy.

**Literacy--Critical versus Functional**

Although the term "literacy" has a wide range of meanings, the most basic level of literacy is usually defined as *functional*. It is termed 'functional' because the purpose of teaching these literacy skills is to "equip adults with just sufficient competence to operate at the 'lowest levels of mechanical performance' in order to manage the external demands of a print-dominated culture" (Webster, Caddick & Reed, 1999). Webster, Caddick and Reed go on to say that a functionally literate person is able to perform basic societal tasks such as reading signs, posters, maps, directions; can enter basic economic exchanges involving currency, numerical operations, credit transactions and taxation; and has increased access to some everyday services, information sources and vocational opportunities. However, functional literacy merely "equips the person to respond to outside demands, to understand and to follow [orders]. There is no suggestion here of leading, commanding, mastering or controlling"
(Lankshear, quoted in Webster, Caddick & Reed, 1999, p. 50). Consequently, students need more from a literacy program than functional literacy.

Critical literacy recognizes that simply "being literate" does not guarantee success in society (Peirce, 1987). One aspect of critical literacy in the ESL classroom that moves students beyond functional literacy is that of problem posing. Auerbach and Burgess (1985) discuss the importance of problem posing in the ESL classroom, as opposed to problem solving, where students are simply told what they should or should not do. Problem posing does not solve problems for students, but rather invites them to take control of their own lives and discuss possible solutions for their own problems.

**Problem Posing.** Based on the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, the problem posing model appears well suited for adult ESL instruction (Wallerstein, 1983). Freire developed his curriculum to teach literacy. He worked to change what he called the students' "fatalistic attitude" that they could never effect change in their own lives. He encouraged them to analyze why their lives were the way they were, to question why some lived better, and
to discuss what they could do to improve their lives (Wallerstein, 1983). During the process of developing a critical view of their lives, students also worked to become literate in order to better their position.

While Freire developed this curriculum specifically for L1 literacy, some have pointed to the similarities between L1 and L2 student populations, and advocated that Freire's approach is in fact extremely relevant to ESL instruction, especially among adult immigrant students (Frye, 1999; Rivera, 1999). Wallerstein (1983) points out that, like the population Freire worked with, many ESL students come from a low socio-economic background and some have experienced little formal education. Often students are struggling with low L1 literacy levels and trying to learn English simultaneously. "The problem-posing approach takes these conflicts--the difficulties students have in living in the U.S., their feelings of vulnerability, and their desire to learn English while maintaining their own culture--as the center of the curriculum" (Wallerstein, 1983, p. 10). Not only is the curriculum a source of language learning, it helps students make the connection between the ESL classroom and
the English speaking community, essentially empowering them by giving them a voice.

**Empowerment.** Some refer to the ability to make one's self heard as "becoming literate" while others call it "empowerment." Clark (quoted in Brown, 1991) defined empowerment as "the process by which individuals gain a measure of control over their lives" (Brown, 1991, p. 249). Wallerstein (1983) states, "For ESL students, learning English can begin the process of gaining control over their lives; getting a job; having access to needed services" (p. 8). Of course, empowerment can be defined in a variety of ways. According to one textbook author/editor, "empowerment comes in the form of slowly gaining the tools to use a language" (H.D. Brown, personal communication). However, I define empowerment not as having the tools to use the language, but as the ability to use the language as a tool.

**Empowerment through Curriculum.** Curriculum holds an important place in ESL instruction, and textbooks should, at the very least, assist in preparing students to communicate effectively with the language in the target language community. Furthermore, as language teaching
professionals, we are "commissioned to empower learners--politically, economically, socially, and morally--to become critical thinkers, equipped with problem-solving strategies, poised to challenge those forces in society that would keep them passive" (Brown, 1991, p. 248). In this respect, the role of textbooks should be not only to teach the language, but also to help learners develop a voice and discover the social power of using the language to make themselves heard. When learners begin to use the language as a tool to achieve a specific purpose, they are in fact constructing their own knowledge.

**Constructivism**

While each of the preceding movements in language instruction have their own individual features, all fit within a constructivist ideology. I now attempt to explain constructivism, first as it relates to learning in general, then, more specifically as it relates to second language learning.

**Constructivism Defined**

Constructivism is a theory about how knowledge is constructed; therefore, is not so much a belief about teaching, but rather about learning (Reagan, 1999;
Theobald & Curtiss, 2000). "As an epistemology [theory of knowledge], constructivism, in essence, entails the rejection of traditional transmission-oriented views of learning, as well as behaviorist models of learning. Instead, emphasis is placed on the individual learner's construction of his or her knowledge" (Reagan, 1999, p. 414).

According to Theobald and Curtiss (2000), constructivist educators stress the importance of using students' background knowledge and previous experiences to foster learning. They believe that students learn best when they apply their knowledge toward solving authentic problems in real contexts. Additionally, education should engage learners in "sense-making"; in other words, it should strive for deep understanding of core ideas rather than simply the recollection of facts, so that students can understand not only the what, but also the why. Finally, constructivists emphasize the importance of dialogue and interaction to learning (pp. 107-108).

Constructivism also recognizes that the learning process is active, and that learning is collaborative in nature (Reagan, 1999). "Learners learn by doing with the
help of peers and experts" (VanPatten, 1997, p. 3). The ideas of constructivism do not relate exclusively to language instruction, but rather to many disciplines. Therefore, I will explain how they relate specifically to the field of second language learning.

Constructivism as it Relates to Second Language Learning

Constructivism breaks away from the traditional style of second language instruction by focusing on language meaning. The focus lies in using language, not in learning about it. The ideals of constructivism in language arts instruction contrast with a reductionist view of learning namely that "behavior [language] must be reduced to its most elementary parts before these parts can be combined to understand more complex behavior [language]" (Shuy, 1981, p.102).

Some of the most important components of constructivism as they relate to second language instruction are: student autonomy, focus on meaning, critical thinking, cooperative learning and teachers as co-learners (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). Student autonomy emphasizes learners' construction of knowledge by actively
involving them in choosing what to learn, rather than treating them as passive recipients of knowledge. With respect to focus on meaning, research indicates that "people learn by chunking new information with existing knowledge and that meaning plays a key role in forming those chunks" (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001, p.7). When instructors focus on meaning rather than the form of the language, they are doing more than simply "looking at the bigger picture"; they are helping students to use their background knowledge to learn the new language. Critical thinking is an element crucial to encouraging students to find their own solutions to problems, and to make sense of their lives in a new language. Cooperative learning activities help learners realize the potential they have to find solutions to problems in the classroom, to help others, and to learn how to ask for help. Working together on activities helps to establish trust between learners and to dispel the feeling language learners often have that they are alone in their struggles. It is also important to see teachers as co-learners. This removes the expectation that the teacher is the expert with all
the answers, but rather that teachers and students work together to make knowledge.

It is important to recognize that constructivism is not about the activities that take place in the classroom, but rather the purpose behind the activities. In order for students to be able to make connections between the material and the "real world" i.e. what takes place outside of the classroom, teachers themselves must look for and see those connections. In a second-language constructivist classroom teachers must see language, not as an end in itself, but rather as a tool for expression.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the historical background of language arts textbooks in the U.S., and discussed three major shifts in SLA theory that have taken place over the past several decades, specifically communicative competence, whole language, and critical literacy, which includes a problem-posing methodology, and the belief in student empowerment. Each of these changes fit under the umbrella of constructivism, a radical departure from traditional, behavioristic methodologies, which gives creative power to the language learners. In
the next chapter, I discuss what prior research has already been done on ESL textbooks, in order to establish the importance of analyzing textbooks and to determine where more research is needed.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON TEXTBOOKS

Introduction

VanPatten (1998) states, "With regard to pedagogy, the tremendous gap that exists between theory (supported by research) and practice is a real concern" (p. 931). In this chapter, I provide a literature review of the perceived discrepancy between theory and practice in ESL textbooks. Within the little research that has been conducted on ESL textbooks, the primary focus has been on the lack of authenticity in textbook dialogues. The studies I include in my review compare textbook dialogues with real life dialogues, and find the former very different from the latter.

Limitations of the Study

While my research is a study of ESL textbooks to determine how well they reflect constructivist theories of language learning, my review of the literature is somewhat limited by the lack of similar research. That is not to say that ESL textbooks have not been analyzed in the past,
but rather that the research that has been done has focused on different issues.

Prior Research

Among others, some of the studies that have been done on ESL textbooks include: sexism in textbooks (Renner, 1997), expressing doubt and certainty (Holmes, 1988), business language used in meetings (Williams, 1988), authenticity in transactional dialogues (making purchases) (Taborn, 1983), answers to "yes/no" questions (Richards, 1977), authenticity in making requests (Meyers-Scotton & Bernsten, 1988; Schmidt, 1994), authenticity in doctor/patient exams (Cathcart, 1989), roles of reading/writing in literacy texts (McGroarty & Scott, 1993), and the hidden agenda in ESL/adult basic education curriculum (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Katz, 2000; Sandlin, 2000). One of the most recurring themes in prior research is that of authenticity (or the lack thereof) in ESL textbooks. Although this is not the specific focus of my own research, it seems to be the most closely related to the ideals of constructivism, and to the guidelines I use in my own textbook analysis.
Why Evaluate Textbooks?

The importance of studying textbooks lies in the fact that they not only constitute a major part of the instructional practice, but also their production is geared to follow the perceived demands of the market (i.e., what the teachers and administrators want) (Byrnes, 1988; VanPatten, 1998). Textbook authors attempt to include the most popular recent research findings, all the while producing texts that adhere to the expectations of the teachers who will be using them.

Considering the effects that research has had on our understanding of learning and teaching over the past several decades, there are some basic common beliefs that we should expect to find in current textbooks:

- Learning is experiential; therefore, communication should be authentic in nature.
- Curriculum should center around the interests and needs of the students.
- As learning is not passive, neither are learners. They bring a wealth of background knowledge and experiences, and textbook activities should tap into that prior knowledge.
Consequently, the studies I examine in detail are those which deal with these ideas. Savignon (1987) stated that the new theories for language learning, along with "demands of learners and program sponsors for curricula that address real-life communicative needs, led to many initiatives in teaching materials" (p. 237). Nunan (1999) also stated that during the 1970's "a much richer conceptualization of language began to emerge. Language was seen as a system for the expression of meaning." He noted that this realization had "a profound effect at the levels of syllabus design and textbook writing" (p. 9). Both Nunan and Savignon indicate that today's textbooks are much more effective at teaching communication than they were in the past.

**Signs of Progress**

Some of the most obvious changes that have taken place in ESL textbooks are visual. Today's textbooks are more visually appealing than were those in the past. They are filled with colorful artwork, and as each company produces newer versions of already published textbooks, we can see technological advances portrayed in the text: classrooms and offices have computers and students have
cellular phones and CD players. Textbook publishers have also worked hard to show greater respect for diversity in gender, ethnicity, and physical appearances of characters, and some have included characters with disabilities. Possibly more important than the visual aspect of the books has been the type of changes made in the textbook activities. In order to promote communicative language teaching, students are now given opportunities to practice language in pair work and group work within the text's activities. But are these changes enough? Many would argue that these changes are merely superficial, and the real problem with textbooks lies much deeper.

Authenticity in Second Language Textbook Dialogues

Although the definition of authentic materials in the classroom has been the source of much debate, it is also the most commonly studied aspect of textbooks, specifically in relation to dialogues. ESL textbooks typically have a large number of model dialogues to help students to practice speaking. Many studies have been done (especially during the late 1980's) comparing textbook dialogues with real conversations recorded in the
same settings. One such study was of transactional dialogues (conversations between customers and salespeople) in which Taborn (1983) argues that "our textbook dialogues...in many cases are totally valueless as reflections of what people really say in such circumstances" (p. 208). This complaint has resonated throughout many studies.

**Asking Directions**

In 1988, Myers-Scotten and Bernsten did a study on two types of conversational exchanges, one of which was asking for directions. Direction giving is considered a "conventionalized" exchange, meaning that there is a socially constructed pattern that is followed by members within the speech community. As with greetings, introductions, and other such conventional exchanges, the format is highly predictable, so that the exchange only becomes noticeable (or "marked") when someone fails to produce the expected response.

The direction askers in the study were both male and female, two were of average university age and appearance, two were middle aged (35-40) one day dressed in a suit, and another in casual attire, carrying a backpack. The
purpose of the study was two-fold: first to determine if visual attributes of gender, age and attire would alter the manner in which directions were given, and second to compare the tape recorded dialogues with ESL textbook dialogues.

A total of 216 samples were gathered from one location at Michigan State University, by asking the same question of 100 female and 116 male students picked at random: "How do I get to the Vet Clinic from here?" The results indicated that there is a uniform structure to giving directions, which remains unchanged by the age/gender or apparent social status of the recipient, and that authentic dialogues are distinctly different than those found in ESL textbook dialogues.

Meyers-Scotten and Bernsten (1988) point out that most textbook dialogues contain three elements: a request for directions, the directions, and a statement of thanks from the direction seeker. However, as their study demonstrates, the exchange is more complex than this three-part dialogue. First, direction seekers were instructed to follow the textbook model and remain silent during the giving of instructions, but this was not
possible, as the students giving directions would invariably stop at certain junctures to insure that the listener understood. "These confirmation checks included a pause preceded by a non-falling intonation, or rising intonation on a directive, as in "And then go right and get to Shaw?" (p. 377). Additional conversational elements not included in textbook dialogues that take place during the direction giving are in the form of "fillers" such as "uh" or "okay," as well as ellipses, incomplete sentences, and what appears to be a final confirmation check after the directions have been given. Additionally important is the fact that authentic directions are not exclusively bald imperatives ("Go straight two blocks. Turn left on Wilson."), as commonly found in textbooks, and in fact only constituted 41% of the total directions recorded during the study (p. 378).

The findings of the study indicate that the authentic directions are both more complex in structure (e.g. confirmation checks, incomplete sentences) and more interactional (e.g. number of turns taken) than those written for language learners in textbooks. The authors suggest that in order for textbooks to impart this skill
to students, writers should rely not on their own instincts but rather on authentic dialogues.

**Doctor's Office Conversations**

In a similar study, Larimer-Cathcart (1989) conducted a study of tape recorded conversations occurring in both a pediatrician's office and a women's clinic. The conversations were qualitatively examined for several items: topics, functions of utterances (eliciting/giving information), grammatical structures (verb forms, question forms and complex sentences) and content words (nouns and verbs that carry most of the meaning). Based on the research she argues that such classroom models should be based on authentic discourse (i.e. real conversations).

One of the least surprising elements of the data was that the doctors typically controlled the conversation, as well as shifts in topic (for example, from examination to diagnosis to prescription). As Larimer-Cathcart (1988) points out, taking control of the doctor-patient conversation is not traditional, even for native speakers. However, she adds that, as native speakers are becoming more comfortable demanding explanations from their doctors, ESL learners need to be aware of the trend as
well as their rights as consumers. Unfortunately, this is not reflected in current textbooks.

Typically, textbook dialogues use the conversation with the doctor to introduce and practice modal verbs (e.g. should, would, may). Larimer-Cathcart (1988) considers this type of dialogue to be "thinly veiled excuses for the presentation of a grammar point" (p. 105). She cites a textbook example:

Patient: Is there anything else I should do?
Doctor: Yes. You should drink a lot of liquids and get lots of rest. (Rost & Stratton, cited in Larimer-Cathcart, p.105).

However, during the real-life exams, the doctor did not use modals to give advice, but rather as hedges ("I would have to suspect..."; "She may have picked up..."; "It should fade away...") (Larimer-Cathcart, p. 117). Like Taborn (1983), Larimer-Cathcart (1988) argues that in order to understand how our language functions, textbook authors need to study actual dialogues, rather than rely on intuition. She also suggests that such research should be based not on what instructors and researchers think is
important for learners, but situations that the learners
themselves feel are valuable and useful.

Cultivating Genuine Interest

In the early 1900's John Dewey studied the connection
between students and materials. According to Pierson
(1999), Dewey found that "when a subject to be learned has
no personal meaning for the student, the [student] quickly
loses motivation to learn. On the other hand, within
curricula that cultivate genuine interest, there is no
separation between the self, the material, and the
learning activity in which the individual is engaged"
(Pierson, 1999, p. 309). Student interest in materials is
not strictly limited to the topics chosen, but also the
manner in which they are presented. A huge part of
textbook presentation is in the activities students are
asked to do with the topic material.

Surface-Level Communication

Raimes (1983) did a study on ESL textbooks and found
that many texts "still divide and sequence the language
into grammatical structures (and) deal with the anomaly of
"What about real language use?" by turning to functions"
(e.g., asking questions, apologizing, complimenting,
reporting, giving directions, or making requests) (p. 541). One text, with the second edition published in 1980, kept 20 of the lessons from the 1973 version, merely adding a function to the existing grammatical focus of each chapter. She also summarizes research done by Long and Sato (1983) which determined that "display questions" ("Is the clock on the wall?"), which are virtually unknown outside of the classroom, are still predominant, and that merely 14% of the questions instructors ask actually fill an information gap (Raimes, 1983, p. 543).

Likewise, Auerbach and Burgess (1985) found many of the dialogue models, as well as conversation activities for students use "display questioning." They give the following example:


In essence, these activities are no different from the traditional activity of the teacher asking, "Where is the book?" to which the students reply, "On the table" and are corrected into saying, "The book is on the table." This activity is very different than asking a student,
"Where is your book?" (because it is not on your desk, as it should be) to which the student replies, "Uhmm, at home.," in which the purpose is not to practice a specific form, but to elicit information (and pass judgment on the content rather than the form of the student's response). Gaies (1983) defines display questioning as the following: "classroom questions [that] typically aim at having learners display knowledge of material covered in class rather than eliciting referential or expressive information unknown to the teacher" (p. 208). Auerbach and Burgess (1985) found this type of questioning frequent in textbooks. Textbook authors claim that because the students are asking each other these questions (rather than being asked by the teacher) that they are participating in communicative activities. This is, however, a misnomer, as the activity neither involves unpredictability nor requires creativity on the part of the participants. Because it is communicative only at the surface level, it is doubtful that it cultivates genuine student interest.

Shuy (1981) states that most language instruction tends to focus on surface level aspects. "The fields of
language and literacy have focused their instructional materials and testing content primarily on coding skills" (p. 104). In language instruction, coding skills refer to vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. He explains that the opposite of constructivism is reductionism. The reductionist argument is that "behavior must be reduced to its most elementary parts before those parts can be combined to understand more complex behavior" (Shuy, 1981, p. 104). He goes on to say, "The underlying learning theory, seldom recognized but present here nonetheless, is that learners learn best small things before large things and that by taking natural language apart and by cutting it into little pieces, the learner can best benefit" (p. 105). This is the opposite of what research indicates about the natural direction of language learning, which goes from deep structure to surface, or from the function (getting something done) to form (surface correctness). (Shuy, 1981). This insistence on focusing on the surface details of the language, rather than the deep structure serves to keep learners passive (and likely uninterested), because the power of literacy is in the being able to derive meaning from the context (Scribner and Cole, 1978).
Looking Below the Surface

Students take a genuine interest in the reality in which they live. In a thought-provoking article, Auerbach and Burgess (1985) examine the manner in which ESL "survival" textbooks present material, questioning how situationally and communicatively realistic they are. Addressing "situational reality" means taking into account the conditions of the immigrant learner population and portraying their lifestyles accurately in the textbook. In order to determine this, they ask to what degree the content presented reflects what adult ESL students actually encounter outside the classroom, and to what degree language forms in the textbook replicate the types of language interaction which take place in the outside world.

Auerbach and Burgess (1985) found that often dialogues (especially in lower level texts) are oversimplified to the point of being misleading. They cite the following textbook dialogue:

A. How can I get a loan?
B. Why do you want the money?
A. To buy a car
B. How much money do you need?
A. $2,000.

B. Please fill out this application.
A. When do I get the money?

This is not a good reflection of the difficult process of securing funds from any type of lending institution. It does not acknowledge the difficulty of qualifying for a loan, and leads the student to believe that simply filling out an application guarantees funding.

In relation to health, housing, and work issues in the textbooks, often what is omitted is as important as what is included in the texts (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985). Segments on health care in textbooks deal with making appointments, describing symptoms and filling out simplified forms; however, "failure to address such factors as crowded clinics, long waits, unhealthy living or working conditions, high costs, and communication problems neither prepares students for what they might encounter nor legitimates these experiences when students encounter them" (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 480).
Students are genuinely interested in the reality in which they live. Because textbooks ignore such issues, when the students are faced with reality, they may believe that the difficulties are due to their own inadequacies (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Wallerstein, 1983).

In analyzing units on housing, Auerbach and Burgess (1985) found that they usually include looking for and renting an apartment, describing problems to the landlord, and tenants' responsibilities. Learners are told that they should be quiet, keep the apartment clean, and talk to the landlord if they have any problems (Walsh, 1984, cited in Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 481). Dialogues are often based on a middle class perspective: "The kitchen has a new sink and stove...The bedroom has a beautiful river view [There are] three closets and a linen closet. The bathroom is very modern ..." (Freeman, 1982, cited in Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 481). The authors contrast these textbook views with an excerpt from a story from the Boston Globe about housing problems of Indo-Chinese refugees:

"We buy the diapers, the Huggies," LeSuong was saying. "In the cold, they are good to
stuff in the cracks by the window."

"But it's not the cold that is the biggest problem," Nguyen Van Sau said. "It's getting someone to come when things get broke, when the ceiling cracks or when people get scared of a fire like there was at number 4.

"We call, 10, 15 times and nobody comes. All I want is them to clean and make the rats go so children will not be near them," he said.

"I tell them once about a rat and the man, he say to eat it." Sing Ha, 9, said. He laugh and say we eat dogs so we can eat rats too."


The obvious contrast between the reality that students may face, and the examples given in the textbooks perfectly illustrates the gap that Dewey (see Pierson, 1999) described between the materials and the students. Such a distance affects the interest and motivation of students, and consequently the quality of learning that takes place.

In the same manner as the units on housing, Auerbach and Burgess (1985) demonstrate how units on work often "promote the view that finding a job depends on how well
you fill out the applications, dress for interviews, make appointments, and so on....They rarely discuss nonpersonal factors like competition with Americans, economic recessions, and discrimination" (pp. 482-483). Additionally, the authors point out how students are taught that in order to do well at work, they should be submissive and obedient, and work hard. While these are admirable and important qualities, Auerbach and Burgess argue that the hidden curriculum of the textbooks is to prepare the students for menial positions. They cite one textbook that includes the following dialogue:

A. What did you do in Laos?

B. I taught college for 15 years. I was Deputy Minister of Education for ten years and then...


Unfortunately, the text goes on to facilitate a conversation in which the teacher should ask the students, "Why do refugees have to start their jobs at the bottom?" (cited in Auerbach & Burgess, 1985, p. 484). The
underlying assumption is that the lack of (English) language skills precludes these students from obtaining professional jobs, regardless of whatever prior education or experience they may have.

Textbooks cannot merely choose important themes and topics to capture the genuine interest of students, but must also consider the manner in which the topic is presented. It makes a difference whether the topic is called "jobs," or "not being able to find work" (Edelsky, 2000). Textbook authors must acknowledge and incorporate students' prior experience in order to make materials interesting and realistic. Ignoring learners' prior experience results in a traditional, transmission-oriented view of learning, where both students and learning are treated as passive.

Students as Passive Receptors

It is highly doubtful that any instructor or textbook author intends to treat learners as if they are passive, yet it happens. Using slightly different terminology, Freire (1993) and VanPatten and Lee (1995) discuss the traditional, teacher-fronted philosophies of teaching, in which students are viewed as passive recipients of
knowledge. Freire calls it the "banking theory," while VanPatten and Lee refer to it as the "Atlas complex:" it is the belief that teachers and textbooks contain all of the wisdom and information that students need. Teachers dispense this knowledge on an as-needed basis, and "the presentation of new material can be likened to 'filling the bucket', i.e., the teacher fills the students' minds with new learning" (Kirkeby, 1994).

Language textbooks often promote this reductionist view of learners because many textbook authors view learning as a process in which students passively receive the transmission of information from their teachers and textbooks (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). As one textbook author said of his book, "Does this book help learners to feel confident, step by step, slowly but surely, about using English in a brand new context? Does it present a number of commonly experienced contexts within which these fragile learners can identify themselves?" (emphasis added). As long as authors and instructors see this student population as fragile, they will continue to treat them as passive receptors of information doled out by instructors and textbooks. This philosophy of instruction
does not acknowledge that students must be active participants in their own construction of knowledge, nor does it recognize the wealth of knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom.

**Failure to Acknowledge Prior Experience**

In a study of consumer education texts used in adult literacy programs, Sandlin (2000) states, "the majority of lessons assume that learners have had little experience with the real-world skills presented in the lessons" (p. 296). This failure to acknowledge that students have prior life experience promotes the belief that "learners are passive recipients of information or skills handed over by someone more expert and of higher status than themselves" (Webster, Caddick & Reed, 1999, p. 51).

Admittedly, immigrant students have trouble communicating in English, and often they face additional problems dealing with the issues of housing, work, healthcare, and the like. However, it is unfair and disrespectful of adult learners to imply that a lack of language equates with a lack of knowledge or ability.

Similarly, Auerbach and Burgess (1985) found that ESL textbooks promote the idea that problems have only one
solution, which can be found in the textbook. Rather than having students discuss their options and learn strategies for overcoming obstacles, textbooks simply give students solutions. By "giving" students answers, instead of teaching strategies to find their own solutions, these materials are not only undermining the prior knowledge and experience of the students, but they are also maintaining the equilibrium of power—the teacher (system) has all the answers. Auerbach and Burgess cite the distinction made by Freire (1993) between problem solving and problem posing. Freire suggests that the teacher's role is to engage students in finding their own solutions to common problems. However, educators and textbook writers often attempt to intercede on behalf of their students, to help them by solving their problems for them. This reinforces the students' feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy.

Conclusion

No one would argue that textbooks have not improved over the past century; nonetheless, it can be argued that many of the changes are superficial and inadequate because we have not changed the underlying principles that drive textbook production. The research that I have reviewed
highlights the discrepancy between what takes place in real life and what is portrayed in textbooks. The differences include unrealistic, non-transferable dialogues; oversimplification of complex issues; omission of important information, focus on surface-level communication, and treatment of learners as passive recipients of information with little or no life experience.

Although the majority of the studies I have reviewed focus on the issue of authenticity (or lack thereof), ultimately, the argument I make in reference to ESL textbooks is not about the lack of authenticity, and the answer is not simply creating better dialogues or inserting items that are more meaningful or authentic into current textbooks. Rather, the problem lies in questioning the "underlying intellectual assumptions which generate methods" (Raimes, 1983, p. 583) because methodology is truly the driving force behind textbook activities.

Need for Additional Research

Virtually no studies have been done that question standard (reductionist) sequencing practices, or the
underlying assumptions that "learning is the result of teaching, piece by piece, item by item. The whole, reading [language] is the sum of the parts, words and skills. Learners are passive and controlled" (Goodman et al, 1988, p. 99). Some practitioners have published the positive results of utilizing a constructivist/critical style of teaching in adult ESL programs (Frye, 1999; Peirce, 1995; Rivera, 1999), and a comparison of whole language versus skills-based (children's) literacy instruction (Freppon & McIntyre 1999; Pierson, 1999), but no comprehensive studies have been conducted on teaching methodologies in ESL textbooks—nothing to question what we do, or even why we do it.

The Current Study

In the next chapter, I examine a number of ESL textbooks from a constructivist viewpoint, using a model of literacy proposed by Gorden Wells, of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Wells specializes in language development, language learning and first language
literacy research. He designed an "Inclusive Model of Literacy," based upon the belief that:

If the goal of education generally is to enable individuals to become creative and critical thinkers and communicators, only a model of literacy that recognizes the importance of the epistemic level can be accepted as adequate, and this is so whatever the cultural background from which the students come. (Wells, 1987, p. 21).

In constructivism, "epistemic" refers to "making knowledge." An epistemic level of language instruction is one whose purpose is helping students learn how to use language--first, to make meaning of their lives, and second, to transform their lives through language. Wells' model of literacy includes four guiding principles, which I have chosen to use as a model for my textbook analysis. In chapter three I will further discuss his guidelines as they relate to my project.
CHAPTER THREE
ANALYSIS OF TEXTBOOKS

Introduction

In chapter two I examined what prior research has been done on ESL textbooks. This chapter presents my own analysis of current ESL textbooks with respect to some of the themes discussed in previous chapters. I have chosen to use the guidelines for literacy proposed by Wells (1987) to use as a framework against which to compare the texts. I wish to determine if currently used textbooks in adult, entry-level ESL classrooms incorporate constructivist ideologies, and if so, to what degree.

In this chapter, I explain the connection between literacy and ESL instruction, and explain the model of literacy that is the basis of my textbook analysis. I then continue by applying Wells' guidelines to two pertinent textbook topics: healthcare and work.

Literacy and English as a Second Language

Literacy instruction and ESL instruction for adults have a close relationship. On a practical level, they are often seen as inseparable by those who offer programs for adult students with low literacy skills in their first
language, or for adults whose L1 literacy skills do not easily transfer into the English language.

Recent research demonstrates the importance of providing both adult literacy and adult ESL instruction grounded in the everyday life contexts or functional contexts of learners (Sandlin, 2000), and the need to capture the genuine interest of learners (Edelsky, 1999; Freppon & McIntyre, 1999; Pierson, 1999). It has also become apparent from both the viewpoints of ESL and literacy instruction, that preparing students to "function" with the language is not adequate. According to Wells (1987), literacy instruction must go beyond functional, to an epistemic level of instruction, by teaching learners how to use the ability to communicate to transform their worlds. This means that textbooks must do more than provide students with opportunities to communicate and practice language.

Using the guidelines Wells proposes for a literacy program, I suggest that ESL textbooks should include the following principles:

1. Language should be seen as a means to achieving other goals; even when attention needs to be
focused on the code [grammatical forms], this should be in the context of an intrinsically meaningful activity.

2. Writing, reading, speaking, and listening should be seen as complementary processes, each building on and feeding the others in an integrated approach to the exploration of ideas and feelings, the consideration of alternatives, and the formulation and communication of conclusions.

3. An important place should be accorded, at all stages, to the sharing of stories, both those of the literature of the culture and those that learners themselves construct on the basis of their own experiences; providing an important opportunity to make sense of their own lives and make meaning.4

Wells advocates that these guidelines should be implemented simultaneously rather than in a progressive manner; that is, that instructors should attempt from the beginning to include all four principles in language

4 Wells actually proposed four guidelines, the first of which promotes the responsibility of students in selecting tasks and determining methods for evaluation. This, while an important teaching philosophy, does not lend itself well to textbook evaluation.
instruction. However, in using them to evaluate textbooks, textbooks that focus on the code (surface structure grammatical activities) may use language as a means to achieve other goals, but often do not go on to include the exploration of ideas, feelings, alternatives, or conclusions, and rarely do they provide the opportunity to share stories. Therefore, rather than addressing each principle in each textbook, I view the model rather as a continuum, and ask how far along the continuum each book falls: Does it stop at merely "practicing" language skills, or does it go on to include activities in which students are able to explore their ideas and feelings? Does it stop there, or continue towards an epistemic model of literacy (where learners construct their own knowledge) by allowing learners the opportunity to share stories and make the connection between the past and the present/the classroom and the "real" world? By applying Wells' guidelines to the text activities, I will explain how I have categorized each of the textbooks I evaluate.

Wells designed his model for children's literacy, but because it has a strong theoretical base in constructivism
and language acquisition, it also works well as a model for ESL textbooks. Returning for a moment to the definition of constructivism, according to Theobald and Curtiss (2000) constructivist educators: stress the importance of applying students' background knowledge and experiences toward solving authentic problems in real contexts, engage learners in "sense-making" or understanding core ideas rather than simply the recollection of facts, and emphasize the importance of dialogue and interaction in learning. Although Wells does not refer to his principles as being "constructivist", it is not difficult to see that he shares many of the same ideals.

Sources for the Study

My research is an analysis of entry-level ESL textbooks used in adult education programs in the San Bernardino area. Texts were gathered from San Bernardino Valley College, the San Bernardino Adult School (an extension of the San Bernardino City Unified School District), and the Family Literacy Program which holds classes at the San Bernardino City public library. Additional texts were recommended by textbook
representatives, or were requested from publishers upon reading about them in other research; however, I restricted my analysis to entry level texts—the first (and possibly the only) ones students will see in an ESL program.

The student population at each of these sites is comprised of predominantly Spanish-speaking immigrants, with the majority of students from various states in Mexico, attending adult education programs, family literacy classes, and ESL classes given through the local school districts. Ages range from 18-65; the students are often parents with school-aged children. Student L1 literacy levels range from zero proficiency to university educated, with the average approximately at a sixth-grade level.

In asking instructors what texts they use in the ESL classroom, I was met with the same response everywhere: no one textbook serves the needs of my students. The *Oxford Picture Dictionary* (not included in my review, as it is not an actual textbook, but a supplement) was the most popular, followed by *Side By Side* (Molinsky & Bliss, 1989 & 2001). Additional texts included *Real-Life English*...
(book 1) (Robinson, 1994), and New Interchange (Richards, 1997). Also included is New Vistas: Getting Started (Brown, 1998), and A Conversation Book 1A & 1B (Carver & Fotinos, 1998).

**Topic Choice**

My analysis includes the above mentioned five ESL textbooks. Within each book (with so many possible elements to examine), I chose to focus specifically on the portrayal of work and healthcare, for two reasons:

1) I expected that the two topics would be covered in ALL texts and would provide a fair basis for comparison.

2) The fields of law, medicine and work have the most deeply entrenched power systems of the language (Peirce, 1989); therefore I believe they would be of high importance and high interest to learners, because those with limited use of the language are at the greatest disadvantage in each of these areas. If our goal is to empower learners, then we must prepare them to be able to negotiate meaning in all areas.
Using Wells' guidelines, as I examine these two subjects in each text, I ask if activities in the textbooks:

1) See language as a means to achieve other goals, i.e., beyond "practicing" English.
2) Promote exploration of ideas and feelings, the consideration of alternatives, and/or the formulation and communication of conclusions.
3) Provide an opportunity for the sharing of stories.

Analysis of Texts

The first topic I discuss is the treatment of healthcare in each of the textbooks. This will be followed by an examination of the topic of work. First, I mention the characteristics that all the books have in common. I then use Wells' guidelines to analyze the individual textbooks.

Healthcare

Within all of the texts, the sections on healthcare vary between 4-21 pages, with only two of the books dedicating more than ten pages to the topic. Common characteristics of texts include: talking about symptoms and injuries, making doctor's appointments, and practicing common commands from the doctor's office (e.g., stand on
the scale, sit on the table, say "aaah," breath in/out, roll up your sleeve, etc.). Two of the books each dedicate a page to the practice of filling out "patient information forms." Beyond this, the textbooks differ greatly.

The guidelines:
1. Language should be seen as a means to achieving other goals; even when attention needs to be focused on the code, this should be in the context of an intrinsically meaningful activity.

Side-By-Side. Of all the texts I examine, only one seems to specifically construct the chapter around a grammatical point. Side By Side (Molinsky & Bliss, 2001) is a grammar-based text; units are divided by the grammatical topic to be covered. The student book does not have an introduction, but on the back cover it claims "Dynamic conversational approach and all-skills practice." The second edition (1989) can be found in almost every ESL classroom I visited, but the third edition (2001) is now available from the publisher.

In Side-By-Side, the segment on healthcare consists of four pages and is found in the unit on past tense, with
a focus on past activities, ailments, describing an event and making a doctor's appointment. The unit begins with basic vocabulary: headache, cough, fever, and provides a conversation practice:

How do you feel today?
I feel...good/terrible
I'm glad/sorry to hear that (p. 142).

However, the next page begins a segment on past tense, "What did you do yesterday?," which doesn't appear to relate to the prior page of "How do you feel?" until later when the two are put together:

A: How does David feel?
B: Not so good.
A: What's the matter?
B: He has a backache.
A: A backache? How did he get it?
B: He played basketball all day (p. 144).

Whatever ailments the characters in the textbook have, it is directly related to what they did yesterday. Even in the dialogue of calling the doctor to make an appointment, the students say, "I ______ all_______ yesterday, and now I have a TERRIBLE _________" (p. 145).
It appears that the primary goal of the activities in this section are what Larimer-Cathcart (1988) calls "thinly veiled excuses for the presentation of a grammar point" (p. 105). It could be argued that the text is using language to achieve other goals, such as practicing important communication skills related to healthcare, and is therefore meaningful. However, there is no true interactive quality to these activities, as students are simply pretending to need to call the doctor because they hurt themselves yesterday, just so they can practice using the verb+ed form. This activity is not even a true role play activity, where students create their own dialogues; it is a grammar-based activity. Additionally, Side-By-Side (Molinsky & Bliss, 2001) stops short of the exploration of feelings and provides no opportunity for learners to share stories. As I discuss textbooks that do include these opportunities, it becomes clearer what is missing from the first few that I examine.

New Vistas. New Vistas (Brown, 1998) is a series that according to the author, "features the best of what has come to be known as communicative language teaching"
I reviewed the first book in the series, subtitled: Getting Started.

Like the tasks in Side-By-Side (Molinsky & Bliss, 2001), the language exercises in this text fall short of being meaningful. The unit on "Health and the Body" consists of seven pages, with basic body parts, and common symptoms. Students are given the opportunity to practice common commands from the doctor's office, such as, "sit on the table, say 'aaah', breath in/out, roll up your sleeve" (p. 75), and describe what is wrong with the characters in the pictures.

One activity asks students to practice filling out a "patient information form." First, they listen to a cassette dialogue, and then fill out the form for the character in the dialogue (pp. 77-78). If the goal of this activity is to assist students in knowing how to fill out such forms, then the examples should at least somewhat resemble a realistic form. Medical history forms can require an overwhelming amount of information, even for competent speakers. Nevertheless, the book provides an oversimplified version in which students are supposed to practice filling out the patient information form by
listening to a cassette and filling in the form: not for themselves, but for the character in the dialogue. However, the form appears to be more of a comprehension quiz than an authentic transfer of information, as it is merely a checklist of symptoms that in no way resembles the complexity of a real information form. Furthermore, students do not contribute their own ideas, experiences, or questions about healthcare in order to make the activities meaningful.

Often, it is not the topic, but rather the presentation that determines how meaningful (or not) an activity is for students. Also on the topic of healthcare, this same book, *New Vistas* (Brown, 1998), includes a model excuse note from the character's mother to her teacher. This is an important skill for immigrant students because such communications are formulaic in nature, and socially constructed, meaning that they follow a very specific pattern.

Therefore, the topic itself should be relevant to many learners. However, the presentation of the topic leaves something to be desired. The textbook sample reads, "Dear Ms. Brenan, I am sorry Susan can't come to
school today. She doesn't feel well. She feels sore all over, and she has a headache and a backache. Sincerely, Mrs. R." (Brown, 1998, p. 78). Students answer some questions about the content of the note, and are then instructed to write a note to teacher of their brother or sister who is not feeling well.

As a meaningful activity, this falls short in two respects. First, New Vistas (Brown, 1998) is a series for adult and young adult learners. However, this activity asks students to write a note for a brother or sister who is not feeling well. Considering the majority of students in an adult education program have adult siblings, as well as children of their own, it does not make sense to instruct them to write on behalf of their brother or sister. This is precisely the gap about which Dewey speaks (see Pierson, 1999) that exists between learners and materials, which diminishes students' motivation to learn. Returning to what Rigg (1991) stated about language (outside of the classroom), "Language is always used purposefully" (p. 524). Asking an adult who may have children of their own to write a fake note on behalf of an
imaginary school-aged brother or sister, is not a good example of using language purposefully.

Secondly, the note reads, "I am sorry Susan can't come to school today" (p. 78). How is this note going to get to the school? Notes to the teacher are usually carried by the student when they return to school. Furthermore, they function not as an explanation, but rather a request: "Please excuse my child's absence yesterday. She was very ill." Often the request includes, "Please excuse her from gym class, and do not allow her to play outside at recess today." It is also not a common practice for parents to sign a note, "Mrs. R." In a subtle way, this diminishes the importance of the ESL student: the teacher (authority figure) is addressed by her full name, but the parent signing the note is not. Students will follow the model given. Providing them with an appropriate model to use is imperative, as is informing them that they have the authority to control their child's activities, even when they are at school. Providing them with a marked model (simply in order to "practice" the language) is irresponsible. It is unfortunate that a topic with
potential to capture the genuine interest of students is reduced to a reading comprehension activity and should not be mistaken for one that is intrinsically meaningful.

Real-Life English. Today, the term "survival English" refers to texts/programs which provide students with basic communicative skills to function in the community, centered around daily living tasks. The syllabus is often based upon language "functions" (requesting and giving information, accepting/declining invitations, etc.). According to Auerbach & Burgess (1985), in practice, a survival text covers all "literacy and prevocational and basic skills for students with zero to intermediate language proficiency" (p. 476).

Basically, any textbook used in an entry level ESL classroom today is classified as a survival text. Although the name has stayed the same, the text has tangibly changed. The original "survival texts" were sort of handbooks on "becoming" an American, and even though many of the topics are the same in newer texts, the point of view is noticeably different, mostly for the topics that are no longer included (i.e., becoming a citizen).
Real-Life English, 1 (Robinson, 1994). According to the introduction, the entire Real-Life English series is a "competency based" program consisting of four levels. Additionally, it is a model of what is known as a "survival text;" such texts were popular in ESL programs during the 1980's. Designed during a period when many immigrants were educated professionals fleeing political persecution in their home countries, the texts typically focused on the basic knowledge necessary to "survive" in and assimilate into the new culture. Chapters in this textbook include renting an apartment, opening a bank account, applying for a job, and becoming a U.S. citizenship. Real-Life English (Robinson, 1994) is a good example of how much the perceived needs of the audience can determine the content of the textbook, and although it has a different "feel" to it than the other texts, I include it in my study, as it is still used in some classrooms. Unfortunately, it falls short of moving beyond Wells' first principle.

Real-Life English (Robinson, 1994) introduces Health Care in unit 8, and spends 13 pages on it. Unit competencies are: identify kinds of health clinics, read a
thermometer, make doctor's appointments, talk about symptoms and injuries, and listen to doctor's instructions. Students are introduced to the doctor's office, emergency room, city clinic and the dentist. Through photos and dialogue students are shown that they should expect to stand on a scale, be told to breath in and out and describe how they feel.

Within the unit, the activities do not specifically focus on code, but they cannot be deemed "intrinsically meaningful" either. Students are instructed to practice describing how they feel, explain that they have a fever, and make a doctor's appointment. One page is dedicated to filling out a medical history form, yet it is an oversimplified version, requesting only name, address, emergency contact, symptoms (only those covered in the unit), and yes/no: are you pregnant, have you ever been hospitalized, do you exercise, do you take any medicine (if so, what?) (p. 108). A true medical history form does not ask for symptoms. Rather, it elicits information about the medical history of the patient, and their families: for example, do you have/have you ever had (check all that apply): diabetes, high blood pressure,
heart condition, etc. Do you have a family history of (the same conditions)? Once again, a textbook has provided an oversimplified version of a potentially meaningful activity in which students have the opportunity to achieve other goals (honestly filling out a medical history information form), and reduced it into nothing more than a comprehension activity where students "practice doing language."

2. Writing, reading, speaking, and listening should be seen as complementary processes, each building on and feeding the others in an integrated approach to the exploration of ideas and feelings, the consideration of alternatives, and the formulation and communication of conclusions.

New Interchange. New Interchange (Richards, 1997) is a text created for a broad audience. In the introduction, the authors state that the language used is "American English," which indicates that they expect the book to be used outside of the U.S., and for young adults and adults. Richards also states, "The primary goal of the course is to teach communicative competence, that is, the

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5 ESL textbooks used outside of the U.S. designate whether they are
ability to communicate in English according to the situation, purpose, and roles of the participants" (p. iii). The introduction goes on to say that the underlying philosophy in the textbook design is that "learning a second or foreign language is more rewarding, meaningful, and effective when the language is used for authentic communication." Furthermore, students are given the opportunity to "make use of their own knowledge and experiences, and express their ideas and opinions" (p. iv).

It appears that the author of New Interchange (Richards, 1997) sees writing, reading, speaking, and listening as complementary processes, as each is included in the chapter activities. Additionally, students have many opportunities to talk about their own lives. However, the text does not truly allow for the exploration of ideas, feelings and alternatives to health care problems. For example, the six-page unit on healthcare titled "It really works!" begins, like other texts, with common health complaints. It then instructs students to talk about the following questions:

written in "American" or "British" English.
Have you had any of these health problems recently?
Which ones?
How many times have you been sick in the past year?
What do you do when you have a headache? a cold? insomnia? (Richards, 1997, p. 72).

As a meaningful activity, this is a good start, especially asking about the student's own health history within the past year. Most people, even if they have not been sick recently, can think of something from which they have suffered over the past year. Although the text does not provide the follow-up question of "What did you do?," one would hope that the students would be afforded such an opportunity to discuss their own experiences, and help each other find solutions to their problems. The way the questions are worded, however, does not initiate a true conversation. They can easily be answered with a single word or phrase that does not require any sharing which would allow for the self-construction that takes place when people tell stories (Miller & Mehler, 1994) or truly explore their healthcare concerns.

The chapter finishes with an activity asking students to write about an interesting home or folk remedy and to
share it with classmates. This is followed by a reading activity that begins with the question, "When you have a minor health problem, do you usually go to the doctor, get something from the drugstore, or use a home remedy?"

However, the question appears to be a rhetorical one, as the text simply goes on to state, "When people have a cold, fever, or the flu, they usually go to the doctor for help, or they get some medicine from the drugstore. But many people also use home remedies for common illnesses" (Richards, 1997, p. 77). The text provides some sample home remedies to practice reading comprehension after which students are again asked to share any home remedies they use. Here *New Interchange* (Richards, 1997) provides a crucial and interesting topic, but does not explore it at an epistemic level. It does not address issues surrounding healthcare, such as access to and cost of professional care, emergencies, nor preventative care. Although the text promotes the discussion of home remedies, which is the consideration of alternatives, it treats them in a trite manner, never asking one of the most important questions: Why? Why do people use home remedies?
In a textbook initiated situation like this, the exploration of ideas and feelings should include questions such as, What are the benefits of doing so? What are the potential dangers? Such questions allow students to formulate and communicate their opinions on the subject. Moreover, simply asking students about the home remedies they use is not the equivalent of the sharing of stories. Providing students with the opportunity to share from their own experiences allows them to make the connection between the text, their own lives, and their communicative needs.

3. An important place should be accorded, at all stages, to the sharing of stories, both those of the literature of the culture and those that learners themselves construct on the basis of their own experiences; providing an important opportunity to make sense of their own lives and make meaning.

Wells (1987) states that the importance of sharing stories is in helping students to make sense of their own lives, which I will discuss further in the next chapter. Unfortunately, of all of the texts I examined in regard to healthcare, only A Conversation Book 1B (Carver & Fotinos,
1998) gives students a true opportunity to share stories that learners themselves construct on the basis of their own experiences.

A Conversation Book 1B. A Conversation Book 1B (Carver & Fotinos, 1998) is a brilliantly written textbook for ESL learners. In the introduction the authors simply state that their intention in writing the book was to provide "a wide variety of vocabulary and student-centered learning activities" to use with students, within the teacher's own style (p. xiii). The section written to the teacher is filled with suggestions on how to use the book, with detailed explanations of the author's intentions for each section (conversation springboards, grammar for conversation) as well as overall teaching strategies (corrections, grouping, ideas for games, etc.). As pointed out by McGroarty and Scott (1993), many ESL literacy courses have a high turnover rate of instructors, and may even taught by former students with little or no formal training. Such extensive direction for teachers (even those with experience and training) gets the "creative juices flowing," improving the possibility that the text will be used in as artistic a manner as it was
intended to be by the authors. After all, textbooks generally do not teach students, they merely assist in the learning process.

In this textbook, the unit on health includes the topics of The Body, Staying Healthy, Getting Sick, Going to a Doctor, Medical Emergencies, Hospital, Inside Your Body, The Dentist, and The Veterinarian. The Learning Strategies warm-up exercise asks students to describe a recent illness, how they felt and what they did to get well. Then they are instructed to write in their journal about their family's health, and to include any medical problems, accidents, or emergencies (p. 59). Although this is simply a "warm-up" exercise, it includes many pertinent skills. Students are practicing (without an oversimplified form) writing down their families' medical histories in English. This gives them the opportunity to recognize what words are not in their current vocabulary that they need to know, thus increasing their own autonomy. Moreover, journal writing "provides students opportunities to explore within themselves as well as with peers and teachers the particular meaning that a given
classroom event or aspect of the curriculum had for them” (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001, p. 7).

The segment on Staying Healthy includes doctor's checkups from infants to elderly patients, shots, healthy eating, exercise and sleep. Pictures show nurses checking weight and taking blood pressure, and introduce the topics of urine samples, AIDS testing and eye exams. This segment introduces the topic of preventative care, which is rarely seen in ESL textbooks.

The Community Activity instructs students to look up the Board of Health or their community hospital in the telephone directory. On the board, students should list the questions they would like to ask, and then call the number to find out the answers. This is an excellent activity in that it encourages students to think about health-related questions they might have in their own lives, and rather than simply providing the answers it forces them to, as Frye (1999) puts it, "claim the right" to speak outside the classroom in a sometimes hostile cultural environment. Assignments often provide students with a necessary "excuse" to practice the target language. However, the activity does not demonstrate a seamless
integration within the text. Exercises go from a discussion of what clinics exist in the community, to calling the Board of Health or a hospital with questions (p. 62). Perhaps this activity would fit better towards the end of the unit, after students have discussed health issues in more depth, and had the opportunity to narrate their own experiences and problems related to these issues. Additionally, some model questions would be helpful, as would an explanation of what it is the Board of Health does, in order for students to formulate their own questions.

The segment on Medical Emergencies also elicits student narratives. It shows pictures of several emergencies, including a child on a bicycle getting hit by a car and a toddler drinking household cleaning supplies. Students are asked what they would do in the situations, and then asked to share if they have had medical emergencies and what happened. As a partner activity students are to decide what to do if in the following emergencies:

- If the person next to you on the bus faints, what do you do?
If you see someone fall down the stairs, what do you do?
If you cut yourself badly with a knife, what do you do?
If you step on a rusty nail, what do you do?
If you accidentally take poison, what do you do? (p. 69).

It is interesting to note that the question is, "What do you do?" This segment does not use the imperative, nor is it a practice of the modal "should" as is often found in ESL textbooks with this type of activity. Again, there is no "right" answer; students have the opportunity to explore their own feelings. Even if they as a group formulate a conclusion such as, "You must get a tetanus shot," the knowledge comes from their individual experiences, not from the textbook.

One issue touched on in this text (although briefly) is that of having medical insurance (or not). During a role play exercise in which students make an appointment to see a doctor, the "receptionist" asks the "patients" if they have insurance, as does the patient information form (p. 67). Unfortunately, the topic does not resurface again, even though the format of the book would lend to
addressing it in a problem solving activity in which students could consider some alternatives for those who do not have medical insurance.

Overall, A Conversation Book 1B (Carver & Fotinos, 1998) a highly communicative text which clearly fulfills the guidelines for literacy set out by Wells (1987). In this unit on health, the activities are meaningful; the four skills are seen as complementary processes which allow for the exploration of feelings, consideration of alternatives and the formulation of conclusions; and an important place is accorded to the sharing of stories. Throughout the unit, students have multiple opportunities to share stories. Some are told in the third person, where students are instructed to imagine what happened to the people in the drawing. Other stories are elicited from personal experience, with questions such as "Did you ever go to the emergency room? Why?" (p. 69). Still other stories come from questions like: "How do people in your country treat these ailments?" (p. 64), which gives students the opportunity to discuss cultural differences. Additionally, if students/instructors decide to skip a section (e.g. the veterinarian) it will not affect the
rest of the chapter, as each sub-topic is autonomous, even though they are closely related, allowing for each class to determine their own course of study.

Just as important to learners lives as health (and sometimes closely related) is the topic of work.

Work

The second theme that I chose to analyze within the textbooks was work. The topic of work—although presumably of high interest to ESL students—does not receive universal treatment in textbooks. Of the five books I analyzed, one series (New Vistas, Brown, 1998), does not cover the topic of work at all in the first book (Getting Started), but dedicates the entire fourth book (intermediate level) to the issue (not included in my research). The other four texts dedicated between 5 and 21 pages to the topic. The closest that two books came to having a common theme was the introduction of grammatical points "can" and "do" in relation to work. The differences (audience and purpose) will be further discussed as they relate to Wells' guidelines.

New Vistas. New Vistas; Getting Started (Brown, 1998) does not include a section on work. In unit 5 ("The
Time"), students have the opportunity to discuss their daily activities, in which there is one mention of "go to school/work" (p. 40). However, the sample student schedules do not include work, but rather focus primarily on free time activities (parties, rock concert, studying English, playing basketball, etc.) (pp. 41, 49), namely the same type of activities one would expect of an "acculturated" teen-ager with financial (parental) support. Again, we find a textbook that does not reflect the lifestyle of many of the students using it, which creates a distance between the learner and the material and discourages learning.

It should be noted that the topic of work is introduced at a later time. As the author explains, "In New Vistas, Book 4, (intermediate level) the whole book is on the workplace, because by now the audience for the material is more focused on work environments" (Brown, personal communication, Sept. 3, 2001). However, many immigrants come to the U.S. in order to find work, and they attend English classes in order to improve their ability to get the job of their choice. If the distance between these learners and the classroom materials is too
great, the danger exists that the students will not stay
in an ESL program long enough to ever reach the
intermediate level textbooks.

1. Language should be seen as a means to achieving other
goals; even when attention needs to be focused on the
code, this should be in the context of an intrinsically
meaningful activity.

   Side-By-Side. As with the section on healthcare,
   Side-By-Side (Molinsky & Bliss, 2001), places the topic of
work within a unit on a specific lexico-grammatical point.
Work falls under the heading of "Can/Have to." In the
five pages that cover work the focus is almost exclusively
on the code (grammar). First students practice yes-no
questions with negative responses "Can Betty drive a bus?"
"No, she can't. But she can drive a taxi" (p. 118). This
is followed by yes-no questions with an affirmative
response: "Can Michael type?" "Of course he can. He's a
secretary" (p. 119). Taborn (1983) complains of the over-
use of answers containing yes/no + a tag phrase in
textbooks, because, while this structure is in no way
incorrect, it is not a realistic use of the English
language. In a study on this topic, Richards (1977) found
that in spoken English only 11% of yes/no answers were followed by a tag, yet textbooks have an average occurrence of 68% of yes/no + tag. In this activity, 100% of the can/can't questions are followed by yes/no + tag (s/he can/can't). Thus, not only does Side-By-Side use a highly relevant topic as pretense to study a grammar point, but it does so in an unrealistic manner.

The last activity in the section on work is for students to think about their own skills and make a list of the things they can and cannot do (one-word answers), then to share their list with others. Fox (1994) describes this type activity as a "so what?" Students are supposed to "share" with each other, for example: "I can (use a computer), but I can't (fix a toilet). What about you?" But where does this activity lead? How does this personal information help students understand each other any better? What are learners supposed to DO with this information? This is a classic example of "practicing" language. There is no exploration of feelings or ideas, and the activity certainly cannot be deemed, "intrinsically meaningful" at any level.
New Interchange. While New Interchange (Richards, 1997) does not use a grammatical point as the topic of the chapter, it still falls short of the exploration of ideas and feelings, the consideration of alternatives, and the formulation and communication of conclusions.

All the units in New Interchange (1997) consist of six pages. The topic of work fits into the unit on "How do you spend your day?" (p. 8). In the first activity, students are given a list of jobs and told to match them with the correct category (professionals, service occupations, management positions, and office work). All of the jobs fall into a relatively professional category, as even the "service occupations" listed are flight attendant and salesperson (p. 8). Afterwards, students are supposed to add two more jobs to each category and compare their answers with a partner. Presumably, this would be "using the student's own knowledge" to which the author alluded (Richards, 1997, p. iv). However, much like the activity in Side-By-Side (Molinsky & Bliss, 2001), after finishing this task, one could easily say, "So what?" (What is the purpose of this task?) "I added a gardener and a teacher. Now what?" Again, Riggs (1994)
said, "The major purpose of language is the creation and communication of meaning" (p. 524). This type of activity does not foster the creation or communication of meaning, or the exploration of ideas.

After practicing a dialogue with a partner emphasizing simple present Wh-questions and statements ("What do you do?," "What does Kanya [textbook character] do?") students fill in the blanks and practice "conversations" by talking about what other people do. Textbook characters are either university students with part-time jobs or professionals. Students are given few opportunities to discuss their own lives. One activity simply states: "Ask your classmates questions about work and school" (p. 10), but upon a closer look at the model, the activity appears very much to be a continuation of the practice on wh-questions:

"What do you do?"

"I am a student."

"Where do you go to school?" (p. 10)

This is followed by a writing activity: "Write a description of what you do. Don't write your name on the paper. Pass your descriptions around the group, and try
to guess who wrote each one." The model for this activity reads, "I'm a student. I go to McGill University in Canada. I'm a freshman. I study computer science. I work part time at a radio station, too. I'm a disk jockey. I play music. I love my job" (p. 11).

The last statement in the model, "I love my job," serves as a question to students: "How do you like work/school?" Obviously, the authors are attempting to integrate meaningful activities that build upon each other into the text; by asking, "What about you?" they believe they are providing for the exploration of feelings. However, in each of the models, the characters reply that they like/love their work/classes/school. Rather than an expression of opinion I believe they are merely promoting a formulaic routine, no different than asking "How are you?/Fine thanks. How are you?." There is nothing wrong with teaching formulaic expressions nor adjacency pairs, especially to entry level students, as long as they are recognized for what they are (and are not). They are not exercises in critical thinking, nor are they a true expression of ideas.
Additionally, no mention is made in this text of procuring work, and no opportunities are given for students to examine alternatives to this real-life problem; all the adult characters have jobs, many of which are professional, and the young people (ages 17-20) are all students with part-time jobs. The introduction of the text claimed to choose topics that are of high interest and relevant to students. While the topic of work is highly relevant to all students, I do not believe the manner in which it is dealt with in this text includes the interests of immigrant students who are more concerned with finding work (or finding better work) than they are discussing how much they love their (professional) jobs.

2. Writing, reading, speaking, and listening should be seen as complementary processes, each building on and feeding the others in an integrated approach to the exploration of ideas and feelings, the consideration of alternatives, and the formulation and communication of conclusions.

and

3. An important place should be accorded, at all stages, to the sharing of stories, both those of the literature
of the culture and those that learners themselves construct on the basis of their own experiences; providing an important opportunity to make sense of their own lives and make meaning.

Both Real-Life English and A Conversation Book 1B allow for both the exploration of ideas, as well as the opportunity to share stories from the learners own experiences. Because the authors of these texts have integrated these activities throughout the units on work, I will also keep the two guidelines together, and simply discuss how each book addresses both ideas.

Real-Life English. Real-Life English (Robinson, 1994) covers employment with the competency objectives to: identify kinds of jobs, give work experience and skills, read help-wanted ads, complete job applications, and understand safety warnings. From a cultural perspective, the author of the text made sure to break down gender stereotypes. Characters within the unit include both a man and a woman who paint houses, a female mechanic, a male housekeeper, and both a female cook and a male cook/baker. The unit is 14 pages long, and does a rather
impressive job of drawing on student experience, exploring feelings and formulating conclusions.

On the second page of the unit, students are shown two photos of people interviewing for jobs. Although no mention is made of what students "should" do, the photos show a man (Pedro) dressed in slacks, a long-sleeved white shirt, tie and sports jacket, interviewing for the position of painter, and a woman (Mu-tan) dressed in a skirt, interviewing to be a short order cook. With a simple pair of photos, the textbook editors subtly introduce students to the cultural expectations of employers regarding interview attire. In the text, both job applicants have experience in their respective fields. The students are encouraged to answer not only what Pedro and Mu-tan can do/did in their countries, but also, "What jobs can you do? What did you do in your country?" (p. 115).

Additional activities are:

- After the introduction of pertinent vocabulary (gardener, housekeeper, mechanic, etc.) students are again asked what they can do, and (perhaps more importantly) what they want to do (p.117).
Students listen to a cassette in which Soo-ha calls about a gardening job. Afterwards students are asked to discuss in a small group whether or not they think Soo-ha will get the job, (why or why not?) (p. 118).

After reading want ads in the newspaper, students answer comprehension questions, and then are asked to discuss the ads with a partner and whether or not they would apply for any of those jobs (why or why not?). (119).

The questions in these activities allow students the opportunity to consider alternatives related to job-seeking issues, and possibly have the opportunity to discuss larger issues surrounding work, such as discrimination, language difficulties, and the difficulty of finding work, especially as these issues may relate to their own lives.

Additionally, students are encouraged to discuss what they did in their country in three different activities in this unit, which may provide students many opportunities to share stories based on their own experiences. By sharing about past work experiences, students are
reminding themselves of their own abilities and strengths, which also helps point them to the future.

Although I have placed Real-Life English (Robinson, 1994) in the most epistemic category of the three guidelines, I do so hesitantly. Students discussing "what they did" does not exactly constitute sharing stories. The word sharing indicates that students are revealing something personal about themselves. I can give a description my job duties while teaching English in Lima Peru: "I taught ESP classes to businessmen/women from beginning level through advanced conversation. I also assisted in curriculum development and conducted workshop for instructors." But this description is nothing more than a surface-level fact. Sharing requires some kind of emotional relevance that goes below the surface and connects to our humanness, creating opportunities for us to bond with each other. It is this same bonding that empowers students by taking them out of isolation—linguistic and otherwise—and helping them claim a place in their community. In this respect, although Real-Life English opens the door to discussing the past, it leaves
much to be desired. Additionally, there are several items missing from the textbook.

Included in the unit is a job application to fill out, however, it is also an oversimplified version of an application, asking only for name, address, phone, social security number, and work experience. There is no section on education or personal references. Knowing in advance to bring a list of schools with addresses and dates of attendance, names, addresses and phone numbers of references can be extremely helpful to someone filing out job applications. Also missing from the work experience section are questions on "Why did you leave your last position?" and "May we contact your previous employer?" which most job applications include. Responses to these questions are socially constructed. Most American young people learn from their parents or job coaches the expected responses to such questions, which may be very different in other cultures, and should be included as a topic in this section.

Also interesting to note is that the Real-Life English (Robinson, 1994) series has subsequent books which use the same topics and expand on them with more complex
sentence structure and vocabulary. For example, in Book 2, the unit on healthcare expands from general practitioners to include specialists such as obstetricians and psychiatrists. In Book 2, the unit on employment states, "If you want to work in the United States, you must have a Social Security number" (p. 107) and includes a sample form to fill out. I find this unusual in that Book 1 clearly showed job applications requiring a social security number, yet no information is given on how to obtain one until Book 2, yet students presumably need to finish all of Book 1 before moving on to Book 2. Overall, Real-Life English was difficult to place in any one category according to Wells' guidelines. However, it had more positive aspects than negative.

A Conversation Book 1B. A Conversation Book 1B (Carver & Fotinos, 1998) allows for many opportunities to discuss alternatives and share from personal experience. The unit on work (unit 3) consists of 21 pages. It begins with a section titled "Learning Strategies" which instructs students to make a list in English of the work they do in their homes every day, then with a friend from class to make a list of jobs and work situations in their
community that require English. This functions as a warm-up exercise for the unit on work. This is important for several reasons. First, the text recognizes household tasks as work. This is important for students who may be mothers/housewives. Again, it is not the topic that will inherently capture a learner's interest, but the manner in which it is expressed. Not only does it recognize that keeping a house is work, but also that there are situations in the community that require the use of English in order to do that work.

In this first part of the unit on "Work everyone does", cartoon characters of all ages and both genders do a variety of chores around the house, including feeding dogs and babies. After introducing the vocabulary of cooking, washing windows, vacuuming, etc. the students are to ask everyone in the group how often they do each of the activities listed, tallying them in their workbooks, and comparing the results with other groups in the class. Students are then introduced to a "Cross-Cultural Exchange" in which they find a list of questions: "Who does the housework in your home? * Should men help with the housework? * In your country, do men help with the
housework? * Why or why not? * What electrical appliances do people use to do housework in your country?" (p. 39)
These questions are skillfully designed to encourage real dialogue among students. They are asked to express opinions on meaningful topics, exploring what may lead to a change in attitudes as a result of coming in contact with different cultures. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer, simply the sharing of personal experience: what it is like now, and what it was like before, and the consideration of different alternatives to cultural and work issues.

Other subtitles of the unit include Home Repairs, Jobs, Clothing for Work, Safety at Work, Working on a farm, Problems at Work, Losing Your Job, Finding a Job, and Benefits. In the segment, Problems at Work, students see sketches of people at work and are instructed to discuss what is happening in each of the pictures and discuss the problems together. Problems include (sexual) harassment, gossip, personal problems and two employees chatting/ignoring a customer. On the following page students are given several other pictures and told to work in groups of four and to state the problems in the
pictures, pick one problem, find a solution, then role-play the problem and solution for the class. The problems include (age) discrimination in promotion, not understanding someone who is speaking to you, and arriving to the office in a suit/tie where everyone is dressed in jeans and tee-shirts. Again, the activity does not have a single solution to the problem. Even if multiple groups pick the same problem, each one may have a different solution, allowing students to practice solving their own problems rather than looking to the teacher/text for all the answers.

The segment on Losing Your Job includes reasons over which workers have control (poor performance) as well as those over which they do not (plant closes, seasonal work, acts of nature). Such topics are rarely included in textbooks and when students experience problems they often blame themselves for not succeeding (Auerbach & Burgess 1985; Wallerstein 1983). The simple act of initiating the topic, especially in such a student-centered text gives students the opportunity to share stories from their own experiences, diminishing the shame that may be involved over losing a job, even if it was not their fault.
A role play activity in the section on Finding a Job instructs the students to "ask some of these questions (or others)"

Applicant:
What are the responsibilities of the job?
What are the hours?
Do I have to wear a uniform? Does the company provide the uniform?
What is the salary?
What are the company benefits? What am I eligible for?

Interviewer:
Why are you interested in this job?
Why are you thinking of leaving your present job?
Do you have any experience for this job?
Can you read and write English?
Can you work overtime? (p. 55)

The first thing to note about this activity is that it is not a scripted conversation. Each participant has a list of questions to ask the other person. They must however each create their own responses to the other participant's questions. Secondly, while these questions do not
represent every job interview, they do provide a good basis for practicing a job interview. The interviewer's questions are realistic, and the applicant's questions provide ESL students with a 'good model to demonstrate the types of questions that are culturally acceptable to ask. Most importantly as a practice dialogue, the ending is open, unlike traditional textbook dialogues which seem to always end with the student saying that, yes, they can work overtime, and the interviewer saying, "Great! You're hired!." To the contrary, A Conversation Book 1 allows students to end the interview in any way they choose, even if it is "Well, if you cannot work overtime, I'm afraid we can't hire you."

Overall, the unit on work in A Conversation Book 1 is quite impressive, covering a variety of work-related issues, many of which are typically not found in ESL textbooks, including losing a job, good reasons to quit a job, good reasons to fire an employee, problems associated with work, and most importantly, job benefits.

Conclusion

In examining the topics of healthcare and work in these textbooks, it is apparent that no two textbooks are
alike, yet most are more alike than they are different. That is, few of the books that I analyzed incorporated all of the elements in Wells' model. Shuy (1981) points out that, "how people use language to get things done is a higher order skill or competence than is their simple mastery of the isolated, decontextualized language forms (phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax)" (p. 106). And yet it is the decontextualized language forms on which most textbooks focus.

When I began this project I thought that what bothered me about textbooks was the fact that they lacked an authenticity factor in materials. While I still believe this is an important issue that needs to be addressed in textbooks, I do not believe it is the core problem. I believe rather our "standard pedagogical practices" are the main problem with current textbooks. The practices to which I am referring are: highly sheltered input, the practice of starting with the form of language in order to "prepare" learners to function with it (i.e. using a grammatical syllabus) rather than the other way around, and not giving students enough opportunity to express themselves creatively with the
language, especially through stories. In the next chapter, I discuss the importance of the issue of "standard practices". I also make some suggestions for textbooks, discuss some ideas for a specific textbook unit, and make suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Introduction

One of the main questions that has driven my research in this project is, "What's wrong with using standard pedagogical practices to teach language?" By outlining the history of basal readers, I have attempted to show how textbooks have traditionally started a unit with a list of vocabulary words and a grammatical point, using it to build an artificial discourse around which students can "practice doing language." Additionally, textbook authors have viewed language learning as mechanical, and language learners as a metaphorical product, going through the language factory, adding a new function at each station (unit).

As long as we continue to view language learning as a mechanical process, and the classroom as a metaphorical factory, our currently-accepted practices make perfect sense. However, if we begin to change our perceptions of language and language learning, we must also call in to question our practices. Upon analyzing current ESL textbooks, I found that veryfew reflect the principle of
using language to make meaning. In this chapter, I discuss the importance of treating language (and language learning) as dynamic, and make suggestions as to how this could be done in an ESL textbook unit.

A Dynamic View of Language

In her article "Chaos/Complexity Science and Second Language Acquisition," Larsen-Freeman (1997) discusses this issue of metaphors. First, she calls attention to "the similarities among complex nonlinear systems occurring in nature and language and language acquisition" (p. 142), and goes on to say that rather than using "machine" as a metaphor for language, we would be better served by considering it an organism: "machines are constructed; organisms grow" (Rutherford, quoted in Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 147).

Using either metaphor we know that language as a whole is comprised of smaller parts (syntax, lexicon, phonology, pragmatics, etc.). Viewing language as a machine, we can see each of these as one of many wheels working together to produce the end result. However, we also know that language is not stable, and that a change in one segment affects the others (e.g., audience
determines rules of pragmatics as well as choice of lexicon, phonology and syntax). Therefore, to teach language by focusing on the individual segments, or even to teach from the viewpoint that language is mechanical does not do justice to language as a whole (Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

A machine must have individual parts perfected before additional parts are added. In language instruction, this would be the equivalent of using a grammatical syllabus in a textbook. On the other hand, an organism grows—not always perfectly—as a result of appropriate amounts of input (light, water, etc.) and adequate room to expand. With language, learners must receive appropriate amounts of input (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) and have the opportunity to grow (create with the language). The more input they receive, and the more they create, the stronger the organism becomes. Additionally, few organisms grow symmetrically or identically; depending on the conditions, one area may develop more quickly than others (just as with language), and some areas may never fully develop. And yet, an organism can function with its irregularities, while such "imperfections" will cause a machine to break
down. Therefore, one of the main reasons we cannot continue to teach language in a mechanical fashion is that language is not linear; it is dynamic.

It was, perhaps, this dynamic view of language that inspired Wells to develop his model of literacy. After all, if language itself is dynamic, so also must be the process of developing language learning, including the texts used for instruction. According to Wells, the distinguishing factor in his proposed model of literacy is the inclusion of the epistemic level. "To focus only on the interpersonal communicative functions of literacy is to fail to recognize the changes that reading and writing can make in the mental lives of individuals and, by extension, of the societies to which those individuals belong" (Wells, 1987, p. 110). This view of the transformative power of language does not stop with students being able to "exploit the full symbolic potential of language for thinking in either the written or the spoken mode" (p. 114), but rather includes students as a dynamic part of the language learning process. For this reason, he says:
(Learners) should be treated as active constructors of their knowledge and understanding; they should be encouraged to share the responsibility for selecting the tasks in which they engage, for deciding on the means for attaining their goals, and for evaluating the outcomes of their attempts (Wells, 1987, p. 121).

From this viewpoint, everything about language learning is dynamic. Returning to the metaphor of language as an organism, the learners themselves and their needs are as integral a part of the growth process as is the curriculum.

Creating Dynamic Texts

Returning to Wells' model, I would now like to reintroduce the first criteria, which was omitted in my textbook review. For the purpose of reviewing textbooks, it did not seem applicable (or even fair) to analyze how an existing text treats students as active constructors of their own knowledge and encourages them to share in the responsibility of selecting tasks, setting goals, and evaluating the outcomes (Wells, 1987). However, when
considering the creation of a textbook, I believe it carries as much importance as the other three used in my textbook analysis.

Non-Traditional Texts

Some ESL and literacy instruction programs in the U.S. and Canada have opted, with positive results, to create their own textbooks, with the help of their students. In 1994, a group of community-based ESL instruction providers in Chicago worked on a collaborative project called "Empowerment Through Curriculum." They spent two years creating a textbook based on the interests of their students. Topics focused primarily on students' rights, and each unit began with a student authored story:

These vibrant stories dealt with topics that seldom find their way into published texts, such as the path to legal residency in the United States; driving; the rights of undocumented people; and issues of discrimination, sexual

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6 Using language as a means to achieve other goals; using the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking to formulate conclusions; and creating/sharing narratives.
7 Five Community Based Organizations serving a variety of immigrant populations, (presumably all adults) including Latin American, Polish and mixed ethnic/language backgrounds, participated in the project.

During the field testing of the chapters, teachers found that students showed great interest in the topics. Many of the activities around the stories included students having the opportunities to tell their own stories (of immigration, discrimination, etc.) and to make comparisons with their own cultures. One activity asks students to write and role play two dialogues: one for being stopped by the police in the U.S., and another of the same situation in their own country (with potentially comical results) (Ullman, 1999). Such activities go beyond the traditional focus on surface structure aspects of the language, and help learners develop deep structure pragmatic skills.

In a similar manner, a literacy program in Canada opted to write their own texts for a literacy program. In this program, similar to Freire's idea of teaching literacy, students dictate their own stories to someone who can write them down (an instructor, or more advanced student) and these become the actual texts the students use to learn how to read. Once the texts are developed,
they are used not only by the individual authors, but are also shared among other students (Gaber-Katz, 1996). One of the stories that has drawn much attention is that of a student named Rose, an adult with a learning disability. Her story was that of her childhood, one that was filled with abuse and incest. While many would argue that such stories have no place in the classroom curriculum, it has been a favorite among students (Gaber-Katz, 1996).

Although the programs in the above examples did not state that they used Wells' model to develop their curriculum, what they have developed reflects well the principles that he suggests: students are actively involved in the curriculum selection, language is used as a means to achieve other goals, students use language to explore feelings and formulate conclusions, and they are given the opportunity to narrate stories.

The Importance of Narrative

One issue included in Wells' model, but rarely discussed with respect to second language learning, is that of narrative. Wells (1987) states that "an important place should be accorded, at all stages, to the sharing of stories, both those of the literature of the culture and
those that learners themselves construct on the basis of their own experiences; providing an important opportunity to make sense of their own lives and make meaning" (p. 122). While he does not explain the process of how telling stories helps students make meaning, I believe it is an important issue that should be further examined, especially as it relates to the creation of self identity.

Language as Identity

Many researchers agree that it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self; it is the place where our sense of ourselves is constructed (Budwig, 2000; Peirce, 1995; Wallerstein, 1983). Some go so far as to say that

(they) structural properties of language will impact on children's construal of self. The assumption is that children growing up in different language communities, would be likely to develop different senses of self to the extent to which language provides different ways of indexing oneself given differences in languages' typological make-up (Budwig, 2000, p. 200).
Building on this philosophy, proponents of social identity argue that when someone learns a new language, they are in fact constructing a new identity (or re-constructing their identity) (Kramsch, 2000; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Of immigrants to the U.S., Wallerstein (1983) says:

Not knowing English isolates people, for language is more than a means of communication—it's a reflection of culture. Language is a principle source of group identity and the transmission of that identity to children. As people live in the United States and learn English, they simultaneously reframe their culture and absorb new cultural and social underpinnings (p. 5).

In this respect, language learners are constructing a sort of dual personality: the person they were before they came to the U.S., and the person they are today (Before English and After English). This division is often very emotional: before they saw themselves as capable—-they made the decision to leave their homes and did whatever it took to immigrate to the U.S. Now, they are no longer
able to communicate effectively; they may be experiencing
discrimination and may feel very inadequate (Norton
Pierce, 1995; Wallerstein, 1983).

On this topic of identity (based on her own
experience), Anzaldúa (1987) says that non-speakers of
English:
suffer economically for not acculturating. This
voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for a
psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity--
we don't identify with the Anglo-American
cultural values and we don't totally identify
with the Mexican cultural values. We are a
synergy of two cultures with various degrees of
Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so
internalized the borderland conflict that
sometimes I feel one cancels out the other and
we are zero, nothing, no one (p. 63).

She also says, "If you want to really hurt me, talk badly
about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to
linguistic identity--I am my language. Until I can take
pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p.
59). Anzaldúa's testimonial is not that of an adult
immigrant learning English, it is that of an adult, born and raised in the U.S., who admits she is completely fluent in English, Spanish and several dialects of the two. She speaks of the shame of learning English as a child and being told not to "sound like a Mexican" (Anzaldúa, 1987). She also discusses the sense of alienation language learners experience as a result of having to reject their past in order to provide themselves and their families with a future. In the same manner, Peirce (1995), has discussed the negative impact social prejudices have on language learners, regardless of their first language. It is for this reason that I propose the need to include personal narratives in ESL curriculum. I believe that when students are afforded the opportunity to discuss their past lives, especially in their new language, they are able to bridge the chasm between their two worlds, their two identities, better allowing them to succeed in their new language and cultural surroundings.

Purpose of Constructing Narratives

Little research has been done on the importance of narratives in second language acquisition. However, I argue that they are crucial not only to acquiring the
acquiring the language, but also to constructing a positive identity—not only as a language learner, but also as a member of society, both with a past and a future. Researchers have argued for the importance of using narrative-based instruction in adult education, stating that narrative is the means through which humans make meaning of experience (Rossiter, 1999). From a pedagogical standpoint, Gaber-Katz (1996) says:

> It is understood that the messages in the learners' stories reflect the values, life experiences, and culture of the learners more accurately than do skill-building exercises and commercial stories... Starting with their own words and from their own strengths better enables students to learn subsequently the structure of the written language and the technical skills of decoding (p. 52).

But perhaps equally important is "the value (of) seeing oneself in new ways and seeing oneself as an actor in one's own life" (Gaber-Katz, 1996, p. 51). Students bring a wealth of information and experience with them to the
classroom, and yet all too often this resource of knowledge remains untapped.

Affording students multiple opportunities to share stories from their own life experiences does more than give them the opportunity to improve their language skills; it affords them the opportunity for them to share something of themselves, of their past, thus shaping who they are and bridging the gap between their worlds of the past and the present. "The idea is that the process of telling one's story externalizes it so that one can reflect on it, become aware of its trajectory and the themes within it, and make choices about how one wishes to continue" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 66).

Summary

In this section, I have discussed the need to see language as a living organism rather than a mechanical structure, and I have discussed how language shapes identity. I have given examples of programs that have solicited student input in curriculum development, and argued for the need to include narrative in ESL curriculum, especially as a means for helping learners shape their identities. In the next section I take a
topic which appeared in the student-initiated curriculum in both Chicago and Canada--domestic violence--and make suggestions as to how it could possibly be incorporated into a textbook.

Domestic Violence in the Classroom

Domestic violence is often erroneously defined exclusively as "wife beating." However, this is only one aspect of violence and abuse that takes place among family members. Additionally, it is a topic that is universal, in that domestic violence knows no distinction between racial or social classes (Arizmendi-Peñaloza, 2002). As a topic, I envision (perhaps idealistically) domestic violence to be a part of an empowerment type of curriculum in an adult program.

Domestic violence is a social issue, and although it is deeply hidden, the effects are far reaching. I believe it is the responsibility of all community members to be aware of the signs of domestic violence, as well as the options that are available to victims. Inviting ESL students to participate in learning about this topic includes them in the greater community, and gives them the knowledge that they could help someone in need. It also
opens dialogue to discuss cultural differences between the U.S. and other countries, which moves the activities beyond "just learning the language."

Using Wells' model to frame such a unit, student input would be solicited throughout the unit, from the introduction of the topic (e.g., Is this something we want to explore?) and in the proposed activities (e.g., Let's make a list of potential topics we want to use for role play?). For example, in the classroom, I envision introducing the topic with the question, What do we (you all) know about domestic violence? What is domestic violence? How does our society define: spousal abuse (male and female), child abuse, parent abuse, elder abuse. What is meant by emotional abuse? How does the law in our state define abuse? How is that different in your country?

Once we have exhausted our own resources, then I would ask, "What do we want to know about domestic violence?" or rather, "What should we know about it?" If at this point there is no student interest (or definite topic avoidance) then the unit would be completed, and we would move on. However, I would hope that some of the
questions that would arise (perhaps with some mild prodding) are:

♦ What resources are available for abusers/abused in our community?

♦ (How) Does the law protect immigrants who are being abused?

♦ If the police are called on a DV situation, can the victim be deported?

♦ Will s/he lose his/her children?

♦ Is it against the law (here) to physically discipline children?

♦ What might be some of the reasons that people are abusive? (this helps us recognize that abusers have problems)

♦ What might some good reasons be for staying in an abusive relationship (this helps us to avoid blaming the victim).

♦ If I know someone in an abusive relationship, how can I help them?

The above questions are atypical of ESL textbooks, although describing the difference between them and traditional textbook questions may be difficult. The
primary difference is that they do not focus on any specific grammatical point, but rather on a topic. The questions could just as easily be directed to a group of immigrants who are native speakers of English. Additionally, many of the questions are similar to the ones that the students themselves created when asked by the Chicago CBO textbook project (especially those questions dealing with immigrants' legal rights) (Ullman, 1999).

ESL teachers are specialists in language, and, while interesting, the above questions are also outside of the expertise of language teachers; therefore, I suggest that the purpose of the ESL teacher is to help students draft letters/dialogues that can be used to invite specialists to come visit the class and discuss these issues. Specialists would include personnel from local shelters, law enforcement and/or legal clinics that would be willing to discuss DV, prevention, and dispel common myths. Since the students would be the ones doing the inquiries, the presentations are not another "this is what I (authority figure) want that you all should know". Rather, the
students have control of what they want or do not want to learn.

Drawing on Wells' second principle, using language as a means to achieve other goals, students could be responsible for drafting letters to invite guest speakers, make posters that define pertinent vocabulary, and discuss what is and is not acceptable behavior towards other people.

After receiving this background education, I would then look for authentic texts for students to read (news articles, or something like Sandra Cisneros's vignettes) which give students the opportunity to discuss OTHER people's lives and experiences. Using the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking to formulate conclusions (Well's third principle), students could also take educational information that is available (flyers, brochures, newspaper articles) and decide whether their community has enough resources available for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. They could then make suggestions to the appropriate agencies on how to make improvements.
Knowing that talking about the issue may bring up the desire to vent some feelings, I would suggest a variety of activities. One would be for students to have a list of situations about which they can role-play (some "safer" than others, like perhaps a family ignoring the needs of an elderly parent). Role-play activities can be very empowering for students. It may give a woman the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to "put the cuffs" on a man accused of abusing his wife, or at least the opportunity to say something she would never dare to say in real life. It is also very healing when a classmate responds in a positive manner—like apologizing when they are accused of hurting someone's feelings, instead of blaming the victim.

I would also suggest a poetry writing session. (I would look for some examples of authentic texts to read to get the creative juices flowing.) I believe that poetry is the easiest way to express one's self in a second language because it is non-linear, non-grammatical, and generally only made up of words that convey meaning. And poetry is very personal. Most people understand a person saying, "I wrote a poem but I don't want to share it."
After this takes place, students may wish to share from personal experience. If so, I would facilitate small groups, and suggest that one area be designated for women only, another for men only, and the rest however they wish to split up. The fourth and final principle, *the sharing of stories*, is a potentially traumatic activity to someone who has experienced an abusive situation. However, avoiding the topic does a disservice to those needing it most. In adult ESL classes, the student may be both the victim and/or the perpetrator. Avoiding the subject may not only increase a victim's sense of helplessness, but also does a disservice to the community of which the ESL instructor is a member (J. Williams, personal communication, 12/18/2001).

I certainly do not advocate that students feel obligated to share from their own personal experiences, but an opportunity should be provided for those who wish to take advantage of it, even if it is told in the third person. "At the core of a narrative perspective on development is the idea that narrative is the means
through which humans make meaning of experience" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 60).

Community-based literacy programmes (sic) also use story because they feel that there is educational value in literacy learners telling life stories that previously had to be kept secret, or could be told only from someone else's perspective or agenda... When community-based literacy programmes validate and affirm literacy learners through the use of story, it may be exactly what learners need, after years of not believing that they have stories to tell. (Gaber-Katz, 1996, p. 53).

The activities I propose are potentially beneficial, not only to those students who have been touched by some form of domestic violence in the past, but to the entire group. They are activities in which all members of the class can participate, learn about and discuss a topic about which all members of our society should have a basic understanding.
If You Wrote It, Would It Sell?

During the process of doing my research and thinking about ways in which Wells' model of literacy could be better implemented in textbook design, I also had to wonder if textbooks were designed in such a fashion, would teachers actually use them? VanPatten (1998) reminds us that publishing is a competitive business. Publishers are reluctant to publish anything that does not "look familiar" to language teachers because they need to sell their products, not to students, but to teachers.

Therefore, taking my idea of a unit on domestic violence, I sent out a survey question to the TESL List-serve that is managed through CUNY. As of May, 2002, this list-serve has more than 28,000 subscribers of ESL/SFL teachers in 129 countries world wide. I explained how the topic of domestic violence had surfaced in two different programs that requested student input for curriculum development, and then asked some of the following questions:

- Do you think this topic is appropriate for an ESL textbook? (Why or why not?)
Would you consider doing a lesson series on domestic violence in your ESL classroom?

Or, if you already incorporate this topic in your classrooms, how do you do it?

Also, what about this topic scares you as an instructor? (What do you see as potentially going wrong—in or outside of the classroom?)

(See appendix A for complete survey.)

Considering the number of subscribers to the list-serve, I did not receive a huge number of responses, but the members who did respond sent long and thoughtful replies to my questions.

**Survey Results**

Of the 21 respondees, 7 were male, 12 female, and 2 could not be determined by their signatures. There were 10 from the USA/Canada, 7 from other countries, and 4 did not designate their geographical locations. Of the 21 responses, 1 did not answer the questions, but simply gave advice. Of the remaining 20, 12 were in favor of including the topic in an ESL classroom, 5 were against it, and 3 had extremely mixed opinions (more against it than in favor of it).
As a group, the numbers appeared to be split fairly evenly. However, by further dividing the groups into smaller segments, some interesting patterns emerge: of the male respondents, 2 were in favor, 4 opposed. Of the female respondents, 10 were in favor, and 2 opposed. Of respondents from the US/Canada, 10 were in favor, 1 opposed, and from all other countries, 2 were in favor, but 4 opposed. Interestingly, all of the responses that were dead set against the topic were from outside of the US/Canada. The highest number of responses as a group came from females from the US/Canada who favored the topic (8), the second highest came from males from all other countries who opposed the topic (3). However, I am not as interested in analyzing the respondents as I am interested in discussing what they had to say, for many of them raised some very valid issues surrounding the topic of domestic violence, and more specifically the integration of the topic in an ESL classroom or textbook.

**Classroom Topic Versus Textbook Topic**

Many of the respondents who favor discussing the topic of domestic violence in the ESL classroom made a distinction between the topic and the text. In general,
most teachers feel uncomfortable with the topic being "forced" upon them by a textbook. Several suggested that such topics could be extremely helpful, if printed as a supplementary text, rather than as the primary text for the classroom.

Teacher Qualifications

Repeatedly, the issue of instructors being "qualified to deal with this issue" came up: "Teachers are not trained therapists." Some saw this as an "end of conversation" statement, adding, "personally, I avoid such topics unless the students bring them up." However, using the same philosophy, many others stated that because they are not qualified to answer questions on the topic, they invite guest speakers into their classrooms. The most commonly mentioned resource was law enforcement officers, who may explain issues of family violence, or the procedures of reporting crimes, including domestic violence.

Traumatic Reality

Introducing real-life issues in the classroom means leaving the comfort zone of the predictable. One respondent said, "Just as domestic violence is a reality
for many, it may equally be a traumatic reality, and they may not want to speak about it, particularly if they are victims." Most of the instructors that opposed the integration of the topic in the classroom provided some kind of "protective" reasoning--protecting the students: from opening emotional wounds; from bringing up a topic about which students do not have enough language to express themselves; and even protecting the other students from the discomfort of having to view the emotional "wreckage." In short, the topic can be profoundly upsetting, and "while tears may be cathartic, some may feel that the classroom is not the best environment for this to happen, and, hard-hearted as it may sound, may not be conducive to the learning of English." The topic of domestic violence is, without a doubt, an emotional one. For this very reason others felt that it should not be avoided.

The Importance of Not Avoiding Issues

Most of the respondents who said they do or would be willing to include a unit on domestic violence in their classroom saw it as an issue of student empowerment and teacher responsibility. One person said, "By introducing
our students to such issues we're doing much more than teaching English. If we don't do it (introduce the topics), who will?" Another responded, "There is no reason to be so afraid of dealing with serious matters that we should exclude them from the classroom...We are to help students express themselves in all areas--not just the non-controversial ones. Perhaps all a student has known is silence on such issues...The teacher who dances around and away from difficult issues shows his or her students that they are also unfit to deal with such things and the result is a bunch of people who 'can't deal' or are too afraid of the 'sticky' ideas of life."

While those opposed to the issue seemed to view it as an isolated topic whose function (like any other classroom topic) was simply providing a springboard for "an academic discussion for the sake of getting people talking," those who favored it saw it from a very different, and much more global, perspective. Virtually all of those in favor of discussing domestic violence in the classroom agreed that a critical factor is incorporating the topic into larger themes, such as: getting to know the community, health services, cultural values, gender issues, or respect (for
self and others). They also indicated that the manner in which the topic is introduced is crucial.

Introducing Issues

The instructors that already include issues of wife/child abuse, sexual harassment, and cultural differences (including civil rights/gender issues), all indicated that they introduce the topic by way of authentic literature and/or films. Several different respondents specifically mentioned the vignettes of Sandra Cisneros. Others used booklets published by social service providers in their communities, describing what resources are available to the students, and in what languages. These instructors are prepared to deal with what may include some very personal revelations by their students.

Because domestic violence is not generally a "public" conversational topic, when a student does opt to discuss their problems in a classroom, it can be uncomfortable for all, especially if the topic was not initiated by the instructor, or if the instructor is not well prepared. One instructor wrote, "Big problems are revealed when we discuss these issues and some of us are not prepared to
help our students. Somehow, in my afternoon multi-level ESL class, domestic violence/abuse was brought up. It was, innocently enough, brought on by a discussion on laundry products. One low level student burst into tears and began a tirade, in very poor English, that lasted a 1/2 hour describing her own situation of abuse. We were all horrified. All the students tried to help her with suggestions...I felt unprepared and embarrassed. I felt the need to lead, but I had no idea what to do. It was a real surprise and I was caught off guard." As much as instructors like to plan for classes, they cannot plan the results. Many of the instructors who were opposed to introducing the topic of domestic violence in a classroom said that, "I personally would avoid potentially traumatic topics unless brought up by the students...If on the other hand domestic violence occurs as a student initiated topic, I would not try to suppress it unless it was clear to me that those students who wanted to discuss the topic were causing distress to another student." Unfortunately, if the topic is introduced "out of the blue" by a student, in a classroom where an instructor has never "planned" to discuss the topic because they themselves would be
extremely uncomfortable with it, the discussion would not be effective, and would simply be remembered by all present as that "incident," where the victim's behavior (crying in public) is viewed as "inappropriate" and the code of silence and cycle of violence is inadvertently reinforced. In essence, for a unit on domestic violence to be most effective, an instructor would almost have to take a proactive attitude.

Effective Presentation

First and foremost, be prepared. According to one respondent, "It is irresponsible to even touch the issue without some serious background research into what services are available (in the community)." Almost all of the responses I received agreed on one thing: "ESL teachers are not qualified to hand out medical, legal or psychiatric advice." Therefore, experts should be invited into the classroom. Most teachers inadvertently assume the position of advisor. Even in the responses to my survey, I received more advice than I did answers to my questions. I asked, "What would YOU do?" and I got a lot of: "YOU should do X:" However, anyone who has worked in crisis intervention knows the danger in this attitude,
especially when dealing with personalities who are already accustomed to "doing what they are told--or else."

One response came from someone with experience as a crisis line counselor: "To be effective, a unit should teach about the cycle of violence (i.e., things are good then bad then good. Don't think the abuser is "cured" because things are good for a while). Also, teach about signs of a potential abuser (extremely possessive, demands commitment very early in the relationship, etc.). Talking about the effects on children would also be important (and resources available for children, how to report abuse, what happens to the children when the police are notified, etc.)." For teachers to present an effective unit on such a topic she says, "We need to do a lot of research, bring in guest speakers, and give students information about available resources."

It could easily be argued that most teachers already have enough to do and not enough time to do it in, and to ask them to spend hours arming themselves with the necessary information to present such a unit is unreasonable. The same instructor that had the topic brought up by her student says that today, she is much
more willing to discuss controversial issues in the classroom, but she adds, "I would love a book with lessons on this and other family topics, but hopefully it would lead the class, or help me lead the class, and offer some helpful suggestions. Because if you open the can of worms, you really need to offer help."

Language Barriers

Several respondees expressed concern for introducing the topic in anything but advanced classes. One stated, "I would not use this with beginners or low-intermediates; since they do not have enough language to express themselves, they may become a boiling pot of emotions." It is easy to recognize how this could be a problem, especially if the students and teachers do not all share the same L1, or if the instructor prohibits the use of L1 in the classroom. Surprisingly though, one of the instructors from the Chicago based CBO textbook project noted during the field testing phase that the topics in the text (immigrants rights) "provided outlets for ideas and frustrations that, before the class, many students had only expressed in their native language to people who were of the same ethnic background" (Ullman, 1999, p. 521).
Rather than causing isolation, the textbook topics actually drew them together by providing the opportunity for students to share with each other from their life experiences.

Summary of Results

Taking all of the responses into consideration, I believe there is a need for some type of text dealing with social issues, including domestic violence, especially within the U.S. and Canada. Perhaps this could be a supplementary text, as proposed by more than one instructor. However, after analyzing the responses I received, as I review my own ideas for such a unit, I see that in addition to the activities that I proposed for the students, all of which fit within Wells' literacy model, there should also be a guide for instructors who have no personal experience with the topic. Perhaps such a guide could be co-created with a domestic violence agency, outlining the same issues that are discussed in detail in volunteer training workshops. I am not advocating that ESL teachers become "bush beaters," in search of domestic violence victims, but that they should feel competent to
deal with this tough issue, enough so that they can help empower their students who "know someone" who needs help.

Additional Research Needed

One of the limits I explained in doing my project was the lack of research on constructive methodologies in the classroom, both in teaching practices and in textbooks. I believe that a huge need exists for research comparing students who are exposed to the use of constructivist texts and techniques in the classroom with those who are in programs that are more traditional. One such study was conducted comparing the L1 literacy acquisition of six children, three in a whole language program and three using traditional basal readers (Freppon & McIntyre, 1999), but much more research is needed, especially in the field of adult second language acquisition.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, Nunan (1999), Savignon (1987) and Richards (1998) all state that textbooks have changed dramatically since the 1970's to reflect current beliefs about language teaching. Sadly, I do not agree. I believe that the changes that have been made are neither
dramatic, nor do they truly reflect what we (say we) believe about language teaching and learning. For the most part, the textbooks I examined have maintained the basic belief that "literacy [language] is exhaustively defined as a set of mechanical linguistic skills and is thus easily measured, packaged and delivered" (Webster, Caddick & Reed, 1999, p. 50). We can change the packaging and delivery as much as we like, but not until we alter our definition of language will we truly and dramatically change our textbooks.

I began this research project thinking that the answer to the problem--the discrepancy that exists between theory and practice--could be solved by adapting our textbooks to a constructivist ideology. Now that I have finished my research, I realize that complex problems cannot be solved with such simple answers. I also recognize that what I thought would be a professional journey has become a very personal one--one that not every language teacher is interested in taking. Knowing this affects the type of recommendations I am comfortable in making. In fact, rather than recommendations, I am
proposing challenges to the industry, to textbook authors and publishers, and challenges to instructors of all languages. I challenge them to:

- Reconsider their views of language and of language learning.
- Not view ESL students as fragile, but as the strong, capable, intelligent people they are.
- Draw from students' prior knowledge of the world in order to learn new languages.
- Truly involve students in the process of deciding curriculum.
- Not be afraid of not knowing all the answers in the classroom.
- On a daily basis give students multiple opportunities to form opinions, solve problems, and share from their own life experiences.
- Make learning an experience.
- Do not fear change; embrace it.

I believe the last is perhaps the most important. Change is inevitable. And yet it is frightening, so we often avoid it. But changes are taking place within our
profession, and these are exciting times for those who have already begun the journey. And to those who are willing to take that journey: enjoy the ride.
APPENDIX A:

SURVEY QUESTIONS
Hello Colleagues, I have a question. Or rather, a sort of a survey.

Recently I read about two different programs that incorporated a student interest/needs assessment into the curriculum design. One, an adult basic literacy program in Canada (a mixture of ESL students and anglophones), the other a collaborative group project in Chicago (including a variety of student first languages). A topic that came up in both programs was that of "domestic violence." I believe this topic is geographically universal.

So, my question(s):

--Do you think this topic is appropriate for an ESL textbook? (why/not)

--Would you consider doing a lesson series on domestic violence in your ESL classroom?

--If not, why not?

--If so, what kind of ideas come to mind on how to facilitate meaningful activities? (i.e., video clips from specific movies, newspaper/magazine articles, role playing a court scene? [O.J. comes to mind]), poetry, comparing cultural definitions of abuse, finding local statistics on domestic violence, formulating a "what if" plan, etc.).

--Or, if you already incorporate this topic in your classrooms, how do you do it?

--Also, what about this topic scares you as an instructor? (What do you see as potentially going wrong--in or outside of the classroom?)

I will be interested to hear any and all thoughts on the subject. Thank you, Julia Reineman M.A. Candidate California State University, San Bernardino USA Confabulation101@hotmail.com
APPENDIX B:

TEXTBOOKS DISCUSSED


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