MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT ESL CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the authors' work with one school district in Minnesota helping to evaluate and revise their ESL program. In particular, the authors describe the steps that the district ESL teachers took in evaluating and selecting an ESL curriculum. These steps included consulting existing literature on curriculum and textbook selection, coming to a consensus as a district about priorities in regard to the ESL curriculum, looking at curricular choices made by other districts in Minnesota and creating a comprehensive curriculum review evaluation rubric to assist in making the right decision for the district. In addition to describing the process of the curriculum evaluation and redesign in the district, they present evaluation tools (checklists and rubrics) that they created for the purpose of designing curriculum. Further, they propose guidelines for the process of making decisions about ESL curriculum, which can be modified to fit other districts' ELL characteristics, teacher preferences, identified standards, and mainstream curricula.

INTRODUCTION

Programs for English language learners (ELLs) are increasingly becoming more systematic in their approach to instruction. In the past, the English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum was frequently patched together or developed from other curricula no longer being used by other teachers. In addition, commercially prepared curricula were often unsatisfactory or limited in their scope and practicality in the ESL classroom. Fortunately, this situation has been changing.

Because no textbook will address all the needs of every ELL, there will always be a need for teacher created materials and knowledge of how to differentiate mainstream curricula for ELLs. Yet many districts do desire to adopt a published curriculum, particularly for newcomers in larger programs. As textbook publishers have responded to the demand for quality materials, more commercially available textbooks specific to ELLs have been developed as well as more specialized ESL curricula that are integrated with mainstream textbooks. As the choices increase, so does the necessity of developing a systematic means for evaluating the various textbooks available, particularly as the purchase of a published curriculum may be one of the most expensive propositions a district will undertake. For those districts so inclined, this article will provide a means for evaluating potential textbooks and curriculum materials.

Despite the increased number of choices in regard to ESL textbooks, it is important to keep in mind that each district will have some unique needs and thus a one-size-fits-all-model is not appropriate. Several approaches to textbook selection have been proposed,

but unless the key stakeholders are involved and understand the unique needs of their district, an inappropriate choice may be the result. This occurred in one district the authors worked with and resulted in none of the ESL teachers using the texts that had been purchased at considerable cost to the district. Personalizing the choice to fit a particular district cannot be emphasized enough (Ansary & Babaii, 2006; Byrd, 2001).

The authors have been assisting several school districts with program evaluations and curriculum adoptions. This article proposes some guidelines for the process of making decisions about ESL textbooks, which can and need to be modified to fit individual districts' ELL characteristics, teacher preferences, identified standards, and mainstream curricula. The intent is to provide practical guidelines and ideas to consider when choosing or reviewing ESL curricula. In addition, a description of work with one school district that actually conducted a district-wide ESL program evaluation is included. As part of this review process, the program evaluators worked together with district team members, to evaluate the existing ESL curriculum and to make recommendations for a new one. The steps that were taken to evaluate and select an ESL curriculum are described. These steps included consulting existing literature on curriculum and textbook selection, coming to a consensus as a district about priorities in regard to the ESL curriculum, exploring curricular choices made by other districts in Minnesota and creating a comprehensive curriculum review evaluation rubric to assist in making the right decision for the district. Before proceeding to the description of this work with the district, some basic principles that need to be taken into consideration when making decisions about adopting an ESL curriculum will be outlined.

FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ESL CURRICULUM

Questions to consider when designing curriculum

Any review of ESL curricula should begin by identifying the essential characteristics of the district (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001). These include the ESL program philosophy and goals as well as those factors mentioned earlier, such as the learner characteristics, standards, teaching preferences and mainstream curricula. Whether or not there is diversity of home languages spoken or one predominant language group is also important to consider as some textbooks may include a home language component. Similarly, whether or not a district adopts a curriculum that incorporates this component depends on the belief system among district educators as to the desirability and practicality of bilingual programs.

Another crucial element in the curriculum selection process is defining, in explicit terms and with sufficient detail for clarity and mutual understanding, what the goals of ESL instruction in the school or district are. These goals should always be described in relationship to the mainstream or content-area curricula as the broader main goal of the

ESL curriculum should be to prepare ELLs for success in the mainstream academic content and curriculum (e.g., Collier, 1989; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Gibbons, 2002; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989). This is often a challenging task for ESL teachers, particularly in smaller districts, where the connections between ESL and content-area classrooms are often not as well-established. An elementary ESL teacher, who teaches ESL in a pull-out instructional setting where these connections have yet not been created, describes the difficulties of connecting the ESL curriculum to the mainstream curriculum like this:

> It can be exhausting, as an ESL teacher, to create your own curriculum constantly. Some differentiated instruction manuals that come with the regular curriculum, can be helpful.   But teaching with an ESL curriculum that is not tied into the mainstream curriculum is difficult. Students are not engaged (at least in my pull-out setting) because they don't receive a separate grade for their work; and they cannot practice and reinforce their learning if the content is different from the mainstream content.

Another related challenge is evident in the experiences of several ESL teachers who have shared with us their struggles to balance between, what they call "teaching language" as opposed to serving as "tutors" with homework help. These teachers are ESL teachers from small ESL programs where the students represent multiple content-area classrooms and grade levels. In these settings, the students come to the ESL classroom (for which they often do not receive academic credit) expecting to get help with their homework assignments from the content area classrooms. These assignments vary significantly from student to student as do the academic support needs of the students. It is this kind of reactive or remedial, fully customized, assistance that takes much of these teachers' time. Little time is left for the more proactive, foundation building language learning activities. The real challenge lies in the fact that this kind of reactive mode of instruction addresses the more visible and immediate gaps in the students' skills and knowledge, but it does not proactively and systematically support students' long-term second language acquisition skills outlined in the ESL language standards (national and state-level) that function as a prerequisite for students ultimately succeeding in mainstream, content-area classrooms. Thus, it is essential that the ESL teachers define their roles as providing both the more foundational language skills as well as the more reactive assistance that responds to students' more immediate needs stemming from the content area classroom.

Additionally, some districts may have small numbers of ELLs while other districts may have students at all proficiency and age levels. Larger programs with multiple teachers would likely benefit from the common expectations developed through a district- and/or school-wide review process (Garinger, 2002; Kessler, 1997).

Before ordering review copies of ESL curriculum materials, the ESL teachers, with other stakeholders (the more that can be included in this process, the more likely the curriculum adoption will be successful), should discuss the underlying philosophical views about the ESL curriculum, its goals and its connections to what we know of best practice in educating ELLs. Table 1 lists some of these questions that should be explored at the very beginning of the review process. Experienced evaluators say that districts that not only have discussed these points, but which also have documented and enforced implementation of these principles, have tended to be more successful in selecting and implementing a curriculum that is utilitarian and is compatible with the mainstream curriculum.

Table 1. Starting Point: Checklist for Making Decisions about an ESL Curriculum

Questions to consider during ESL curriculum review:

·   What is the goal of ESL instruction in the school/district?

·   What are the crucial characteristics of this program? What are the beliefs and expectations of the various stakeholders in regard to ESL instruction?

·   What is the role of ESL instruction in relationship to mainstream curriculum and instruction?

·   What is the ESL program philosophy?

·   What are state requirements regarding the education of ELLs?

·   What are the skills and knowledge described in the state/ national ESL standards?

·   What do we know about what is best for ELLs?

The role of textbooks

A textbook can serve different purposes for teachers. It can function as a core resource, as a source of supplemental material, as an inspiration for classroom activities, or even as the curriculum itself (Garinger, 2002). We emphasize that a textbook or a textbook series should never be the total answer to the district scope and sequence for ELLs because of the diverse nature of ELLs and the programs that serve them as well as the diversity among schools and among mainstream curricula. However, a textbook can provide a framework or structure on which to personalize and differentiate for each district's, school's and classroom's needs. It can also serve to standardize the expectations of what will be taught at each grade level and at each level of proficiency. Where feasible, ESL textbook content should be aligned as much as possible with the mainstream curriculum content and themes, especially if the ESL textbook contains

academic content themes. Table 2 lists the multiple ways that textbooks are commonly used in ESL classrooms.

Table 2. Roles of Textbooks

ESL textbooks may…

- · Help sequence material/information to cover

- · Contain ideas for activities

- · Provide information about learning processes

- · Complement curriculum (e.g., grammar, vocabulary)

- · Serve as a reference

- · Include assessments

- · Offer homework assignments

- · Serve as an introduction to a unit or theme

- · Assist in standardizing instruction (getting to a certain level by the end of the year)

- · Provide stories, visuals, and overhead transparencies

- · Serve as the main text with supplements created by the teacher

ONE DISTRICT'S JOURNEY

What follows is the description of the process used by one district to personalize their approach to selecting an ESL curriculum. The intent of this paper is to make that process transparent.

Brief district profile

This Minnesota school district has approximately 7000 students, ten elementary schools, a junior-senior high school, a middle school, and a second high school. The district has approximately 350 ELLs with a variety of languages represented, including Latinos and a large population of Somali and Sudanese former refugees. Some of the ELLs were born in the U.S. Many come from homes where there are issues of first language literacy. There are nine ESL teachers. Both push in and pull out models are used in the district.

In the following section, the four-step process that the district employed in reviewing their ESL curriculum is outlined.   These steps included:

1. Exploring established characteristics of ESL curricula
2. Stating district priorities about curriculum
3. Eliciting feedback from other districts
4. Establishing district's guidelines for systematic evaluation

Each of these steps will be described in more detail below.

Exploration of established characteristics of ESL curricula

The first step in the curriculum review process was to seek out several articles and textbooks that addressed the issues involved in selecting an ESL curriculum. These were summarized and the results examined by the ESL teachers and the authors to look for common characteristics to be aware of in the selection process (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2006; Garinger, 2002; Kessler, 1997). These characteristics were meshed with the existing process the district used for curriculum review, which specified certain features that should be included in any review. This step was essential because it enabled the district to explore what had already been discovered about successful ESL curricula and especially what the components of a successful ESL curriculum were and then personalize that with district expectations.

As part of this literature review process, a goal was to identify proposed criteria that went beyond the more obvious inclusion of language skills and assessment to address the unique, often not directly related to linguistic, needs of the language minority students in the district who come from limited formal schooling backgrounds. These criteria relate to such issues as fostering a community of learners, climate of respect, home-school connections, learning strategies, and alignment with the district curriculum. Although the review did not by any means yield an exhaustive list (this would be an ongoing process), and criteria specific to the district were needed, the information from this review was documented and is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Criteria for ESL Curriculum Established from Literature Review

Overall Program	Vocabulary and Content Based Instruction
· Is there a clearly stated philosophy and approach?	· Does instruction go from broad to specific?
· Are there goals?	· Are content and language integrated?
· Is there a clearly defined audience?	

· Are high expectations evident?

· Are a sufficient number of objectives addressed?

· Does the curriculum foster a community of learners and a climate of respect?

· How does the curriculum align with district content curriculum?

· Does the curriculum build background knowledge?

· Is there spiraling of vocabulary and content?

· Is the curriculum authentic and connected to the real world?

· Progression of skills

Reading and Writing

· How does the curriculum address reading and writing? What is the nature of the instructional model?

· Is there completeness of presentation?

· Is there adequacy of practice?

Listening and Speaking/ Oral Language Development

· How does the curriculum address oral language development?

· Is there completeness of presentation?

· Is there adequacy of practice?

· How does the program address pronunciation?

Grammar

· Is there adequacy of presentation of structures?

· Is there appropriate sequencing?

· Is there adequacy of drills and practice?

Assessment

· Does the curriculum assess students' prior knowledge and readiness?

· Is the assessment related to the instruction?

Instruction of Skills

· Does the curriculum provide scaffolding?

· Does the curriculum include higher level thinking skills?

· Does the curriculum include guided practice?

· Is the curriculum varied and challenging?

Other:

· Are there suggestions for home school connections?

· What is the appearance of the materials? Is it culturally respectful? Is it attractive?

· What is the availability of the materials?

· What is the cost?

·   Is there controlled and free practice?

·   Is there explicit instruction of learning strategies?

Stating district priorities about curriculum

Because the district was engaged in a program evaluation, pertinent information was gathered at this point from ESL teachers, administrators and mainstream teachers as to what they thought was important in an ESL curriculum. The results of these discussions and interviews were presented at an ESL department meeting for further discussion and final decision making. There was widespread agreement that the curriculum chosen needed to be aligned with district curriculum as much as possible. In particular because literacy was an important district goal, educators believed that literacy should also be stressed in the ESL curriculum, with particular emphasis on building content area vocabulary. They decided that other reading strategies used by the district should be a part of any new curriculum. These included looking for curricula that did the following: Built background knowledge (Marzano, 2004); emphasized content area reading (Readance, Bean, & Baldwin, 1989); used leveled readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996); provided opportunities for critical thinking and construction of meaning (Cooper, 2000); engaged the learners in authentic tasks and assessment (Routman, 1991; Stiggins, 2002; Tompkins, 2003); developed writing skills through process writing (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005); provided strategies for differentiation (Tomlinson, 2001); incorporated high standards and provided collaboration with mainstream teachers (Berube, 2000); and consisted of curricula that were appropriate for diverse learners (Sleeter & Grant, 2003).

They also were aware that one curriculum would not necessarily be appropriate for all ages and levels of proficiency. Prior to looking at any curriculum, they examined all of the texts and teaching materials they were currently using and rated them as to appropriateness and usefulness. As such, it became obvious what they were looking for and what they were lacking. As the first step in determining curriculum needs, each individual teacher filled out a grid of all the curricula they were using. An example that one teacher submitted is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Example of Format Used for Evaluating Current Curriculum

Materials	Grade level used	Focus or main objectives; purpose	Strengths	Weaknesses
Take home leveled library books	First, Second Third (last year)	Reading more at independent level,	At least 75% non-fiction, family involvement,	Not enough time to discuss the books

		exposure to new info, vocabulary, background knowledge, improving fluency	reading more at independent reading level, experiencing success	that have been read with the students
			Accountability for reading more at home	Challenging to get new books home each day
ELL texts **Scott Foresman ESL Accelerating Language Learning**	First, Second Third (last year)	Used sometimes as additional resource to help students gain more background knowledge, concepts, and reading strategies	Thematic, good background units, includes strategies to teach, and 4 modalities of listening, speaking, writing, and reading are included in the lessons	Sometimes not challenging enough at first and second grade levels Separate program and curriculum does not always follow what is happening in main stream classrooms
Steck-Vaughn **Phonics**	Second, Third (last year)	To accelerate reading in English for student who had strong BICS in English	Very systematic and attractive to learn from, easy to use	Too much vocabulary if student does not have BICS in English
District reading texts and ELL components **English Language Learners Treasures** **Macmillan/McGraw Hill**	First, Second	To use differentiated instruction, leveled readers, and best practices for ELLs, to help them develop oral and written language, and academic language	Integrated with the district's new reading curriculum that began to be used in grades K-2 this fall Improvement in collaboration with mainstream and sped teachers because using the same reading curriculum	Lack of time to teach all of the components Not having all resources of the ELL program (now using only the teacher's manual)
Guided reading using nonfiction leveled readers	First, Second Third (last year)	To teach reading strategies in word recognition, comprehension strategies, to also	Taught in the push in program in a small group that included both ELL and mainstream students reading near the same reading levels	A year's plan of books to teach If there are more than 50% of students

		increase background knowledge		in the group who are not ELL
Support curriculum for classroom teachers **in the new reading curriculum Macmillan/McGraw Hill**	Kdgn. First, and Second	To help teachers become more able to differentiate instruction for ELLs	Included in teachers' manuals and based on best practices for ELLs	Time for more collaboration and learning together

Next the teachers met to determine what curricula they were currently using that they wanted to continue to use. They also determined what they were using in common. The information was placed on a grid like the one below so that gaps and commonalities became evident.

Currently Using

Level 5

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

New-comer

	K	1-2	3-5	6	7-8	9-12

Finally, the teachers worked together to identify areas of weakness. There were several grade levels and proficiency levels that had minimal curriculum or materials that were inappropriate or ineffective. They listed specific types of curricula and materials they thought they needed at each level on a grid similar to the one below.

Identified Needs

Level 5

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

New-comer

	K	1-2	3-5	6	7-8	9-12

Feedback from other districts

The next step, which was facilitated by the authors, was to inquire from other districts about curricula they were using, to elicit other teachers' feedback on the curricula and to compile a summary of the main features of each approach. Responses were received from teachers from ten different school districts in Minnesota about the ESL textbooks series/curricula that they use and their experiences with using them. Samples of the feedback that was received from teachers in the field are included with each textbook series and will be presented in the feedback in three sections, starting from the elementary level, to middle school and then to high school levels. While these comments are not meant as endorsements or criticisms of any particular textbook, they are representative of the feedback received and were useful to the district as they determined their own particular needs.

Elementary ESL

Textbook Series: *Scott Foresman ESL*

Publisher/s: Addison Wesley Longman/Scott Foresman

Authors: Jim Cummins, Anna Uhl Chamot, Carolyn Kessler, J. Michael O'Malley, and Lily Wong Fillmore

Description:

"This series is a content-based program (Grades K-8) that accelerates English language learning. It teaches students the academic language and content they need to achieve success in the mainstream classroom. Through explicit learning strategies, grade-level content materials, and a balance of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, Scott Foresman ESL helps students develop their higher-order thinking, their language ability and, ultimately, their self-esteem." (www.longman.com)

Sample teacher responses:

"Our school district adopted this curriculum within the last 5 years. The strengths of the curriculum are that it uses the typical content found at that grade level to teach English.

It focuses a lot on discussion and does have student consumables. I actually hate the curriculum and feel that the textbook is too high for limited English speakers and too low for students who are more fluent. In addition, it doesn't match what the classroom teacher is doing, so the kids are not engaged in learning something different." (Grades K-6)

"For my intermediate students, I modify the mainstream curriculum (Scott Foresman), and that works well. We do what they do in 2-3 weeks instead of 1. It would be nice to have more stories, though." (Grades 5 and 6)

Textbook Series: *Scott Foresman Reading*

Publisher/s: Pearson/Scott Foresman

Description: not available

Sample teacher response:

"I love this reading curriculum because it has leveled resources and targeted skills for each week. The teacher's manual has hints on how to better reach ESL students. The BEST part is the companion resource called "Adding English". It has parallel lessons for each main lesson the mainstream teacher uses. So I can use ESL strategies to help my students better comprehend the reading text, vocabulary, background knowledge, etc. The students like the fact that we are reinforcing and practicing the skills they are learning in the mainstream classroom and feel more successful. Other intervention resources help me practice grammar, reading fluency with lower level booklets on the same topic, worksheets, etc. This text book has a good balance of phonics, oral language practice, vocabulary, writing, strategies (i.e. compare/contrast), reading comprehension and grammar. You can find this text on-line at: http://www.sfreading.com/." (Grades K-6)

Textbook Series: *Avenues (PreK-5)/ Harcourt Trophies (PreK-6)*

Publisher/s: Hampton-Brown

Description: *Avenues*

· 	Beautiful, Language-Rich Resources

· 	The Best in Basic and Academic Vocabulary Development

Harcourt Trophies

Trophies is a research-based, developmental reading/language arts program. Explicit phonics instruction; direct reading instruction; guided reading strategies; phonemic awareness instruction; systematic, intervention strategies; integrated language arts components; and state-of-the-art assessment

· Grade-Level Content with Connection to Science and   Social Studies

· Time-Saving Tools for Teachers

· Standards-Based with Specialized Strategies

· Literacy for All Students

· Multi-Level Writing Supports

· Data-Driven Instruction with Multi-Level Assessment

· (www.hampton-brown.com)

tools ensure every student successfully learns to read. (www.harcourtschool.com)

Sample teacher responses:

"With the exception of Newcomers, all ESL teachers at my school use *Avenues*, and some of the classroom teachers also use it when they have high numbers of ELL students in their reading groups. Some of the classroom teachers also use *Avenues* when they have high numbers of ELL students in their reading groups. I use *Avenues* for K as a primary text and for Newcomers as a supplementary text. In K, I also use books from the website Reading A-Z, district Newcomer curriculum, and Harcourt Trophies ELL readers. I love *Avenues*, and so do the students, but I don't rely solely on that curriculum." (Grades K and 1)

"Overall, I love it! There are so many different things to choose from for each week's worth of lessons. There are songs, readings, listening exercises, daily writing, etc. I think its strongest feature is the quality of the reading selections. I have two problems with the curriculum. First, I don't really like the written tests. Secondly, the writing portion, with another book called "English at Your Command", is more complicated to integrate into lessons. All in all, I really think it is helpful for students. We use the *Avenues* curriculum with most, but not every student. Sometimes we use the ELL sections of the mainstream Harcourt Trophies curriculum. This is our first year of using *Read 180* with some students. *Avenues* works well with most levels, but we usually do other things with absolute newcomers. There are so many good choices in *Avenues* that I supplement some, but not too much. The main area where I always need to supplement is that we do not have enough leveled readers in the program. And there are always occasions when it is good to add something different to the weekly curriculum."

"The kids are very aware with *Avenues* and Scott Foresman, if you use a level that is lower than their actual grade. I don't like this at all, and they don't either." (Grades 5 and 6)

Middle School

Textbook Series: *Highpoint* (Grades 6-12)

Publisher/s: Hampton-Brown (www.hampton-brown.com)

Description:

Motivates Struggling Readers and English Learners

Closes Gaps in Language and Literacy

Equips Teachers for Effective Instruction

·   High interest, multicultural selections

·   Significant themes

·   Real-world appeal

·   Engaging activities

·   Extensive vocabulary development and skills practice

·   Complete learning-to-read strand

·   Direct instruction in reading strategies

·   Abundant work with expository text

·   Comprehensive grammar instruction and practice

·   Fully supported Writing Projects

·   Multi-level teaching strategies to address diverse needs

·   Full array of assessments to diagnose, plan instruction, measure progress, and re-teach.

·   Varied teaching tools- from transparencies to technology, to audio and theme books!

·   Family newsletters in 7 languages to increase home involvement.

Sample teacher responses:

"For middle school, I like *High Points*."

"I have used Hampton-Brown *Avenues* and *High Point* with middle school kids. I don't like either of them. To me, they echo the basal readers that we are trying to get away from. They are full of worksheets and other canned activities that seem like busy work to me."

"Both *Avenues* and *High Point* really integrate language arts and the 6 traits writing method. I believe that this curriculum works really well if you have pull out method. It becomes a little more difficult to use in an inclusion model, which is what I am teaching this year. I have used it to supplement and guide what I do with third grade social studies curriculum. I have heard good things from ELL teachers in my district because they don't have to reinvent the wheel. Like all things it has pros and cons but it would definitely be worth your while to check it out."

"*High Point* was good in the sense that it targets various content areas. However, I didn't care for it too much, because I didn't feel the lessons connected. As I used it I found myself adding more lessons of my own to extend the content."

Textbook Series: *Making Connections*

Publisher/s: Cambridge

Description:

"*Making Connections* is a reading skills book aimed at the high-intermediate student who needs to prepare for academic reading tasks. The book has four high-interest thematic units, each with multiple readings on health, multicultural studies, language and the environment." (www.cambridge.org)

Sample teacher response:

"In my current middle school teaching job, I use an older series called *Making Connections* with my intermediate level students. I use it in conjunction with the mainstream curriculum, pulling things from here and there. *Making Connections* is not bad, but it's a little out-dated. If a more up-to-date version exists, it might not be a bad one to look into. "

Textbook Series: *Shining Star* (Grades 6-12)

Publisher/s: Longman

Description:

"*Shining Star*, a four-level program, gives students all the support they need to master reading, writing, literature and content, within a systematic language development framework. A flexible program, *Shining Star* can be used for newcomers through intermediate level students." (www.longman.com)

Sample teacher response:

"I have been working with the introductory level of the *Shining Star* series. I teach level 2 reading and writing. My class is about 12 students from 6th to 8th grade: Hispanic, Somali, and Ethiopian. I use the textbook and workbook as a point of reference and departure. We read the stories in the book. I use the workbook and activities in the textbook as I see fit; I would say about half of what is provided. I try to complement the text: for example, we watched part of a baseball documentary that featured Roberto Clemente after reading his biography in *Shining Star*. It takes about three weeks to get through a unit, each unit having two stories, one fiction and one nonfiction. I make a poster out of the reading strategy and feature it for the week. I also try to recycle the strategies we have gone over. For example, it was cause and effect with texts on earthquakes and a Greek myth. It was question words with texts on ball games and a Clemente biography. Some strategies are easier to use than others. I also have a

response notebook, and we are collectively reading a novel, neither of which directly relates to the textbook. I just try to weave them together. Since I am collaborating in some mainstream English classrooms, I'm trying to structure the level 2 class to prepare them for what is to come."

Textbook/Curriculum Series: *Read 180*

Publisher/s: Scholastic

Description:

"READ 180's adaptive, instructional software provides intensive, differentiated skills practice to motivate struggling readers. The software analyzes, monitors, tracks, and reports on student accuracy, noting not only incorrect answers, but also the types of errors made and the time of the response. According to how the student performs, the software continually adjusts instruction offering students immediate feedback. READ 180 goes beyond branched differentiation to offer truly adaptive instruction. After logging into the software, the students are directed through the four Learning Zones." (www.teacher.scholastic.com)

Sample teacher response:

"*Read 180* is wonderful. It is a great Language Arts Curriculum that targets various areas for reading: Vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, etc. For this program I don't feel I need to supplement the material because it covers so much."

High School

Textbook/Curriculum Series: *Shining Star (Grades 6-12)*

Publisher/s: Scholastic

Description:

"*Shining Star*, a four-level program, gives students all the support they need to master reading, writing, literature and content, within a systematic language development framework. A flexible program, *Shining Star* can be used for newcomers through intermediate level students." (www.longman.com)

Sample teacher response:

"I enhance the units with selections from *A Multicultural Reader* (Perfection Learning). Shakespeare is also part of this course, grammar study, word study, independent reading and 4th quarter literature circles with novels of choice (Red and Black), and the *Cambridge English Grammar* in use with my high school newcomers, in addition to *Shining Star*."

"*Shining Star* teaches ELLs through content. It is based on strategy research of Anna Chamot on CALLA. The units are thematically developed and contain grammar mini lessons and a grammar focus for writing activities."

"I really liked it. I thought it did a nice job of choosing material that was interesting for high school students, and of teaching the language in context. I rotated between using the textbook and reading a fiction book with the class, and I thought *Shining Star* worked well with that method. I remember the second level text had a unit on WWI and included some personal stories of high school-age people who lived at that time. We read *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the same time, and were able to compare WWI to WWII as well as compare stories of teenagers who lived during each. I also thought the text offered a lot of good suggestions for teachers (how to modify the text, plan activities around the readings, etc.)."

I too use The *Shining Star* Series at the high school level but only at the lower levels (1 & 2). It tends to be a bit 'young', but I too add supplemental materials. I also find that the grammar focus does not always match the reading material so again it is taking some extra steps to pull out the grammar points. In the 3rd and 4th levels, I use literature books and try to focus on a more content-based approach to learning the language.

Connecting with other teachers, schools and school districts is an important and often highly useful tool for teachers, whether they are creating an ESL curriculum for the first time, reviewing and revising an existing curriculum or looking for new ideas and approaches for teaching and using their existing curriculum. The challenge that teachers typically face is the lack of time to connect with other teachers. Some possible ways to get into contact with other teachers includes subscribing to ESL list-serves and electronic forums (e.g., a list-serve maintained by the English Language Learner Division of Minnesota State Department of Education, available through the Department web site at http://education.state.mn.us, a forum facilitated by CAL, available at http://caltalk.cal.org/read/all_forums/?forum=eslstds, or one maintained by Dr. Patricia Hoffman at Minnesota State University (connect through sending e-mail to patricia.hoffman@mnsu.edu), attending local and national professional conferences, organizing book clubs or participating in Professional Learning Communities.

Upon receiving feedback from other districts, the ESL teachers in the sample district reviewed this information and selected three curricula to review. A request was made to the publishers for the desired materials.

District's guidelines for systematic evaluation

The final step was to personalize the information from the various checklists to reflect the district needs and priorities. This information was used to develop a rubric for evaluation. Many of these criteria may be similar to those other districts would develop, but some may be unique to the district. The most important outcome was that there was stakeholder participation to develop consensus and clear guidelines were established that would allow for an objective review by all teachers. Each teacher was then asked to review the materials and make a recommendation to the group.

Table 5. Textbook Evaluation Form

Selection Criteria for English Language Learner Curriculum

Textbook
Title

Publisher

Copyright Date

3   Strongly supports this element

2   Adequately supports this element

1   Element is included, but weakly supported or partially included

0   Element is not included in program

Curriculum/Language Acquisition

| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1.1 | Materials are aligned and compatible with mainstream instruction (K-6 |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1.2 | District Literacy Plan and other content area curriculum. Vocabulary and acquisition of language are explicitly instructed |

Assessment

3 2 1 0   2.1   Materials help teachers diagnose what students can and cannot yet do (and prescribe how to use curriculum to address student needs)

3 2 1 0   2.2   Checklists and rubrics are provided to give meaningful feedback to students

3 2 1 0   2.3   Various formats are available for assessing student work

3 2 1 0   2.4   Assessment content correlates to unit objectives

Oral Language Instruction

3 2 1 0   3.1   Series provides variety of options for students to listen and speak in English

3 2 1 0   3.2   Scope and sequence allows for flexibility to adjust instruction according to various levels of proficiency in speaking

Reading Instruction

3 2 1 0   4.1   (Elementary) Materials align with mainstream instruction specific to K-6 reading strategies and concepts taught

3 2 1 0   4.2   (Secondary) Content reflects core knowledge as aligned with essential 7-12 learner outcomes for content courses in the District

3 2 1 0   4.3   Materials help students develop reading skills and strategies with non-fiction text

3 2 1 0   4.4   Content vocabulary is explicitly taught

3 2 1 0   4.5   Language is taught in context

3 2 1 0   4.6   Content in literature is appealing to students

Written Language Instruction

3 2 1 0   5.1   Instruction in writing process is scaffolded

3 2 1 0   5.2   Lessons explicitly teach students each stage of the writing process

3 2 1 0   5.3   Examples of student writing are provided

3 2 1 0   5.4   Lessons link writing tasks to authentic purposes

Grammar/Mechanics/Spelling Instruction

3   2   1   0   6.1   Lessons provide for grammar to be taught in the context of authentic writing activities

3   2   1   0   6.2   Lessons provide for mechanics to be taught in the context of authentic writing activities

3   2   1   0   6.3   Lessons provide instruction of spelling in word analysis approach patterns, word families, etc.

Overall Content

3   2   1   0   7.1   Content is multi-cultural in nature

3   2   1   0   7.2   Content is gender-fair in nature

3   2   1   0   7.3   Content fosters methodical approaches consistent with procedures used by the teacher and school (learning styles, cooperative learning, higher order thinking skills, etc.)

Diverse Student Needs

3   2   1   0   8.1   Materials are differentiated and aligned with concepts/skills/strategies being taught

3   2   1   0   8.2   Resources are provided for teachers to address diverse student needs (build background experience, link between known/unknown information, think at higher order levels of Bloom's, learn in inter and intradisciplinary ways, choose an individualized method of learning, etc.)

3   2   1   0   8.3   Visual aids support the text to aid student understanding

3   2   1   0   8.4   Student materials are at different reading levels so students have material

they are able to read

3   2   1   0   8.5   Lessons help students make connections across curriculum

3   2   1   0   8.6   Materials address needs of newcomers at all grade level groupings

3   2   1   0   8.7   Materials allow flexibility in delivery to accommodate various blocks of instructional schedules

Teacher Manual

3   2   1   0   9.1   Manual is durable

3   2   1   0   9.2   Print is large enough

3   2   1   0   9.3   Page number matches page numbers in student text

Book Organization/Format

3   2   1   0   10.1   Outside appearance is attractive

3   2   1   0   10.2   Print is large enough to be easily read

3   2   1   0   10.3   Pages are attractively arranged without too much print or graphics

3   2   1   0   10.4   Diagrams, pictures, and charts are in color, of good quality, age-appropriate, and frequent enough to aid explanation of the test without being distracting

Home School Connection

3   2   1   0   11.1   Materials include component for parent communication (e.g. bilingual listening materials, lending library, explanation of concepts, etc.)

3   2   1   0   11.2   Tasks provide opportunities to practice language skills for authentic purposes

3   2   1   0   11.3   Content teaches parents "how to" assist and give feedback to students on concepts and skills which are taught

Overall Comments:

Evaluated by   Date   Grade Level

CONCLUSION

In summation, the efforts put forth by these ESL teachers to be systematic in determining what curriculum to ultimately purchase, while being attentive to their own unique program, may provide a model for others to use in evaluating their own curricular needs. Collaboration and networking among districts can also provide feedback and information about quality materials, meaningful curricula and useful teaching tools. The

end result will save both time and money as well as strengthen and improve existing programs.

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