



WAESOL World Quarterly Spring, 2015 Issue

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The *WAESOL World Quarterly* is an electronic publication of the Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages. It provides information about the world of [TESOL](#) by sharing new teaching practices, addressing current issues, and collaborating with each other. [WAESOL](#) encourages all ESL and bilingual professionals and graduate students in Washington state to [submit an article](#).

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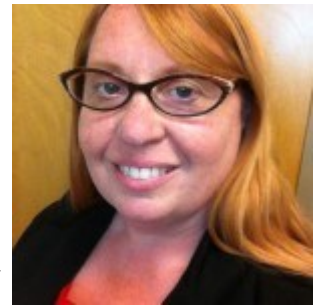
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Greetings all!

It seems that spring is rapidly approaching, bringing growth and renewal. We, here at WAESOL, are excited by the opportunities for growth and renewal that are coming this year. We welcome the work of our new and continuing board members and praise our new WAESOL World Quarterly, Editor, Dr. Caroline Payant.



This year, WAESOL will be hosting TriTESOL with ORTESOL (Oregon) and BCTEAL (British Columbia) on October 2-3 2015, at Highline College in Des Moines, WA, near Seattle. Our conference theme this year is "Transcending Boundaries and Interweaving Perspectives". We hope that all of you will be joining us for this very exciting Northwest Cascadia regional conference. Please watch your mail for messages from TriTESOL as well as WAESOL this year to get the latest updates.

I thank you all for your continued support of WAESOL and hope that this year you will be enriched with continued professional growth. I know that our Editor has a wonderful issue planned for you, so I will keep this letter brief. Enjoy the WWQ and see you later this year!

Kimberly Russell
WAESOL President 2015

A Letter from the Editor



Dear WAESOL community,

I wish to thank all our members for engaging with other participants through the WAESOL World Quarterly. We are especially thankful to our wonderful contributors who have shared their ideas and knowledge about second language pedagogy.

That said, our first 2015 edition includes two great articles about reading fluency and grouping strategies. We trust that these readings will provide you with more pedagogical ideas for your own classroom.

Finally, the WAESOL board and I would like to encourage you to consider submitting short scholarly articles, book reviews, reports on conferences or other professional events attended and/or classroom tips. Your submissions help to make our Quarterly what it is. We look forward to seeing your work in future publications.

Best,

Caroline Payant

Editor, WAESOL World Quarterly



WAESOL's Community Forum

If you're looking for a job in the field or need a place to post job or volunteer opportunities, register and visit our forum:



<http://waesol.org/community/>

*If you have any questions about the forum or run into any problems, please e-mail the forum administrator, Adam, at the following:
adam@waesol.org*

BC TEAL

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Tri-TESOL Conference

Transcending Boundaries and Interweaving Perspectives



October 2-3, 2015

Highline Community College

Des Moines, Washington (Just south of Seattle, near SeaTac Airport)

Increasing Language Learners' Fluency

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English as a second language (ESL) students face several challenges. In relation to literacy, many are at a higher risk for developing reading problems because they may not have literacy skills in their primary language. One of the largest obstacles ESL students may have to overcome is fluency. Students who lack fluency in reading spend more time than their peers to complete reading tasks. This can result in slower progress, which may cause a higher amount of frustration with reading (Caluris, 2006; Rasinski, 2000).

Tankersley (2005) defines fluency as “the ability to read a text accurately, smoothly, and quickly with expression, proper phrasing, and good comprehension” (p. 44). Students who have the ability to read a text fluently have developed automaticity with the materials and vocabulary they are reading. This means they are able to recognize words with greater speed and accuracy and can create links to vocabulary and texts with their own background knowledge (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Words that can be processed like this are considered to be in one’s *sight vocabulary*, which grows and expands over time.

Fluency is not a stage of development. Instead it varies with the difficulty level of a text and the reader’s background knowledge. Therefore, fluency develops over an extended amount of time and will depend heavily on the materials being read. According to Renandya and Jacobs (2002), there is a strong correlation between reading speed and reading comprehension. When readers can process texts with automaticity, they can focus their attention on meaning and comprehension instead of decoding words. Iwahori (2008) notes that “when learners’ language proficiency is limited, they may exhaust their attention finishing the decoding. As a result, they have little attention remaining for comprehending the text” (pp. 74). In other words, the mental energy expended on decoding may overwhelm the learner and make it difficult for them to comprehend the text.

There are two main types of reading fluency: oral reading fluency and silent reading fluency. Tankersley (2005) describes oral fluency as dealing “with prosodic features such as stress, expression, intonation, and text phrasing” (pg. 45). However, demonstrating oral fluency does not always equate to being a fluent reader. Often there are learners who can read aloud with good speed and smooth decoding skills, but who cannot comprehend the text. Silent reading fluency is based on automaticity (Tankersley, 2005). It is when one has

achieved a higher level of decoding skills and can then focus on the meaning of a text while reading silently and independently (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004). Both types of fluency are important and necessary for reading development, but they are not developed in the same ways. Ransinski (2003) and Nutall (2005) both point out that oral reading leads to more silent reading and that silent reading should be one of the main goals for learners as they move up in language levels.

Even the most capable readers sometimes struggle through texts because they are beyond their fluency. Perhaps the vocabulary is new or unfamiliar or perhaps the individual is just not knowledgeable on a particular subject. These kinds of situations force capable readers to use strategies to increase comprehension, like slowing down when reading or reading aloud. However, readers with less fluency may approach all reading difficulties the same because they have not learned strategies. By doing this, they may increase their feelings of failure or frustration and may even give up. Therefore, learners should be taught that successful readers approach different texts in different ways when the reading becomes difficult.

Elevating Learners' Fluency

Fluency is something teachers can promote in their classrooms. Teachers can expand learners' general knowledge, teach reading strategies, and provide opportunities for learners to interact with texts to enhance their abilities. Brown (1996) suggests teachers promote fluency by (1) encouraging learners to interact with the language without worrying about making mistakes, (2) create opportunities for learners to practice, (3) create tasks where learners must express messages, (4) assess learners' fluency and not their accuracy, and (5) discuss fluency directly with the learners. Drawing on other scholars ideas and my own, the proceeding section will review some teaching strategies to increase fluency.

Tankersley (2005) discusses four methods for classroom teachers to promote fluency: modeling and using direct feedback, using extensive reading, using repeated readings, and practicing tasks with specific components of fluency. If learners are going to become fluent readers, they need to hear good examples of what a fluent reader sounds like. Therefore, modeling fluent reading is vital. As children, many of us listened to our teachers or parents read stories to us, but not all children are exposed to this. Therefore, it is necessary to provide positive examples of fluent reading using diverse voices, tones, etc. Teachers can do this by providing a smooth and expressive read aloud daily, even if it is only for a few minutes. This works well with picture books and works well with learners of all ages, including adults.

Extensive reading (ER) is an excellent student-centered learning activity that focuses on the student's needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles. Mermelstein (2013) defined ER as reading as much as possible within the learner's peak acquisition level, for the purposes of gaining reading experience, pleasure, and general understanding, without having any academic requirements attached. ER has proven most effective when learners have been properly placed at the optimal reading level of 98% understanding of the text, or having only 2 unknown words out of 100. Therefore, learners will experience a large number of words repeatedly in various contexts which should enhance reading fluency.

Another idea is repeated reading, which means reading the same material several times (Tankersley, 2005). However, in order for this method to be more effective, learners should have an example of good fluency to work with. For example, teachers can pair students together to read texts where one has good fluency. Another effective method is for learners to select a high-interest article or paragraph and then have a fluent reader read the text aloud and record it. The learner would then listen to it repeatedly and read along with it until they have matched the fluency level.

Learners also need to be taught specific reading strategies. For example, good readers consider the style of text before they read it, its purpose (i.e. for school or entertainment), and to what degree they need to understand it. Therefore, skimming is a skill that should be taught to learners. However, lower level readers probably also need to be taught how to *chunk* words together into meaningful groups of words, so that they do not need to process entire sentences at the same time. Tankersley (2005) points out that "learning how sentences are organized is especially important for English-language learners, who need to develop a feel for their new language" (p.60). This could mean learning grammatical structures, like subject and verb relationships, or it could mean learning common uses of articles, like *a* or *the*.

Conclusion

Supportive classrooms where learners can experience success with reading are the key to helping learners prepare for the literacy demands they will likely face in the future. As learners become more skilled and achieve more success with reading, they will most likely enjoy reading more and become more motivated to read. This can lead to a greater access of language input, which should increase their language development. Good fluency is essential for bridging the gap between basic decoding skills and reading comprehension. Therefore, it is important that learners have good models to listen to and have ample amounts of time and opportunities to practice strong fluency skills. These skills are vital for learners if they are to development higher level critical thinking skills and creative thinking.

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Think, Pair, Share

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Open-class discussions can give the impression that everyone is participating in a healthy, dynamic discussion. However, how can we, as teachers, ensure that everyone is actively contributing and meaningfully interacting with the topic?

Often, class begins with a general discussion about homework assigned the previous night. This could be done with the teacher asking an open-ended question and waiting for a student to answer. This student will, more often than not, be one of the more confident students in the class. To avoid such a situation, and provide a more equal opportunity for others, we should consider the power of “Think, Pair, Share” instead. I first learned of Lyman’s (1981) method many years ago during an EFL conference, and since then, it has become one of my most treasured teaching techniques. With “Think, Pair, Share”, I can easily formulate entire discussions and lesson plans around a simple catch phrase. Its brevity makes it easily accessible and applicable to the classroom.

Think

First and foremost, give students time to *think*. In my own classes, this is most often a freewriting activity. This quiet time provides students an opportunity to mentally shift gears to the English classroom, focus to the matters at hand, remember what they did for homework, and consider what they have recently read or discussed on the topic.

Pair

Once students have been provided with an opportunity to quietly reflect on the question or topic, the next step is to have them express their ideas with a partner. By having students *pair* with a partner, the stakes are lower, as students can more freely share with one person than they can in front of the entire class. Additionally, this provides an opportunity for students to clarify the question with their peers, rather than risking the embarrassment of not knowing in front of the whole class. This second step helps them scaffold their ideas and responses to the question, preparing them for when they *share* as a class.

Share

Having had time to think about the question and then discuss it with a partner, the students have ample opportunity to not only feel comfortable with the subject matter, but to also adequately adjust to the task at hand. Many students may still not want to share in front of the class, and the teacher may still need to wait them out or resort to cold-calling; however, based on my experiences during the pairing session, it is clear that most have a lot to say. The teacher can use this knowledge as a reference point to kick-start the open-class discussion.

This is the basis of the “Think, Pair, Share” catch phrase. We teachers need to provide adequate opportunities for students to adjust to the class by allowing students to *think* about what is being asked of them, to provide an opportunity for students to *pair* with a classmate to discuss the target questions in a low stakes setting, and to provide an open-class environment for students to *share* what they have thought about on their own and discussed with their partners. This technique helps ensure that all students have had an opportunity to participate in class discussions and provides a consistent way of framing discussion-based activities in the English classroom.

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