

**CASE STUDY:
THE STRUGGLES OF ONE ORALLY PROFICIENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNER WITH ENGLISH LITERACY ACQUISITION¹**

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Section 1
Introduction

A great many young English Language Learners (ELLs) struggle with learning to read and write. Even more disconcerting, many intermediate grade ELL students who struggle to read were actually born in the US and have American schools since the first and second grade, and often participated in Headstart and Pre-K programs at their local schools.

In June of 2002, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Office of Bilingual Education (OBE) sponsored a conference on English Language Learners (ELLs) and student/teacher issues for both elementary teachers and teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL). The bulk of the discussion dealt with ELL literacy issues (or, more specifically, problems), particularly those regarding students in the intermediate elementary grades. It seemed as if the participants spoke with one voice, as nearly every teacher present expressed consternation over ELL literacy issues. Teachers expressed dismay over students who seem to be quite orally proficient and yet still read at primary grade levels, and continue to struggle, more than most of these teachers thought “normal.”

It has been a much-discussed subject of controversy that ELLs are placed in Special Education classrooms at disproportionately higher percentage rates than their monolingual counterparts, and have alarmingly high dropout rates. Artiles and Ortiz (2002) argue that many of these students, reading at several grade levels below their own, will be mis-placed in Special Education. Such placement generally occurs in the intermediate elementary years, after earlier teachers – following DCPS official recommendations – have given students the “benefit of the doubt.” Then, when the child reaches the fourth, fifth, or sixth grade, teachers may agree that the fact that these students are “years behind” in school sets them at a serious disadvantage and is an issue that must be addressed and amended – generally in the form of Special Education placement. The disproportionate ratio of ELLs placed in Special Education would suggest that many students are placed in Special Education programs as a sort of last resort; teachers, parents, and administrators confuse language and cultural issues with learning disabilities. If every student who has limited language proficiency and does not acquire the target language quickly is identified as needing Special Education and remediation services, ELLs can expect to be educated in segregated classrooms and will have fewer chances for success in school. Artiles and Ortiz (2002) argue, “intervention strategies that focus solely on remediating students’ learning and behavior problems will

¹ This paper was originally written for TESL 523 Second Language Acquisition (Fall 2002, Professor Bronwyn Coltrane) at American University, Washington, DC.

yield limited results because the school and classroom contexts necessary to maintain high academic achievement are absent” (p. 48). It is incumbent upon those in the ESL and Bilingual Education fields to focus on reaching this age group as much as any other, and on addressing these students’ English literacy acquisition issues as such, rather than shelving them as learning disabilities. This is a field wide open for research.

Slavin and Madden (1999) point out that much of recent research demonstrates that early and intensive intervention is, in many cases, effective for those ELLs who experience English literacy acquisition difficulties in the elementary years, if they are identified. Slavin and Madden argue further that Latino students who are lucky enough to participate in quality bilingual education programs not only seem to close the achievement gap but also advance beyond their monolingual peers in both languages.

The purpose of this case study is to identify causes contributing to the struggles of one highly orally proficient sixth grade ELL, Sally, with English literacy acquisition, and to determine strategies for intervention, remediation, and ultimately, development of successful reading strategies and patterns for her which researchers and teachers may find to be useful for students with similar backgrounds and difficulties.

Section 2 Literature Review

This section reviews several areas of the existing literature and research to support the present study.

Comprehension is central to successful literacy development

Rosowsky (2001) argues that comprehension is central to the act of reading, and that “we are unable to make sense of what we read unless we bring to the text our understanding of the world.” (p. 57). Focusing on Punjabi ELLs in their seventh year of school (ages eleven to twelve) who have lived in the United Kingdom and in many cases have received all of their formal education in English schools, Rosowsky points out that his students are not so much *emergent* bilinguals as students who are learning to read for the first time, whose own language is not represented in writing (Rosowsky states that the written language of his Punjabi students is Urdu). He argues that young ELL emergent readers struggle with English literacy acquisition and are unsuccessful when using a phonics based approach because they are unable to make sense of the words, and therefore cannot retain the information. To support his theory, Rosowsky points out that many of his ELLs come from religious homes and attend regular religious schooling where they are instructed in reading religious texts. These texts are written in a language which is also foreign to the students (Urdu, Arabic, Hebrew), and religious instruction focuses on rigorous teaching of accurate decoding, so that ultimately the student will be able to “read” the text fluidly, albeit with absolutely no comprehension, as part of a religious rite of passage.

Rosowsky's argument that children who are unable to comprehend what they are trying to read because of language issues may experience difficulties with phonics-based literacy instruction is supported by findings discussed later in this paper. However, he undermines his own argument when he describes decoding as an ineffective tool for older, more orally proficient students. Rosowsky argues that decoding-centered strategies for these students are ineffective because their religious instruction focuses largely on decoding-centered strategies for reading religious texts, which they ultimately succeed in doing but with no comprehension of what they are reading. It seems obvious that the reason Rosowsky's students would not understand the religious text they eventually succeed in "reading" is not only because the religious language is foreign to them, but also because they may only receive instruction in the language during the one hour each week or even each day that they are in religion class. The students' lack of comprehension of these religious texts really has nothing to do with how a decoding-centered strategy will affect these students' acquisition of *English* literacy. In fact, one might use Rosowsky's own research to argue that because these students do learn ultimately to "read" their sacred texts quite fluidly and yet without comprehension, how much better they might ultimately learn to read English, the language they presumably speak every day in school, with a similarly rigorous decoding-centered strategy.

Other studies heavily emphasize the importance of phonological processing (the relationship between speech and sound information in processing both written and oral language) and decoding strategies to literacy acquisition. Luis Bravo-Valdivieso (1995) looks at reading issues with Latino children in Latin American countries. He argues that in a test of second and third grade readers of the same age, grade, gender, and socioeconomic status, neither socio-economic status nor IQ accounted significantly for reading difficulties in the reading difficulties group. The most predictive variables of the final reading level were phonological processing, verbal abilities, and the initial level of decoding. He goes on to note that learning disabilities "constitute a serious social problem of epidemic proportions," (p. 190) in Latin American countries. In Chile, Bravo-Valdivieso writes, "the prevalence of reading difficulties among children who have been seen in School Diagnostic Centers is estimated at seventy-eight percent" (p. 190), and the rate of grade retention and early drop out is also very high in those schools. According to Bravo-Valdivieso, factors involved in poor academic success of such children include: quality of the schools and teachers, the health of the children, the availability of supplies, and parents' awareness of and interest in the children's progress. Parents who may themselves have had a poor education or none at all may not place much value or interest in their children's education. Poor educational success on the part of the parents, who may therefore be unable to assist and advocate for their children in the educational forum, will play some part in the child's overall chances for educational success.

It is noteworthy that Bravo-Valdivieso cites phonological processing issues as being a key problem in the educational failing of many of these Latin American students. If Bravo-Valdivieso is correct, it is worth considering that perhaps a large number of US born Latin American students experiencing literacy difficulties and difficulties with English phonics have parents who also have serious Spanish language literacy issues, and

whose difficulties are at least in part rooted in troubles with Spanish phonological processing.

Corinne A. Wiss studies reading problems experienced by bilingual English speakers who are also speakers of another Romance language, in this case native English speaking children enrolled in French immersion language programs. Supporting Bravo-Valdivieso's findings that phonological processing problems in the native language will impact literacy acquisition, Wiss (1993) writes, "it is now well established that reading disabled children display deficits in various aspects of word processing, and there is evidence for a causal link between phonological processing ability and reading skill." (p. 173). Ninety-three percent of her subjects displayed similar profiles upon testing, with similar problems in both languages: "The consistency across languages of learning disabled (LD) children's underachievement in reading and spelling and the consistency of their error types suggest that levels of literacy are not language specific." (p. 172) Wiss's studies suggest that students who experience problems with literacy acquisition in the target language would have similar difficulties with literacy acquisition in the native language. Consider:

Therefore, in evaluating learning disabilities in bilingual immersion children, students whose reading problems arise from the inadequate development of French skills must be differentiated from those who have intrinsic cognitive processing deficits. As each group may need specialized remedial procedures, failure to differentiate them can lead to inadequate or inappropriate educational decisions. For example, some children may be needlessly switched out of immersion programs or placed in early immersion programs despite inadequate developmental skills (Wiss, 1993, p. 172).

Thus, if the ELL already has inadequate developmental skills in the native language, development in the new language and reading skills will be all the more difficult, *especially* if inadequate development of skills includes difficulties with phonological processing, which is central to the development of reading skills and automaticity. The issue may be further compounded if those who would be most likely to help – parents – not only do not speak English, but also struggle to process speech-sound information in their native language. A student struggling to process oral speech-sound information will certainly have difficulty interpreting and processing written, phonological symbols. Therefore, this difficulty with phonological processing in the target language will certainly impede her ability to learn to read in that language, an issue which will only be further complicated if that same struggle impedes her ability to make meaning of the new words and thus, to acquire the spoken language. Importantly, however, Wiss (1993) argues that despite concerns about developmental skills, and that although learning disabilities will be found cross-linguistically, LD children will have no more difficulty with a bilingual situation than with a monolingual situation; in other words, similar academic problems will be encountered in both languages, but they can be addressed.

In order to correctly identify ELLs who are experiencing genuine learning disabilities affecting their acquisition both of oral proficiency and of literacy in the target language, and to distinguish these students from others whom their teachers may simply feel are not learning to speak or read in the new language fast enough, teachers of ELLs will benefit from understanding Jim Cummins' theory of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) versus cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP):

a distinction intended to draw attention to the very different time periods typically required by immigrant children to acquire conversational fluency in their second language as compared to grade-appropriate academic proficiency in that language. Conversational fluency is often acquired to a functional level within about two years of initial exposure to the second language whereas at least five years is usually required to catch up to native speakers in academic aspects of the second language (Collier, 1987; Klesmer, 1994; Cummins, 1981a). Failure to take account of the BICS/CALP (conversational/academic) distinction has resulted in discriminatory psychological assessment of bilingual students and premature exit from language support programs (e.g. bilingual education in the United States) into mainstream classes (Cummins, 1984).

(<http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/BICScalp.html>)

Instructors who take Cummins's theory into consideration will know that even when a student appears to have acquired oral proficiency, they may need years of tailored academic instruction to catch up to their peers.

Finally, it behooves researchers to look at the Success for All (SFA) model, an instructional reading model developed at Johns Hopkins University in the mid-1970's by Robert E. Slavin and Nancy A. Madden. The program has been embraced by schools nationwide and abroad as the model has appeared to have impressive results for improving literacy acquisition in reading instruction for the general population as well as in ESL instruction. Slavin and Madden (1999) describe the program as based on a phonics approach, individual one-on-one tutoring, working with letter-sound recognition at earlier grades, blending and phonics in first grade, moving in to more advanced phonics and syllabic relationships. Children are grouped according to reading level rather than grade level. Experiments were carried out in Philadelphia, Arizona, and California, with mixed populations of ESL students and different "majority" groups – i.e. in some schools, Spanish-speaking; in others, Cambodian, Vietnamese, or another language. These studies showed marked improvements in overall reading ability of students taught according to the phonics-based SFA model. Importantly, the research further demonstrates that third grade Spanish-speaking students in the bilingual SFA program, who learned to read first in Spanish, showed stronger reading and decoding skills in English than those students in the English-only program.

Section 3 Methodology

Research Purpose & Objectives

This section describes the research methodology used to support this purpose.

Research Design

This research was conducted by implementing a series of interviews, miscue analyses, and administration of the Qualitative Reading Inventory 3 (QRI-3) test. The QRI-3 test is designed to identify students' reading levels as well as specific reading problems, and is recommended by the DCPS OBE for diagnosing ELL-specific reading difficulties. It was hypothesized that Sally experienced a serious deficiency in decoding skills, and that this is a major underlying cause for her literacy difficulties. Possible causes for this lack of decoding skills, as well as possible intervention methods and instructional strategies, were subsequently investigated. This research was conducted over approximately a two month period, from September 25 to December 2, 2002.

Our subject, Sally*, was born in the United States but at the age of two years old was given along with her infant brother to the care of her great-grandmother in El Salvador, after their mother abandoned them. Sally and her brother lived with their great-grandmother (the father's maternal grandmother) on a farm in El Salvador. Sally received one year of formal schooling in El Salvador before her great-grandmother died, at which point Sally, then seven years old, returned with her younger brother to Washington, DC, to live with their father, step-mother, and grandmother. The grandmother is primarily responsible for care of Sally and her brother. Though the father and grandmother can read and write in Spanish, no one in the home speaks English. Sally was placed in the second grade upon her arrival in autumn, 1998 and attended the same elementary school, Lincoln* Elementary School in Washington, DC, through the conclusion of this study, which took place during her sixth grade year (2002-2003). Lincoln has a 72% ESL population; roughly 60% of the student body are native Spanish-speakers. Sally's sixth grade homeroom and ESL teachers concluded in the fall of 2002 that Sally reads at about a second grade level.

Interviews

This research was initiated with a series of interviews (conducted in English), beginning with Sally and extending to all of her former homeroom and ESL teachers through the sixth grade who are still available at Lincoln. It was also possible to gauge Sally's reading level, to identify her reading level at the beginning of the school year and thus to measure progress throughout the academic year, through the initial interview with Sally's homeroom teacher. The homeroom teacher suggested Sally was at a second grade reading level based on Sally's diagnostic SAT-9 scores, taken in September 2002.

* The names of all individuals in this study have been changed.

* The name of the school has been changed.

Miscue Analyses

The researcher administered an initial miscue analysis, on September 25, 2002. Miscue analysis is a measuring instrument (a test) designed to assess the strategies that children use in their reading as well as to diagnose weaknesses, and to help identify a student's reading level. Sally was asked to read a story called Len and Linda's Picnic, which is found at the beginning of the Houghton Mifflin second grade phonics reader used in her school (See Appendix 8). As Sally read, the researcher recorded her miscues for later analysis, and filed the results into part of a larger file of benchmarks to compare later results and progress. On November 26, 2002 – two months later – this same passage was administered again for a second miscue analysis. The researcher then compared both the first and the second analysis, and scored both according to the recommendations of the QRI-3 test, discussed more in detail below.

Modeling Success for All

The next step involved looking at the Success For All (SFA) model to plan strategies to assist Sally in reading improvement. This model was selected because of its reputation for high success rates in increasing reading literacy among ELL's. Recall that Slavin and Madden attribute the success of SFA to a phonics-based approach, individual one-on-one tutoring, working with letter-sound recognition at earlier grades, blending and phonics in first grade and moving in to more advanced phonics and syllabic relationships. The researcher (who was also the ESL instructor) set about devising a strategy specifically for Sally, deciding on a course of action involving intensive phonics- and decoding-centered instruction, one-to-one between Sally and the ESL instructor (researcher), as often as possible. Sally received such instruction from the same instructor for three hours every school day for three and a half months, from September 1 to December 16, 2002.

The teacher utilized a Houghton Mifflin second grade level Spelling and Language Arts teaching manual to teach a daily phonics/decoding skills lesson. The first lesson focused on isolated short vowels within one-syllable words or within single syllables. Subsequent lessons included the consonant-vowel-consonant-silent "e" pattern (e.g. *cake*) and other vowel patterns (e.g., "ai" and "ay"), as well as consonant blends (e.g. "fl," and "gr"). Following direct instruction of the new skill, the teacher and student used the new decoding skill to identify that day's "pattern" in words and syllables. Next, the teacher would dictate words for the student to write, to assess whether or not Sally actually had acquired the new decoding skill. Finally, the teacher used a reading passage selected by the textbook maker (Houghton-Mifflin), for the student to read and practice the skills learned that day.

Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-3) Test

The QRI-3, published by Pearson Allyn & Bacon, is the test recommended by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Office of Bilingual Education (OBE) for ESL teachers to use to determine the reading level and to identify reading difficulty issues of

ELLs struggling with English literacy acquisition. Authors of the text, Leslie and Caldwell (2001) write that the QRI-3 is administered to identify “conditions under which students can identify words and comprehend text” (p. 1) as well as “conditions that appear to result in unsuccessful word identification, decoding and/or comprehension” (p. 1) in order to tailor instruction accordingly. Tests are scored according to an established norm with a scoring rubric. The test administrator is usually a classroom teacher or other individual who works closely with the student, and uses the test as a diagnostic tool for classroom teaching. The test administrator will choose from among many different components of the test most likely to provide useful feedback.

Each section includes tests for each grade level: several narrative as well as expository reading passages to administer miscue analysis tests, reading comprehension tests, and grade level word identification tests to help the test administrator determine a child’s independent, instructional, and frustration reading grade level. An independent reading level score suggests that a child can read fluently, without assistance at that level, while an instructional reading level score suggests that is the level at which the child should receive reading instruction. A frustration reading level score indicates a level of difficulty that is too high for the student. If the child scores at an independent third grade level, a fourth grade instructional level, and a fifth grade frustration level, the teacher should choose fourth grade reading materials for reading instruction for that child.

It is not necessary to administer each portion of the test. For example, the examiner may find that a student reads narratives at the second grade instructional level and to confirm such a finding, the test administrator may move on to administer the same type of test or another test at the first and/or third grade level. If the child’s scores on the first grade level test reflect an independent reading level, while on the third grade level test, her scores reflect a frustration reading level, the test administrator can reasonably assume that the child needs instruction at the second grade reading level, though a test at the second grade level should be done for confirmation. Once a general reading grade level has been established, the test administrator can administer as few as one or two other tests to determine if the student is actually at that grade level for reading both expository and narrative texts or, as is often the case, experiences more difficulty with expository texts. The examiner may also choose to administer one or two tests both “above” and “below” a selected grade level to confirm results.

If the student identifies ninety percent of the words on the word recognition test correctly, his/her scores can be said to reflect an independent level. Seventy to eighty-nine percent correct reflects an instructional level, while less than seventy percent represents a frustration level. On the miscue analyses, ninety-eight percent accuracy represents an independent level, while ninety to ninety-seven percent correct represents an instructional level and less than ninety percent correct represents a frustration level. For the comprehension portion of the test, the test administrator reads questions from the examiner’s copy, writing down the responses as they are given. The following tests were administered to Sally on December 2, 2002:

- One first grade level word identification list

- One first grade level narrative miscue analysis
- One first grade level expository miscue analysis
- One first grade level expository comprehension test
- One second grade level word identification list
- One second grade level narrative miscue analyses
- One second grade level expository miscue analyses
- One second grade level narrative comprehension tests
- One second grade level expository comprehension tests
- One third grade level word identification list

Results from Sally's testing appear in Appendix 9.

Section 4 Results and Findings

Interview Results:

Sally came to the United States when she was in second grade. Although she had received one year of formal schooling in El Salvador, she had not yet begun to learn to read. She also spoke no English upon her arrival. In her interview, she comments that nothing really made sense to her at all during the first year that she was in the US. She comments, unprompted, that she did not understand the words, and the letters she was learning were for sounds which were strange to her (See Appendix 1). She indicates that it was only in the third grade that she began to understand what was going on around her in school; in fact, she says it took her about two years to become fully orally proficient. (See Appendix 1)

Sally identifies her cousin Heather,* a young woman in her early twenties who speaks English fluently and graduated from high school in Washington, DC– rather than any of her teachers – as having been the one who helped her learn to read. Sally says she felt she could speak English well at the end of third grade – at which point she had been in the US, and supposedly learning to read, for two years. Her first introduction to reading followed soon after her arrival in the US, at which point she says her second grade teacher, Ms. A,* generally assigned her to work with basic phonics skills games on the computer. Though her teachers started trying to teach Sally to read as soon as she arrived in the US, Sally says she did not understand either the words or the sounds until the end of her second year, at which point she was finishing the third grade. (See Appendix 1)

It is impossible to interview Sally's third grade teacher since she is no longer at Lincoln. However, her second grade teacher corroborates Sally's statements regarding her struggles with learning to read during that first year. That teacher comments that Sally was not speaking a great deal of English by the end of her first year here, either, (See Appendix 2) while her fourth grade ESL teacher comments that Sally seemed to mostly understand and communicate, with occasional uncertainty and speaking with a bit of an

accent, by the time she began to work with her. (See Appendix 3) It would therefore seem apparent that Sally developed oral English proficiency in English during her second year in the US, during which she was in the third grade.

It was therefore not really until her second year in the United States that Sally began to understand what was going on around her in school enough to be academically prepared to learn to read. Only at that point (i.e. third grade) had she acquired the basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) on which to build further cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Only upon entering the fourth grade, did Sally possess any real degree of (oral) English proficiency, and at this point she was behind her peers academically by four years.

Sally's fourth grade homeroom teacher left most of the work with ELLs up to the fourth grade ESL teacher, who grew impatient with Sally for not "being bright" or "picking [reading] up quickly." (See Appendix 3) This particular teacher utilized a single strategy for teaching decoding skills, which consisted of using her finger to cover up parts of the difficult word. (See Appendix 3) Frustrated with Sally's slow progress, this teacher determined that Sally might have more success working with the third grade ESL teacher (though she technically remained a fourth grader and passed to the fifth grade at the year's end). However, the fourth grade ESL teacher did not make the decision to have the third grade ESL teacher work with Sally until the very last grading advisory of that school year, some time in late April or early May. (See Appendix 3).

Therefore, in her fourth grade year, Sally barely knew how to read and did not fit easily in to any reading group; she clearly needed individual attention from either her homeroom or her ESL teacher. The fourth grade ESL teacher, for her part, describes her reading instructional strategies as finding a book that is at the appropriate level for the child such that s/he can read it without making too many mistakes. When the student encounters a word that s/he does not know, this teacher stops the student, who is then to write the difficult word down. (See Appendix 3) That particular teacher informed the researcher that she typically addressed decoding issues as she encountered them by placing her finger over part of the word and having the child look at it that way. While this strategy may at times have been helpful, it appears to have been her sole strategy for teaching decoding. That teacher expresses a negative attitude about Sally's general academic ability or level of brightness, and eventually asked the third grade ESL teacher to take over for her at the end of the school year. (See Appendix 3). The third grade ESL teacher, upon being interviewed, indicated that he recalled that Sally had struggled greatly with trying to learn to read even at a second grade level with him, and that she had absolutely no decoding skills when she came to him. (See Appendix 4).

Several of Sally's teachers assert that Sally didn't seem to be bright or "pick things up" (See Appendices 2-4) as quickly as they thought she should. These teachers indicated that they always suspected she would *eventually* need to be referred to Special Education services, though no one ever referred her.

Miscue Analysis Results

Recordings of Sally's miscues from the original miscue analysis, the passage, Len and Linda's Picnic, from the second grade reader, were analyzed and transcribed. (See Appendix 8). Results from the September 25 exercise show Sally to have been at a low instructional level at that time. After a period of two months, during which Sally received intensive, one-on-one instruction focusing on decoding strategies, she scored at the high instructional level, she was retested on the same passage and scored at the high instructional level.

QRI-3 results

Table 3 presents a summary of the types of tests administered, at what grade level, and final scoring.

Table 3
QRI-3 Test Instruments and Results

Reading Grade Level	Test Type	Level: Independent, Instructional, Frustration
1	Word identification	Independent
1	Miscue analysis – narrative	Independent
1	Miscue analysis – expository	Independent
1	Reading comprehension – expository	Independent
2	Word identification	Instructional
2	Miscue analysis – narrative	Instructional
2	Miscue analysis – expository	Instructional
2	Reading comprehension-narrative	Instructional
2	Reading comprehension – expository	Frustration
3	Word identification	Frustration

The researcher determined it would be useful to try to gauge Sally's reading level at the beginning of her sixth grade year, in September of 2002, and to try to identify her reading strengths and weaknesses in order to develop strategies to further assist her. The initial miscue analysis given in September, utilizing a reading passage from the second grade reader, was ultimately scored according to the QRI-3 guidelines, and reflect that Sally's score at that time was indicative of a low instructional level at the second grade, concurring with her homeroom teacher's assessment, mentioned above. (See Appendix A for teacher's comments and Appendix B to view the first miscue analysis). In early December 2002, a second miscue analysis using this same passage (See Appendix 8) was administered. On this second occasion, Sally's score reflected a second grade high

instructional level, corroborating comments from her homeroom teacher that Sally did seem to be making visible progress as well as clearly enjoying reading more (See Appendix 6).

Several portions of the QRI-3 test were then administered. Following administration of the QRI-3, Sally's scores were calculated according to the test-maker's suggestions. On the QRI-3 tests, Sally scored at the instructional level for all second grade level narrative tests and on the miscue analysis of reading expository passages. However, her scores on the reading comprehension portions of the expository passage reflected a frustration level; the test administrator was thus able to determine that Sally seemed to experience more difficulties with expository reading and that this problem would affect her level of work in classes such as Social Studies and Science. Development of expository reading skills was therefore found to be an area requiring more intervention.

Sally's scores on the QRI-3 show that with an intensive, phonics/decoding strategy with individualized instruction, she did make gains in English literacy acquisition. That she progressed from a beginning second grade level to a high second grade level in the middle of her sixth grade year may not seem impressive until one considers that with the first test given in late September, and again in late November, Sally had already advanced nearly an entire grade in reading level within the span of two months. This is especially noteworthy since none of Sally's previous teachers felt they had witnessed any such progress, or even that the student was capable of succeeding. Sally's scores on the SAT-9 diagnostic second advisory benchmarks show no advancement, but one must consider that she tested at the sixth grade level. This research suggests that Sally can barely read that particular test with any level of real comprehension, let alone understand it well enough to give adequate responses. Therefore, while increased reading proficiency may improve Sally's overall school performance, this will probably not be reflected on any state-mandated standardized tests.

Thus, Sally's scores reflected the fact that she read at a second grade instructional level but needed assistance analyzing and comprehending expository passages written at this level. Interestingly, Sally tended to read out loud as she had been taught, and exhibited great frustration when asked to read silently. Leslie and Caldwell (2001) write that poor readers at fourth grade level and below often have difficulty making the transition from oral to silent reading and therefore tend to comprehend better when reading aloud; thus, Leslie and Caldwell recommend using oral administration for readers at the second grade level and below. This approach seemed to elicit more success from Sally, as well.

Results of Modeling Success for All

During the course of this study, Sally was not exposed to more print in English, and her cousin Heather had less time than usual to work with her due to increased pressures at work and a new pregnancy. Sally's teachers in the second and fourth grade report that Sally did not seem to make progress, but her sixth grade teacher reports that Sally did seem to progress during the course of this study. Sally's improved reading performance

indicates that a teaching strategy focusing on intensive, one-on-one phonics- and decoding-centered instruction, as often as possible was helpful to her.

Section 5 Discussion, Analysis and Conclusion

Sally arrived in the second grade and appears to have acquired conversational fluency in English just about the time she was going in to the fourth grade, after a period of about two years. However, it could be expected for her to need at least five years to catch up to her native speaking peers academically. Often, however, teachers working with ELLs and lacking knowledge of Jim Cummins' theory of BICS and CALP may, and in Sally's case have, attribute(d) a student's lack of "progress" to lack of intellect rather than to normal child second language acquisition development.

If Sally's teachers had been aware of Cummins's theory regarding BICS and CALP, it might have been possible that when Sally entered the seventh grade in the fall of 2204 – her fifth year in the US, Sally might have been close to approaching the academic level of her native English speaking peers. After all, it appears that Sally entered the fourth grade with a fairly functional set of BICS, but no CALP. Her own statements support Cummins's theory that it will take about two years for a child to acquire full conversational fluency. (See Appendix 1) Sally thus entered fourth grade understanding most of what was said to her conversationally, but with no real meaningful prior academic background on which to build further instruction. At the same time, the child was expected to just catch up to her peers, who at that point had been receiving meaningful academic instruction for at least three years. That Sally did not "just catch up" caused her teachers to conclude that she had low intellectual abilities and probably was in need of Special Education services; yet again, no one referred her.

Clearly, Sally desperately needed individual attention from either the homeroom or the ESL teacher. The fourth grade ESL teacher, for her part, appears to have expressed what could be viewed as a negative attitude about Sally's general academic ability (See Appendix 3), and eventually asked the third grade ESL teacher to take over for her, but not until the end of the school year. Part of the dialogue in Appendix A includes a conversation between Sally's fifth and sixth grade ESL teacher (this researcher) with the former fourth grade ESL teacher, in which the fourth grade teacher describes her one and only instructional approach to teaching decoding skills (See Appendix 3); the fourth grade teacher cuts off the other ESL teacher when she starts to describe some different methods that seem to work with Sally. (See Appendix 3). It would seem then that the fourth grade teacher approached teaching Sally with only one strategy, which she was willing neither to build upon nor to expand. If Sally did not respond to her one and only instructional method with high performance, then in that teacher's opinion, it had to be because Sally simply was not bright. (See Appendix 3)

With the third grade ESL teacher reporting that Sally was not really at a second grade reading level when he began working with her at the end of her fourth grade year (See Appendix A), it can be surmised that Sally, already three years behind at the beginning of

her fourth grade year, did not receive any particularly helpful instruction during her fourth grade year, either. In other words, not until she reached fourth grade was Sally at a stage in her language development that she could receive and process instruction and thus focus on learning to read and do math, but her fourth grade teachers did not seem to know what to do to help her. At that point, she was far behind, and without any real meaningful intervention was left to stay there. Her previous teachers, including ESL teachers, seem to have looked at Sally's reading issues as being clearly tied to the fact that she was simply not bright. Therefore, when Sally started the fifth grade, she was four years behind her peers. Though Sally did make some progress during her fifth grade year (2001-2002), her sixth grade homeroom teacher's original diagnostic assessments, given at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, showed Sally to be at a beginning second grade reading level. (See Appendix 5)

Rosowsky (2001) argues that comprehension is central to the act of reading. Rosowsky's argument is meaningful in light of observations regarding Sally and her reading progress. Although he argues against a reading instruction approach centered in phonics and decoding, his argument captures this researcher's own conclusions regarding *primary level* ESL learners who struggle at the beginning reading level. Although many ELLs at the primary level will acquire English literacy at the same rate as their native English speaking peers, those students who experience difficulties may not be helped by phonics-based instruction, if they are still struggling to acquire the target language (English), and all the sounds of that language which may differ, even slightly, from sounds in the native language (i.e., slight differences in pronunciation of Spanish and English vowels, in addition to the fact that English has more vowel sounds than Spanish and these sounds must be acquired). If, in fact, the student is in the process of acquiring oral proficiency in the target language, it is reasonable to surmise that he *may* have difficulty responding to phonics drills. This sentiment was reiterated by primary grade ESL and classroom teachers at the conference mentioned at the beginning of this paper (DC Public School Conference, 2002), and is confirmed in both the interviews with Sally's early teachers and with Sally herself regarding her reading progress in second grade.

It is useful to take a brief look at Myrna*, a beginning ESL student who was in Sally's sixth grade class at Lincoln. When Myrna arrived at Lincoln in the spring of 2002, she was placed in the fifth grade though she could not read. This researcher worked extensively with Myrna over the same two-year period (academic school year 2001-2002 and 2002-2003) as with Sally. Myrna arrived at Lincoln in January of 2002 from El Salvador with virtually no previous schooling, unable to read in Spanish or English. Myrna was not entirely orally proficient in English in June of 2003, and made very little progress learning to read in English in the year and a half she was at Lincoln. In her second year at Lincoln and after many failed attempts to teach Myrna to read using a phonics-centered approach, this researcher discovered that a whole language approach with sheltered ESL instruction, flashcards and total physical response demonstrations were useful in helping Myrna to acquire some degree of literacy at this stage. Phonics seemed to be as meaningless to Myrna, who was still new to the US and was still acquiring English oral proficiency, as many primary teachers suggest it to be with their students and as it appears to have been with Sally during her initial years in the US.

However, while one might hypothesize that phonics-based reading instruction may be ineffective with some beginning/primary level ELLs, and while such a theory would explain Sally's poor performance during her initial school years in the US, it is critical to provide instruction in phonics and other decoding strategies to more advanced students who have mastered BICS if they are to acquire English language literacy.

Much of recent research has focused on ELLs' acquisition of English literacy. However, much of this research in ELL English language literacy issues focuses on very specific case studies, almost exclusively with very early elementary students and occasionally with secondary students. As Slavin and Madden (1999) point out, these studies reflect that Latino students in particular not only seem to close the achievement gap but also advance beyond their monolingual peers in both languages when exposed to quality bilingual education programs, and that when legal and political issues make such programs unavailable, early and intensive intervention is in many cases effective. However, it would seem that there is quite a widespread problem, at least in the District of Columbia Public Schools, where distressingly high numbers of bilingual students – mostly Latino – find themselves in the intermediate grades with serious reading difficulties. Although there is a great deal of research focusing on addressing the needs of primary grade ELLs struggling with reading issues, there is a dearth of studies focusing on improving intermediate grade level ELLs' English literacy acquisition. It also seems that many teachers of primary level ELLs determine that a phonics based approach to reading instruction does not work for many of their students. It does appear that students still in the process of developing BICS may indeed experience difficulties developing phonological processing skills in the target language which may affect development of reading and decoding skills. However, additional research seems to demonstrate that once students have acquired more advanced oral proficiency, it is critical that those students receive instruction that is rich in developing phonics and decoding skills if they are to acquire English language literacy. Researchers might also focus on ELL performance in Social Studies and Science, looking specifically at these students' expository reading skills compared to narrative reading skills. If expository reading skills are weaker, instructional methods aimed at increasing abilities in this area could be investigated, and researchers could study whether such strategies would increase academic performance in Social Studies and Science, as well as overall academic performance.

Without further research into and attempts to address the difficulties of orally proficient intermediate grade level ELLs struggling with English literacy acquisition, ELLs will likely continue to be placed in Special Education classrooms at disproportionately higher percentage rates than their monolingual counterparts, and alarmingly high dropout rates among these students will also likely continue. Those in the fields of ESL and Bilingual Education must focus on reaching this age group if improvements are to be made in the quality of instruction these students receive and thus, in these students' chances for academic success.

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APPENDIX 1:

Interview with Sally: November 25, 2002

Interviewer: Sally, when did you arrive in the United States? What grade were you in?

Sally: um..... second grade.....

I: Was it the beginning of the year, or later, or.....?

Sally: Um..... I don't know..... It was the beginning, I think.....

I: Who was your teacher?

Sally: Ms. A.

I: Did you go to ESL, too?

Sally: Yes.

I: Who was your ESL teacher then?

Sally: I don't remember her name.

I: Is she still here?

Sally: No.

I: What happened when you first arrived? What did you learn, or feel like Ms. A. wanted you to learn? What did she teach you or try to teach you?

Sally: Um, I don't really remember. The ESL teacher did the alphabet with me. Ms. A. had computer games for me.

I: Were they fun games or learning games?

Sally: Learning games. Like the alphabet and stuff.

I: Did that help you?

Sally: I don't know. [shrug]. I guess so. I don't know. No. I didn't understand the words or the sounds.

I: Who was your third grade teacher?

Sally: Ms. C.. [no longer at Lincoln].

I: And ESL?

Sally: Ms. B. [no longer at Lincoln].

I: At what point did you start to feel like you were starting to understand?

Sally:mmmmm..... the end of third grade maybe.....

I: After you had been here two years?

Sally: Yeah.

I: How about with reading? When did that start to make sense?

Sally:mmmmmm ah dunno.

I: Who helped you the most? Who do you feel taught you how to read? Who helps you at home?

Sally: My cousin helped me at home.

I: Which cousin is that? Is that Heather? The one who came to your parent-teacher conference last year with your grandmother? The one who had the baby?

Sally: Yeah.

I: What about teachers in school?

Sally: [pause]..... not really. [shrug]..... ah dunno..... [shrug].

I: Anyone else?

Sally: [pause]..... [shrug] ah dunno. There isn't really anyone at home who could help me, because no one speaks English.

I: When, back then or now?

Sally: Both. That makes it really hard.

I: Ok, who was your fourth grade teacher?

Sally: Ms. D..

I: And for ESL?

Sally: First it was Ms. E. and then later in the year, it was Mr. F.

I: And did you learn more how to read that year?

Sally: [shrug]. Ah dunno. I guess. Yeah.

I: Who helped you the most?

Sally: Mr. F.

I: So what did Ms. D. do with you?

Sally: Mostly, she let me to work with Ms. E..

I: So, what did you work on? Was it helpful?

Sally: Yeah, it was helpful with Math. Not really as much as Reading. Mr. F. was more helpful.

I: What did you work on with Mr. F?

Sally: We worked on sounds and reading.

I: How did you feel about learning to read then?

Sally: I didn't like it, because it was hard and the letters and sounds were confusing, and there wasn't anyone at home who could help me.

APPENDIX 2: Interview with Ms. A: November 25, 2002:

(Note: Mrs. A. is the second grade teacher, who worked with Sally when she first arrived.)

Interviewer: So you worked with Sally in the second grade?

Ms. A.: I sure did.

I: Did she come at the beginning of the year, or?

Ms. A.: Yeah, uh-huh, she came right at the beginning of the school year; it might have been a few weeks in to it, but definitely in September.

I: So how was her English then?

Ms. A.: She didn't speak a word.

I: So how did she progress then? Did she seem sad? Did she have any adjustment problems?

Ms. A.: No, she didn't seem sad at all; in fact, that's one thing I remember about her is that she was always smiling. She seemed to adjust fairly well. I felt that I noticed academic problems right away, but I didn't want to refer her because you know, she had just arrived and you are supposed to give them the benefit of the doubt. Now you know with her cousins, those twins, I had to refer them. I just had to. I didn't care about the benefit of the help; they really needed intervention. I actually thought the one – William – he might be retarded; he just seemed so slow. Now he was good with Math, I remember that, but he couldn't zip up his coat without help. So I referred them. But with Sally, it was a little harder to tell, especially with her just arriving and all.

I: What were some of the problems you noticed with her?

Ms. S: Things just didn't seem to click, even when I translated in to Spanish for her. Retention definitely seemed to be an issue. One day she got it, but the next day, she didn't. It was gone. Or she would halfway get something that the day before she had done well with.

I: What about phonics? What was your approach to that?

Ms. A.: That was part of the reason I felt she wasn't getting it. The letters and sounds they make was definitely difficult for her, and she seemed to have issues with even the most basic Math, too. The thing is, she was eager to learn, and eager to please, too, you know – she wanted it.

I: What was your approach, what strategies did you use with her?

Ms. A.: I put her to work on the computer, and I would work on her letters with her, or the ESL teacher would, or I would pair her up with another kid.

I: At what point did she seem like she was picking up English?

Ms. A.: She was doing some talking by January. A little.

I: Not before then?

Ms. A.: Not really, no.

I: Were there any instructional strategies that you used that seemed to work really well with Sally.

Ms. A. [pause]..... She picked up songs fast. She was a rote learner. If you made up a song for her, she would pick it up a lot faster.

I: What did you think of her development of oral proficiency?

Ms. A: She did seem slow with that, too. She was very quiet, I remember. She didn't say a word really until January. She wasn't really talking a lot at the end of the year.

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Ms. E. (fourth grade ESL teacher):

Interviewer: You worked with Sally the year before last?

Ms. E: Yes. But only for part of the year. The one who really worked with her was Mr. F. She went to work with him after just a short time in the year.

I: What issues did you have with her?

Ms. E: Well, reading was really a problem. She never seemed to get anything.

I: What did you work on with her? What specific approach or strategies did you use?

Ms. E: Well, you know me, what my strategy is. I do not believe in children memorizing a list of words. It's all in context. We read the story which I believe is at their level, and when we come to a word that is difficult for them, I cover over the part of with my finger to help them sound out the small part, and then I gradually move my finger more and more. They write down the difficult word and when we get to ten, we stop and work on those words, and then we go back and re-read. I don't know. She did not seem that bright. My approach did not seem to work with her? Have you tried a different approach with her and has it been more successful?

I: [with excitement] Actually, yeah, we've been doing a lot of phonics drill, and reading

Ms. E: Well, you don't have to tell me your strategy. Is it working? Have you been having success?

I: Yeah, she seems to be making strides.

Ms. E: Well, perhaps then I failed her.

I: Can you think of anything positive about her learning strategies?

Ms. E: Well, you know, she was very eager to please, that one. Not very bright, but she did want to so to please.

I: How would you rate her oral proficiency skills at that time?

Ms. E: Well, she seemed quite fine there. There were occasions when she did not get something that I said immediately. But only occasions. She did speak with a bit of a She sounded more like her brother still sounds; you know, he has a bit of a
.....

I: Spanish lilt?

Ms. E: Yes, exactly. She spoke with a bit of a Spanish lilt.

I: Yeah, Robert does still speak with a pretty pronounced lilt. Sally, not so much anymore. Sometimes, I suppose, but mostly not.

APPENDIX 4: Interview with Mr. F:

(Note: Though Mr. F. normally teaches third grade ESL, in this case, he was Sally's second fourth grade ESL teacher.)

Interviewer: I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me about this. I know you're as swamped as I am at this time of year, but it seemed critical for me to talk to you since, as I understand it, you have worked extensively with the student.

Mr. F: [surprised] I wouldn't say I have worked with her extensively. I only worked with her the last grading quarter of her fourth grade year. She was sent to work with me because of serious reading issues she seemed to have, actually. E. didn't feel like she was making a lot of progress with her, and wanted to see if having her work with me – I was working with third grade then, as I am now – would help at all.

I: Oh. [pause. The interviewer is slightly surprised....] So, what were the reading issues you encountered with her?

Mr. F: Her reading was incredibly low. We worked out of a second grade book, "Ms. McKenzie Had a Farm," and she had extreme difficulties with basic, second grade words, such as "goat" and "could." It was really a struggle, and the next book was also a major chore.

I: What specific strategies or approach did you take? Was there any emphasis on phonics, or, something else.....?

Mr. F: Well, at that time, we were really beyond basic phonics, though we worked on diagraphs, you know, "Tch," "th" "sh." And so on. She had good predicting skills, and when she could use them, it helped a lot, but she had absolutely no decoding skills, which is what she really needed.

I: What about her oral language skills?

Mr. F: Orally, she was fine, on level with the other kids in her reading group, who were all LEPS. It was the reading that was a big problem. Of course, this was all two years ago now, so I'm not sure how much I remember. I had her little brother last year; they had a strange family situation, too, if I recall, that I think really affected things, right?

I: Yes, the mother abandoned her and her little brother with the father's *grandmother* in El Salvador.

Mr. F: Because she was actually born here, right? How did she end up back here then?

I: When the great-grandmother died, the father and his mother went back to El Salvador and got them.

Mr. F: That's right.

APPENDIX 5:

Excerpt from a September 15, 2002 meeting in TAT referral (recommendations for Special Education), with homeroom teacher, Ms. G:

Dr. H: What are some of the issues we have then for referring this student? Should we allow Ms. I. [the writer of this paper] to talk first, since she referred her, or Ms. G?

Ms. I: I would be interested to hear what Ms. G. has to say; I tend to value her opinion and she has much more experience than I do.

Ms. G: Ok, well, thank-you. This child, I have not worked with her for very long; this is only a few weeks in to the school year. I have her preliminary SAT-9 scores, and they show her at a very low level. The classroom assessments I gave put her at very much a second grade level for both reading and math, and I think that's where she needs to be met, academically. She doesn't show a great deal of maturity, nor self-confidence either, though she is eager to please and seems to enjoy learning. I don't think she retains information very well. She has absolutely no decoding skills for reading, and that's what she needs.

Ms. I: That's exactly where I am at; Ms. G. and I are on precisely the same page. I do know the child quite well, actually; I worked with her last year, too. This is a child that is very orally proficient and even fairly articulate and well-spoken in English, who has been at this school since second grade, and can barely read. She has her own invented alphabet, so she does have a sense for phonics, but she has no idea about how it works beyond basic phonics, "b is for ball," no sense of all the little rules or how they work together.

APPENDIX 6: Informal interview with Ms. G, December 3, 2002:

I: Do you see Sally making any progress?

Ms. G: She is making a lot of progress; she's showing all the hard work you have been doing with her. You can hear it when she reads; it's more fluid, she's thinking about the words and actually looking at them and trying to decode them, and having some success. She also seems to be actually enjoying reading more so than I noticed with her initially. And self-confidence seems up.

APPENDIX 7: December 12, 2002, in class:

(Note: This was an announcement from Sally following initial lesson, and several requests to read either by herself or with the teacher.)

Sally: For some reason, I don't know why, I am starting to really like reading this year. You know, like, when I come to your class and I just want to read so much. All I want to do is read now, it seems like. I'm starting to really like it.
