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Teaching Strategies that Motivate English Language Adult Literacy Learners to Invest in their Education: A Literature Review

Debbie J. Severinsen[1], Lori K. Kennedy[2*], and Salwa H. Mohamud[3]

[1] NorQuest College. St. Albert, Alberta, T8N 3M6, Canada. Debbie.severinsen@norquest.ca
[2] University of Calgary. Calgary, Alberta, T3B 0H5, Canada. Lori.kennedy1@ucalgary.ca
[3] University of Calgary. Edmonton, Alberta, T6V 1W8, Canada. salwa.mohamud@ucalgary.ca

*Corresponding author: Lori K. Kennedy. Lori.kennedy1@ucalgary.ca

Abstract

Canadian English language programs have seen a recent increase in enrolment by English as a Second Language adult literacy learners. Minimal research has been conducted specifically on teaching strategies that motivate English language adult literacy learners, leaving literacy teachers with little research-based guidance on how best to motivate these learners to invest in their education. Our literature review found that, because these learners often lose motivation due to their lack of or limited education, building motivation and investment must be at the heart of lesson design. Thus, we adopted a transformative, post-structuralist framework to extend existing psychological and sociocultural theories to the teaching of English as a Second Language adult literacy learners. We reviewed past literature and incorporated the autobiographical narratives of experienced literacy teachers. We outlined six teaching strategies for increasing investment and motivation in adult literacy learners: providing relevance, addressing settlement needs, incorporating life experiences, encouraging learner autonomy, promoting collaborative learning and building self-efficacy. Our aim is to demonstrate that investment and motivation in English as a Second Language adult literacy learners can be achieved through implementing these six teaching strategies. Areas for future research are also identified.

Keywords

motivation, investment, post-structuralist and transformative framework, teaching strategies, ESL adult literacy learners, limited formal education, English language learner, literature review.

Introduction

Over 50% of newcomers to Canada had less than ten years of education according to a 2016–2017 report (Immigration, Refugee, Citizenship Canada 2018). The majority of these newcomers attend classes through Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). LINC is a nationally funded program addressing the settlement and integration needs of new immigrants, such as permanent residents, refugees and protected persons (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2018). Those enrolled may also receive social assistance. LINC teachers are struggling under the influx of low-literate refugees from the Middle East and East Africa in particular, due to inadequate training in adult literacy learner instruction (Ewert 2014, McHardy and Chapman 2016). In some contexts, it has been found that even when training is provided, teachers are not always implementing the training they have received (Crevecoeur 2011; Gerner 2018), and often resort to teaching as they were taught (DeCapua, Marshall and Frydland 2018; Ewert 2014). Traditional teaching approaches have offered few strategies to help English as a Second Language (ESL) adult literacy learners (ALL) increase their motivation and investment in learning (ESL ALL will hereafter be referred to as ALL). For various reasons, many ALL have had limited or no education, making them unfamiliar with the classroom setting and associated learning strategies (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks 2016).

Our literature review revealed the sociological concept of investment and the psychological concept of motivation to be key elements in teaching adult learners (Blackmer and Hayes-Harb 2016; Darvin and Norton 2015; Dornyei 1994; Norton-Peirce 1995; Norton and Toohey 2011; Zarei and Zarei 2015). While motivation concerns the internal struggles of adult learners, investment aims to uncover the social barriers learners face when learning a language (Darvin and Norton 2015). Our literature review supported the notion that motivation and investment are intertwined, finding that when learners are invested in a lesson, they will be more likely motivated to learn (Darvin and Norton 2015; Norton and Toohey 2011). Considering the importance of investment and motivation, we asked: Are there specific teaching strategies that encourage investment and motivation in ALL and, if so, what are they?

Our literature review uncovered six teaching strategies for increasing investment and motivation in adult ESL learners or Canadian-born adult low literacy learners (also referred to as adult basic education, or ABE learners). The six strategies were: providing relevance, addressing settlement needs, incorporating life experiences, encouraging learner autonomy, promoting collaborative learning and building self-efficacy. We argue that implementing these six teaching strategies can increase investment and motivation in ALL, although there is presently almost no established connection linking these strategies with such outcomes. As teachers of this population, we have been using the six strategies in class and have shared our autobiographical narratives to extend the research. While the strategies yielded many favourable results, occasionally they produced unintended distress, or were ineffective. These varied reactions highlight the complex personal and social barriers that influence learning outcomes (Darvin and Norton 2015; Dornyei 1994). In alignment with a post-structuralist

and transformative view of examining preconceived ideas, we feel it is important to embrace the victories and face the challenges of implementing these six strategies.

Given that ALL are prevalent in classrooms across Canada (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks 2016) and the world (Windisch 2015), and that motivation and learning are inseparable (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 2017), we suggest that learners benefit when teachers adopt strategies that motivate ALL to invest in their educational process. This is crucial to ALL becoming active members of their new communities. The methodology used in this article is discussed below, followed by findings, discussion, autobiographical narratives, our transformational journey, suggestions for teaching ALL, limitations and possibilities for future research.

Methodology

Our literature review examined past studies related to key terms: 'motivation,' 'language learning investment,' 'teaching strategies that help foster motivation' and 'ESL adult literacy learners'. We used these terms to conduct online searches of four academic databases: University of Calgary, ProQuest, ERIC and Google Scholar. We selected literature based on its credibility, similarity and relevance to our project (Hendricks 2016). However, due to the limited literature on ALL, we had difficulty locating studies with similar contexts to ours. We thus expanded our criteria to include research on 'ABE learners' and 'adult ESL learners,' as these groups share similarities with ALL. Like ALL, ABE learners struggle with literacy in their first language, while adult ESL learners are adults learning a second language (L2) for the first time. Although Dweck (2006) and Seaton (2018) focus on adolescents, we included their work as it is fundamental to the growth mindset theory for developing confidence and motivation in learners. We did find one study connecting growth mindset with adult learners (Brysacz 2017), but it made no connection to ALL.

We located mainly empirical studies of both quantitative and qualitative methods as well as literature reviews from international sources. We found that six teaching strategies were consistently linked to increased motivation among adult learners: providing relevance, addressing settlement needs, incorporating life experiences, encouraging learner autonomy, promoting collaborative learning and building self-efficacy (Fenwick 2004; Norton and Toohey 2011; Po-ying 2007; Rothes, Lemos and Gonçalves 2017; Seaton 2018; Windisch 2016; Zarei and Zarei 2015). These six strategies became our focus. We extracted and charted data from these articles relating to the six strategies (see Figure 1 and Table 1 in Discussion). We found studies on teaching strategies and ALL, but with no connection to investment or motivation. Thus, we extended current research on motivation, adult learners and teaching strategies to the ALL population with a focus on learner investment.

We included our own autobiographical accounts to further support the limited literature on ALL. We are experienced literacy teachers who work in LINC classrooms. We each offered our voices and experiences with ALL, the six teaching strategies and learner investment and motivation. This insider perspective supports the research, as our teaching experiences mirrored the results of the studies. We also used our autobiographical narratives to critically examine the findings. Learners' perspectives were not included for ethical reasons.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A Transformative Worldview. We feel that a transformative framework best aligns with our goals because the aim of our study is to uplift and motivate an underprivileged, under-

researched group of learners. According to a transformative worldview, 'research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants […] and the researcher's life' (Creswell 2014:38). Many ALL are reduced to marginalised roles, because of their lack of cultural capital (Norton and Toohey 2011), but other external factors, such as emotional, physical and social issues should also be considered.

We hope that effective implementation of the teaching strategies that we have identified will result in increased investment and motivation in ALL. Furthermore, we hope that these changes will extend from the classroom into wider society, which would benefit from more motivated and educated community members. Our firsthand accounts support the theoretical framework by highlighting the potential impact of these six strategies in literacy classrooms.

Motivation and Investment. While the construct of motivation has undergone a significant paradigmatic shift, it has remained mainly a psychological concept (Dornyei and Ushioda 2009). Gardner and Lambert's (1972) concept of integrative orientation suggests that a desire to identify with members of another culture can help spark learner motivation (cited in Dornyei and Ushioda 2009). Dornyei's 'L2 Motivational Self System' (2002) argues that L2 motivation is initiated when the target language is a part of one's 'ideal' self (cited in Dornyei and Ushioda 2009). As a result, the learner will become motivated to learn the language in order to lessen the discrepancy between the 'current' and 'ideal' selves (Dornyei and Ushioda 2009). The construct of investment can be seen 'as a sociological complement to the psychological construct of motivation' (Dornyei and Ushioda 2009 and Murray, Gao and Lamb 2011 cited in Darvin and Norton 2015:37). Thus, we decided to also focus on investment to highlight the complex and fluctuating nature of ALL. This is further supported by our research findings and classroom experiences.

Norton-Peirce's (1995) concept of investment was influenced by Weedon's (1987) feminist post-structuralist approach to identity. Weedon asserted that a language learner's identity is a multifaceted and ever-evolving site of struggle, and that learners may exercise their agency by accepting or rejecting prevailing power relations (cited in Darvin and Norton 2015). Norton-Peirce (1995) was also indebted to Bourdieu's (1977) theory of identity and power. Bourdieu (1977) asserted that one's right to speak is determined by relations of power. Thus, one's position in society and one's language abilities affect one's right to speak and be heard. Accordingly, Norton-Peirce's (1995) investment theory claims that a learner's motivation is tied to their belief that language acquisition will increase their social value and, in turn, enable them to assert their own identities.

By adopting a post-structuralist framework and using Norton-Peirce's (1995) construct of investment, we recognise both the individual and social factors that drive motivation among ALL. Investment is an ever-changing entity, and by embracing this fluidity, we have learned that dichotomies, such as motivated/unmotivated or good/bad have no place in the classroom. What works for one student may not work for another, and what is effective today may be ineffective tomorrow. Moreover, high motivation alone does not guarantee increased investment in language tasks (Norton and Toohey 2011). Even highly motivated students require relevant, interesting and culturally accessible classroom activities to become invested. More importantly, external forces such as physical, emotional and financial barriers can inhibit even highly invested learners from acting on their desire to learn a language. We emphasise that teachers must consider these crucial factors when implementing the six suggested teaching strategies.

Findings: Six Strategies to Increase Motivation

COMMONALITIES IN LITERATURE

Six dominant teaching strategies emerged as themes in the literature (Figure 1) concerning effective learning in ABE learners, adult ESL, adolescent learners (Dweck 2006; Seaton 2018) and ALL. Literature was collected from international sources, including but not limited to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Portugal, the United States and the United Kingdom. Research has not previously connected learner investment, motivation, teaching strategies and ALL. However, we believe that the six strategies can be extended to include ALL and are vital to encouraging motivation and investment in this population.
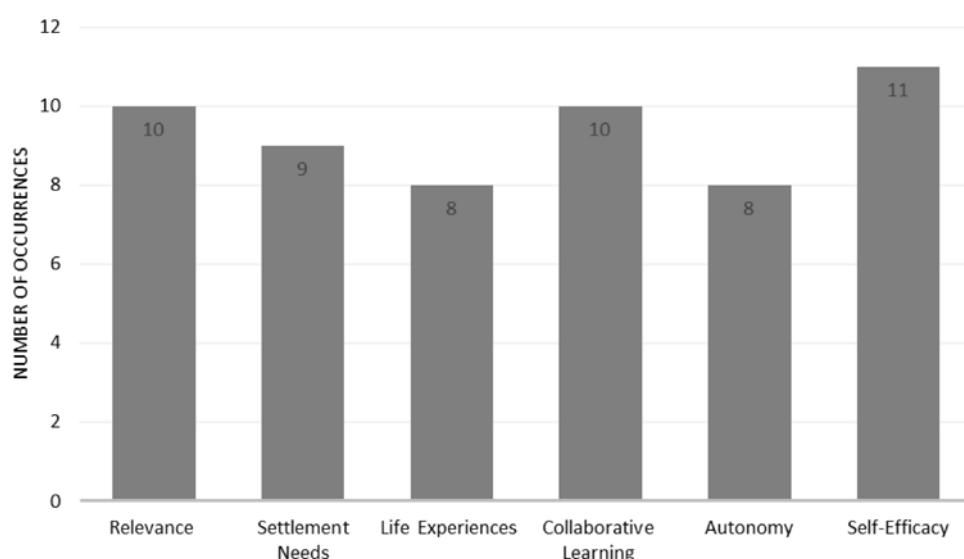

Figure 1   Theme occurrences in literature review

The available literature reveals that ALL require relevant content that focuses on settlement needs, provides space to discuss life experiences, encourages collaborative learning and learner autonomy while fostering self-efficacy. Our literature review found 33 relevant articles (Table 1).

Of those 33 articles, 45% displayed multiple themes. Of that portion, 27% displayed two themes, 12% displayed three themes and 6% displayed four themes. The overlap suggests that a multiple and varied approach when teaching ALL is critical and that individualised responsive teaching is most effective. From our experiences, these strategies support differentiated instruction. As mentioned, ALL face significant obstacles, including emotional, physical and social barriers. The six teaching strategies discussed below are intended to increase ALL motivation while addressing learners' complexities.

Table 1   Distribution of Themes in Articles

Number of Themes in Article	Number of Articles	Percentage of all Articles
1	18	55%
2	9	27%
3	4	12%
4	2	6%

RELEVANCE

A strong correlation exists between increased student investment, motivation and the use of learning tasks based on learners' needs and interests (Atkinson 2014; Bedford 2017; Blackmer and Hayes-Harb 2016; DeCapua et al. 2018; Ollerhead 2012; Rothes et al. 2017; Windisch 2015). In their study with ALL, Blackmer and Hayes-Harb (2016) found that using authentic tasks and materials is necessary when teaching ALL, who respond more strongly to the tangible and relatable. Similarly, using real-world material can positively affect language learners' experiences and increase their motivation (Nicholas, Rossiter and Abbott 2011). For example, Rothes et al. (2017) and Windisch (2015) found that low-literate adults were highly motivated by extrinsic factors, such as seeking a pay raise or assisting their children with homework. They argued that low-literate adults were more interested and motivated by topics that focused directly on their quality of life. These findings further support Dornyei's (2002) earlier theory of the 'L2 Motivational Self System,' as well as Norton-Peirce's (1995) construct of investment, because these adult learners were motivated by the idea of bridging the gap between their 'current' and 'ideal' selves in the pursuit of cultural capital (cited in Dornyei and Ushioda 2009).

Ollerhead (2012) also studied investment in ALL and found that classroom dynamics influenced their motivation and investment. To illustrate, Ollerhead (2012) provided examples of two teachers, Paula and Lucy. Paula created learning content that reflected her students' 'multiple identities as parents, nurturers, healers and consumers' (p. 75). Contrarily, Lucy created learning content that was decontextualised and 'culturally inaccessible' to learners (p. 78). Paula's approach of connecting learning material to learners' backgrounds resulted in ALL becoming visibly excited and engaged in the classroom. On the other hand, Lucy's approach resulted in a lack of response from the learners and their disengagement from the lesson. Ollerhead (2012) concluded that the 'onus is on literacy and language teachers to investigate which identity positions offer their learners best prospects for social engagement and interaction' (p. 79). As a result, teachers are encouraged to base lessons on the needs derived from the class (Richards and Rogers 2014). This supports our own findings that indicate motivation and investment are best achieved through relevant and meaningful learning tasks that meet the needs and interests of ALL.

SETTLEMENT NEEDS

Many of the needs that are relevant to ALL centre on settling into a new country. Settlement needs have been connected to investment and motivation in adult ESL learners (DeCapua et al. 2018; Ewert 2014; McHardy and Chapman 2016; Norton 2001; Norton and Toohey

2011; Ollerhead 2012; Ramírez-Esparza, Harris, Hellermann, Richard, Kuhl and Reder 2012; Rothes et al. 2017). Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2012) included both ALL and adult ESL learners with higher levels of education. The contrasts between these groups allowed researchers to identify areas that are important to ALL specifically, which included addressing settlement needs. Consequently, teachers need to share fundamental information with these learners, who often struggle with basic learning strategies, for them to connect their settlement needs with classroom material (Ramírez-Esparza et al. 2012).

Employment is an immediate settlement need for ALL, as many immigrant learners do not possess the literacy skills required to obtain a job in their new environment (Ewert 2014; Gerner 2018). In addressing this need, Ewert (2014) suggested that 'success hinges on meaning-based classroom instruction organised around content' (p. 268). Although content-based instruction is unusual in English classes for newcomers, Ewert (2014) asserted that ALL are motivated when the content is related to settlement. LINC students learn language through content, such as shopping, going to the doctor and employment. Similarly, there exists a strong positive correlation between classroom use of employment-related topics and the participation of adults with limited education (Rothes et al. 2017). The need for a work-related curriculum is so great that the federal and provincial Canadian governments are focusing on literacy and employment where learners can earn certificates such as first aid or work safety, while building their language skills. This allows ALL to work toward employment that is suitable for their life circumstances and areas of experience, although finding a job in their desired field is not always a reality.

In addition to content-based instruction, teachers must be aware of 'imagined communities' (Norton 2001), which '…focus on the future when learners imagine who they might be, and who their communities might be' (Norton and Toohey 2011:422). Norton (2001) asserted that if a learner cannot imagine themselves as part of a functioning community, they will not be motivated to learn. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to spend time getting to know their students to build on their ability to envision themselves as community members, which is paramount to a successful settlement.

LIFE EXPERIENCES

In addition to their current needs, ALL are often motivated by opportunities to share their life experiences. According to Norton-Peirce (1995), adult learners acquire language by 'collapsing the boundaries between their classrooms and their communities,' (p. 26) and other researchers agree (Biryukova, Yakovleva, Kolesova, Lezhnina, and Kuragina 2015; Hellermann 2006; Nicholas et al. 2011). Effective instruction for ALL should incorporate life experiences and focus on the knowledge learners bring into the classroom (Crevecoeur 2011; DeCapua et al. 2018; Greenberg, Ginsburg and Wrigley 2017). Most learners are eager to share aspects of their life stories, and lessons can be enriched by drawing on their experiences. One way to do this is to implement the language experience approach (LEA), an interactive writing process that facilitates learning by focusing on learners' shared experiences (Crevecoeur 2011). For example, the literacy teacher in Nicholas' et al. (2011) study used LEA to write a class reader dictated by the learners.

Currently, a disconnection exists between ALL and their teachers because of the gap in their abstract thinking abilities (DeCapua et al. 2018). Teachers, being formally educated, bring abstract concepts to learners whose frame of reference relies largely on the concrete. To narrow this gap, teachers can incorporate ALL knowledge into lesson plans by using learners'

personal information to close the gap between concrete thinking (e.g., names, addresses and birthdates) and abstract thinking (e.g., the act of writing in a box or circling the correct answer) (DeCapua et al. 2018). It should be noted that the studies that we found connecting language acquisition and personal experiences do not explicitly focus on the concepts of investment and motivation.

There is a caveat to the use of life experiences in the classroom: 'Non-participation' is a valid choice (Norton 2001). Discussing learners' life experiences can trigger an array of reactions ranging from non-participation to emotional breakdown. The sociological and psychological barriers faced by many ALL can lead to frustration and unpredictable results when they are prompted to discuss their experiences. Adhering to a post-structuralist framework, teachers need to proceed with caution. Some learners may have experienced trauma and sharing past experiences could retraumatise them. It should always be clear that sharing is voluntary. This potential for negative reactions emphasises the complexity of ALL identities and should inform any careful lesson design.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaborative work provides ALL with opportunities to share their stories and experiences. Placing learners into pairs or small groups facilitates L2 acquisition through joint problem-solving sessions which encourages the production of more target-like language (Biryukova et al. 2015; Naughton 2006; Po-ying 2007; Sato and Ballinger 2012; Storch 2011). Collaborative learning sessions are enhanced by strategically partnering heterogeneous learners based on their compatible language ability, known as the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978 cited in Robinson, Kilgore and Warren 2017). Such partnerships mutually assist both learners because activities are scaffolded (Robinson et al. 2017), allowing peers to assist each other in improving language performance (Crook 1994 and Donato 1994 cited in Hsieh 2017). Furthermore, collaboration supports 'forced output,' encouraging learners to apply their language abilities and produce more target-like results (Swain 2000).

Collaborative learning may be effective with ALL, but research is thin. Adult literacy acquisition is a progression of skills that build towards 'interactional competence [from] adult learners' socialisation into literacy events' (Hellermann 2006:377). Hellermann (2006) documented this after observing a current student explain an activity to a new student. Collaborative work promotes interconnectedness as ALL share with and learn more about their peers (DeCapua et al. 2018). Additionally, ALL need to '[w]ork collaboratively to maintain a sense of success and accomplishment and support each other' (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks 2016:7). Research has not previously connected motivation, collaborative learning and ALL, but we believe existing research can be extended to make this connection. Collaborative activities positively enhance the educational experiences of ALL and, in turn, increase their motivation and investment.

However, flexibility is paramount under a post-structuralist framework. Teachers need to be cautious of the social and cultural dynamics of classroom pairings (Naughton 2006; Storch 2011). For example, teachers can consider personality when partnering learners to avoid an introverted learner being dominated by a more extroverted learner, as introverted learners are less likely to initiate activities or ask questions than extroverted learners (Ramírez-Esparza et al. 2012). Additionally, learners should have a choice in deciding with whom they are paired.

AUTONOMY

Being respectful of learners' choices, even if that choice is to work alone, helps strengthen ALL autonomy. In support of this, Rothes et al. (2017) found that learners with less than a secondary school education demonstrated 'lower levels of academic self-concept and use of deep-learning strategies, which can be explained by their shorter academic careers and even, for some of them, history of academic failure' (p. 18). Thus, ALL require bolstered academic autonomy through explicit strategy instruction (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks 2016). We could not locate empirical studies pertaining to explicit strategy training and ALL. However, literature on adult ESL learners reported a positive relationship between knowledge of essential learning strategies, positive learning experiences and increased motivation (Nguyen and Gu 2013; Po-ying 2007; Seker 2015). Similarly, learning strategies are strongly connected to intrinsic motivation and language learning achievement (Seker 2015). Research on learner autonomy and explicit strategy-based instruction found not only that the experimental group outperformed the control group, but that the experimental group also transferred their knowledge to other writing tasks and repeated the performance on the delayed test (Nguyen and Gu 2013). Po-ying (2007) also found that by possessing metacognitive strategies such as self-assessment and goal setting, learners could identify their own learning difficulties and find solutions to overcome them.

In the limited research regarding ALL, learners are found to voice their opinions about their needs and about topics they find interesting (Blackmer and Hayes-Harb 2016). Encouraging this autonomy is necessary for classroom participation and increased learner investment and motivation. Similarly, some ALL have been found to display a sense of ownership of their work in the form of journal writing (Atkinson 2014). Literacy teachers need to acknowledge learner pride and responsibility, which helps ALL acquire a sense of identity in their education and in society (Atkinson 2014). More importantly, this sense of ownership and pride is critical to learners asserting their right to speak and be heard (Norton-Peirce 1995), which, in turn, can help break down ALL sociological and psychological barriers. If ALL feel in control of their learning process, their confidence and morale can be boosted, which results in more capable and confident members of society. Thus, teachers are encouraged to create a learner-centered environment in their adult ESL classrooms because adults need to play an active role in their education (Biryukova et al. 2015; Crevecoeur 2011). In support of our findings, we reaffirm that providing explicit strategy instruction and encouraging learner autonomy are two of the best ways to increase investment and motivation among ALL.

SELF-EFFICACY

Encouraging autonomy is closely related to building learners' self-efficacy, or their belief in their own ability to gain new knowledge. Self-efficacy is an essential contributor to learner motivation (Crevecoeur 2011; McHardy and Chapman 2016; Norton and Toohey 2011; Po-ying 2007) and learning (Dornyei 1994; Seaton 2018). ABE learners have 'lower levels of perceived self-efficacy' (Rothes et al. 2017:8) and, due to their limited education, ALL often display this trait as well (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks 2016). Learner investment and motivation is supported by using learner strengths as a foundation for instruction and by fostering 'a secure environment that will nurture learners' second-language confidence' (Carter and Henrichsen 2015:19). Encouraging learners to see themselves as part of an imagined community (Norton-Peirce 1995) and to encourage a growth mindset (Dweck

2006) is also important as '[m]indset affects motivation, as well as behavior, within all areas of life' (Dweck 2006 and Ketting and Heslin 2015 cited in Brysacz 2017:12).

Building confidence and encouraging a growth mindset in learners lead to greater motivation (Dweck 2006). The growth mindset theory suggests that learners are in constant flux between fixed and growth mindsets as variables fluctuate. Therefore, mindset is situational: belief in one's ability to develop a skill determines one's likelihood of success and brings a natural motivation to learn. Because mindset can change at any time, learners need to believe they have the capacity to learn (Dweck 2015). This aligns with post-structuralist theory, which seeks to collapse dichotomies. One technique to encourage a growth mindset in learners is to praise their attempts rather than their intelligence. Praising learners' intelligence promotes the idea that they have achieved the goal due to their innate abilities. This is a fixed-mindset approach that promotes a fear of failure and a perceived lack of ability to learn, which could impede improvement. Using comments such as 'not quite' and 'not yet' encourages a growth mindset because the feedback is directed at learners' actions and suggests that they can improve over time (Seaton 2018).

Discussion

We do not believe existing research addresses the practical concerns of ALL teachers, who require more pragmatic strategies to cope with the challenges of teaching this group. Research that we examined suggests that, although teaching strategies have been investigated, teachers are not capitalising on the training they have received (Crevecoeur 2011; Gerner 2018). Teachers require more achievable models for lesson plans, resources and implementation strategies to apply to their ALL classrooms. The intention of our research is to provide teachers with functional ideas on practically applying abstract concepts while appreciating the complexity of individual learners and the social and psychological challenges they face. To accomplish this, we included autobiographical accounts of both our triumphs and adversities in implementing the six strategies as the classroom should provide a safe place to explore real-world scenarios ALL encounter every day. We also shared our transformational journey and included a list of suggestions for ALL teachers to consider.

Autobiographical Narratives: Our Experiences Implementing the Six Strategies

RELEVANCE

Lori

ALL can sometimes experience anxiety in unexpected ways. My ALL Foundations LINC class consisted entirely of newly arrived Yazidi refugees, a religious minority from Iraq who have experienced significant trauma. Canada recently introduced a system for sending public emergency alerts by text message. As part of implementing this system, a series of test alerts were sent to all Canadian phones. Since we always practice basic concepts such as time, I thought it would be a relevant exercise to have students prepare for the test alert by warning them of it in advance. As the alert time neared, I watched as one student winced and covered her ears, visibly upset and expecting a loud disruption. When it finally occurred, the alarm was almost inaudible. Afterwards, I quickly tried to reassure her. I felt bad but also felt it was important for her to know about the alarm and learn that it was nothing to fear.

SETTLEMENT NEEDS

Debbie

I found some material for my LINC class on how to read a pay stub. This class consisted of mostly refugees who had been in Canada for roughly three years. One Eritrean ALL really appreciated having the information in a format he was able to comprehend, and he shared his excitement with others. The material was relevant to him and pertinent to his immediate situation as he was employed. However, this was not the case for others in the class, many of whom were not working and saw no direct value in the activity. Norton and Toohey (2011) discuss the importance of imagined identities. Employment is an area that can create anxiety for ALL, as they may not believe employment is an attainable goal and therefore not imaginable. In discussing potential obstacles, ALL may begin to articulate the barriers to settlement they experience.

LIFE EXPERIENCES

Salwa

Since so many ALL love to share their cultures and life experiences, I create multiple opportunities for them to showcase their stories. Last year, I was teaching a lesson about reading recipes to an advanced ALL class which consisted of East Africans, all permanent residents. After learning the vocabulary and language skills needed to accomplish this task, students had the opportunity to write a simple recipe for one of their traditional dishes. Students then took turns teaching the class how to make their chosen dish in the school kitchen. My students were visibly excited and proud to share their cultures and interests. After cooking, we enjoyed the meals together and talked about their favourite memories associated with their recipes. In sharing our love for food and culture, we were all connected.

To showcase the complexity of learners, I also recall an incident with the same group where incorporating life experiences triggered traumatic memories. This can be particularly common when teaching ALL, as many have experienced war, poverty and other trauma. I was teaching a lesson about family, and I thought it would be a great idea to start by asking learners to talk about their families. I had not considered that family could be a source of grief for many of them. Through our discussion, I found that many had lost loved ones due to hunger and war. Some students were crying while relaying their stories of hardship and loss. I too got very emotional.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Lori

I routinely implement collaborative sessions with my ALL Foundations LINC class of Yazidi learners. I create collections of materials based on subjects we regularly review, such as time, date, numbers, the alphabet, colours and weather. Learners are familiar with these activities and how they work. Recently, two new students joined the class. I observed as a current learner explained, in simple English, an activity to one of the new students. They smiled, nodded and listened to one another as they collaborated, discussing the day's weather by pointing to pictures.

On the same day, I had an issue attempting to pair one of the new students with one of my repeating students. I had observed one of the new learners for some time and, based on proficiency and age, thought of an ideal pairing with one of my existing students. I called on both students to partner up, but I was surprised when my repeating student abruptly folded her arms and shook her head, while the new student looked sheepishly at the floor. I quickly understood that they were not willing to work together and made another pairing. I realised that autonomy is critical in collaborative work, and that providing a choice of partners is important for success.

AUTONOMY

Salwa

Since many of my East African ALL have had little to no formal education, they do not possess key learning strategies such as organising worksheets or using classroom resources. I often teach them strategies to make learning easier. I instruct them to write the dates of their tests and assignments in their agendas at the end of class. I also ask them to write their names and the date on their worksheets to affirm ownership and aid in organisation. Additionally, I teach students how to properly search for a term in the picture dictionary and to highlight important words or sentences when reading. After months of reinforcing these strategies, many students are able to apply them independently.

My experience with explicit strategy instruction has generally been a positive one as it has led to students' increased investment in education. However, we must always be mindful of learner differences because failure to do so can result in negative experiences. I have learned that students with different learning styles will prefer different learning strategies. It is okay for some to be more organised than others. I noticed that some ALL like to color-code their notes while others like to use tunes as a retention strategy. We should get to know our students and find strategies that work for each of them individually.

SELF-EFFICACY

Debbie

Acknowledging a learner's strengths reinforces the notion that every student has something to offer. During the beginning of every term my aim is to find a 'techie'—someone who is good with technology. I later call on 'techies' to help others in the class who are struggling. I had one African ALL who had been in Canada for almost one year but had not attended any classes. He was very quiet and did not participate in classroom activities. Once I noticed his technological skills, I set him up with a Smart Board to take small groups of learners through a vocabulary building exercise. While his confidence soared during this activity, the effect did not carry over to other activities and he remained withdrawn. I had hoped that encouraging one of his strengths would help him find a more positive attitude, but the reality was more complicated.

Our Transformational Journey: How this Research has Informed our Teaching

Since adopting a post-structuralist framework for this study, we have become more aware of the complexities of language learners and the language-learning process. We have discovered that there are no cookie-cutter solutions to motivational challenges. While the suggested

strategies can help increase investment and motivation, there are no guarantees when it comes to the complex nature of ALL. Additionally, we have learned that any lack of motivation and investment should not reflect poorly on teachers or their learners. In many instances, learners can be unwilling to engage in classroom activities due to external factors such as familial and health problems, or stress. Exhaustion is common, as many learners have jobs and raise families in addition to attending classes. However, a student who was unmotivated yesterday can become the most active participant tomorrow. One must consider these complexities when thinking about learner motivation. Most importantly, we have learned that every day and every student present new rewards and challenges. Despite the challenges, we now believe implementing the six above-mentioned teaching strategies can transform a classroom and produce more motivated ALL to invest in their learning.

Suggestions

Based on our classroom experiences and findings, we propose the following recommendations for ALL teachers:

1. Incorporate learners' stories. ALL have acquired rich life experiences. To make learning tasks more relatable and captivating, incorporate their stories, cultures and experiences when creating content. This includes using their names, countries and photos for activities. Warning: be mindful of learners' potential traumatic experiences; always make participation optional.

2. Learn about your students. As adults, ALL have a clear idea of their needs and interests. Create language tasks around these topics to spark interest and motivation. Warning: due to the complex nature of ALL, each individual will have different needs and interests. As much as possible, allocate time to fairly address an interest of each student at least once during the term. We suggest creating a routine in which one student becomes the 'student of the week'. This student gets to choose one problem or topic of interest to present to the class, which the others must collectively work to address. Knowing that every student will get their turn can help motivate the rest of the class to work toward this common goal.

3. Teach learning strategies. This is crucial for ALL because of their limited educational backgrounds. Dedicate at least 15 minutes of every session to teaching or reinforcing these strategies. This can be as simple as reminding students to write their name and date on their work. Warning: not all learning strategies will be effective for every student. Get to know your students' individual learning styles to find complementary strategies.

4. Encourage collaborative work. Collaboration is a crucial learning strategy for ALL, as learners can encourage and support one another. In our experience, many ALL come from group cultures. Thus, collaborative learning may come naturally to them and can help them thrive. Warning: be mindful of proficiency levels and social relationships when creating groups, as this can significantly affect the success of activities.

5. Praise the effort, regardless of the result. Capitalise on opportunities to showcase learners' strengths and use them to help overcome their weaknesses. Warning: remember that not all students will require the same amount of encouragement. Also, be sensitive to how you praise your students, as some cultures may deem certain comments to be inappropriate.

Limitations

We identified four limitations in our research. First, we found no articles that incorporate each aspect of our topic: investment, motivation, ALL and teaching strategies. Second, findings were extrapolated to ALL based-on research conducted on similar but distinct populations such as ABE learners. Although strategies designed for ABE learners can be used with ALL, teachers will need to be mindful of the differences between these two groups (Burt, Peyton and Van Duzer 2005). Third, studies on growth mindset focused on adolescent participants, some of whom were native speakers and some of whom were ESL students. Only one study connected growth mindset and adult learners, but no ALL participated in this study (Brysacz 2017). Finally, trauma was not explored in depth. This is significant since trauma can be detrimental to ALL learning and is common among this population.

Future Research

The limited research on ALL has negatively impacted the quality of the instruction they receive (Crevecoeur 2011; DeCapua et al. 2018; Greenberg et al. 2017). Teachers are not using research-based strategies, even after some training (Crevecoeur 2011; Gerner 2018). Thus, further inquiry into teacher implementation of knowledge would be invaluable. Presently, research on curriculum development and evaluating program effectiveness is scarce (Atkinson 2014; Blackmer and Hayes-Harb 2016). Future research should also incorporate ALL participation in piloting curriculum development and teacher training (Crevecoeur 2011; Norton and Toohey 2011). Research on ALL and growth mindset is also needed. Although ALL were not included in Windisch's (2016) discussion on policy interventions, we believe long-term investment in research is critical to supporting ALL. Such studies should also monitor learner retention rates. Finally, original research is needed connecting investment, motivation, effective teaching strategies and ALL.

Conclusion

Our study addressed the unique challenges facing adult literacy teachers and learners by extending current research to draw connections between ALL, investment, motivation and six teaching strategies. Tackling these issues support ALL settlement and integration into society, of timely concern due to the recent influx of refugees in many countries. We maintained a post-structuralist and transformative framework which supports the ever evolving and complex nature of language learning and learner identity. We also reviewed literature and reflected on our experiences. From this, we concluded that six teaching strategies can support increased investment and motivation in ALL when learning English, but future research is required. The six strategies are: providing relevance, addressing settlement needs, incorporating life experiences, encouraging learner autonomy, promoting collaborative learning and building self-efficacy. Additionally, it is necessary for teachers to embrace an individualised, responsive approach when teaching ALL while simultaneously celebrating the victories and acknowledging the external and internal challenges associated with implementing the six strategies. In sharing this study, we hope that educators of ALL can adopt classroom strategies that bring about lasting changes to help increase investment and motivation in ALL while navigating the sociological and psychological barriers in their lives.

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