"Because I am not a writer": Local Literacy Sponsorship of Adult ESL Students

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Chapter 1
Narrative

The road that this project has taken has been a far cry from direct and smooth. In fact,

the whole thing started so well off track from where it made it's final destination that the entire

beginning could be considered a quaint detour to a roadside show in route to the final stopping

point. The most comical part of this entire journey has been the project's looming title set in the

official English department's record books. It has preserved along with the project, despite

leaving the topic itself sitting dejectedly miles and miles back at a precarious looking bus stop.

From the title at the top of this project one can reasonably guess that at some intersection along

the way the idea of a literacy case study hitch hiked itself a ride, with a sideways thumb and the

promise of an English project that does something a little different. But this does not change the

fact that for the entirety of this project the title has remained: *Political Rhetoric of Russo-*

American Conflict: Ice Dancing on the Political Edge. The title is clear, somewhat focused, as

punny as an academic paper allows, and my conundrum of a driving partner for a period of a few

months.

To fully explain my dilemma, it will be best to return to the formation of my original idea

for the project. Living in Trujillo, I was doing what every study abroad student wishes to do

while overseas: planning what work I would be doing in the future. From my experience reading

academic papers for classes and shuffling through a brief grouping of past Bachelor's Essays

sitting in some back corner of the Honors Center, I determined without question, without a

shadow of a doubt, that I really did not want to write one of those. While I understand (especially

now) that there is a wide variety of academic writing styles and different disciplines within the

English major, at that moment I was certain of only two things: (1) I would not be writing a

literary analysis, and (2) there did not seem to be many other options left and I needed to find one quick.

As my infamous working title suggests, I decided to focus on political rhetoric, with a specific emphasis on contemporary tensions between the United States and Russia compared to the Cold War rhetoric. Why this topic? Why bring the Russians into it? There are a number of answers to this question and none of them constitute a real passion for the topic from my part. Frankly, I committed to it and almost immediately regretted it. I was a student desperately searching for a topic in a field I knew very little about.

I saw the rhetorical analysis side of English as separate from the literary analysis side, which therefore satisfied my goal of doing something different with my project, something I had not been doing on a smaller scale in my other literature classes. I found that a straight literary analysis revealed interesting points about fictional texts, but the struggle with relevancy many of these academic writers in this discipline face is not something I felt willing to go up to bat for. I wanted something more applicable to real, concrete things. The term "real" is really the driving force behind this project. For lack of a better definition, here real is referring to things, which have a direct, applicable effect I can apply to something in my own or other local lives. That is to say, I did not want to speculate on ideas or come up with interesting discoveries facts about a novel or story, which could never be proved. I find the larger concepts and ideas literary theorists develop interesting, but I wanted something more direct. That is not to say that I have not read literary analyses that have taken their findings to a larger and more applicable context. I have read some that do this in extraordinary ways, but with my lack of experience in such research and writing, I thought it better to ground my project in a real world context, rather than a literary or theoretical one.

I spent the next few months going on a crash course of rhetoric theory through the ages. Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica,* Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium,* Plato's *Republic*, and Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* all flashed past before me in a storm of Latin and Greek (and the occasional English term): *invention, pronuntiatio, circumitio, ratiocination, elocution, pathos, ethos, logos,* etc. Fast forward a few weeks into reading Aristotle and Cicero to get a foundation on the historical background of rhetoric, I finally realized the reality that everything we speak or write technically is rhetoric, and by Burke I had surrendered to accept this fact. Suddenly I found myself back in the not-so-different pile of projects, bleakly destined for that same dusty corner of the Honors Center, never to be read, never to see light again, only touched by desperate hands dripping with uncertainty, a smell I know all too well. I had conformed to the traditional Bachelor's Essay without my own knowledge and no one was more frustrated with this fact than myself.

Then a period of a few weeks that I will refer to as confused and concern period arrived, when I lost the direction of my project. It was the academic equivalent of driving on black ice; you no longer really know quite where the road is, but you are certain that if you hold on tight enough, you will reach it again (one can only hope). And I did just that.

Yet that was not without further bumps. The unfortunate thing about undergraduate academic research and writing is that it seems there is a gap between what undergraduate students picture the research and writing process to be and what it actually is. I imagined the research process as smooth, largely without failures and backtracking. I then pictured the writing process as moving smoothly through the writing of the introduction, the body, and then the conclusion, and in that order. As many undergraduates may come to find by the end of their studies, this idea is a terrible, terrible lie fed and consumed by students somewhere in the high

school years, around the time that the five-paragraph essay is presented as the golden ticket to writing. Research is actually characterized by writing sections of the piece as research presents itself, finding new ideas in research that completely turn around the topic somewhere towards the middle of the whole process, not having a set thesis until a lot of writing (and a lot of backspacing) has occurred, and the occasional mid-typing existential crisis over a word you desperately want to use, but cannot for the life of you remember (nor can the person next to you, who you continually bother, despite their uninterested expression). As a result of my lack of understanding of how *real* research is conducted, it took some time to come to terms with the process that my topic and project would demand.

The topic itself came out of reading articles on really a range of different applications of rhetorical analysis. Articles like Susan Garland Thompson's entitled "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetoric of Disability in Popular Photography" and a number of other articles from journals like *Enculturation* (a journal of rhetoric, writing, and culture). Essentially I was trying to get a handle on the types of rhetorical analysis that exist in the academic world which focus on more popular forms of rhetoric. When I was working on political rhetoric, I found myself looking at speeches written by professional speechwriters designed for a figurehead to deliver. I looked at Obama's inaugural address and some of his remarks at a press conference in Estonia. I decided I would prefer to look at the popular writings, things the average person would read or write. I found that kind of writing far more interesting than writing designed to be written into history books. In some ways, I find this approach to rhetoric analysis similar to the study of non-canonized writings in literary studies. There has been a draw for many scholars toward the everyday texts that did not have a lot of study applied to them. In the same way, while canonized rhetoric is noteworthy, the everyday ordinary rhetoric of the average person is far more

interesting and telling of the people who write it. That alone was compelling enough to draw my attention toward that kind of project.

In reading similar articles I came upon Amy Dayton-Wood's article entitled, "'When I Close My Eyes, I Like to Hear English': English Only and the Discourse of Crisis." This article brings up many of the questions surrounding the English Only movement within the United States that I had always found of interest. While my project does not specifically focus on the rhetoric of the English Only Movement, a particular moment in her article describes an issue that I focus on: the challenge of non-native English speakers within the United States to learn or leave (as many hostile attitudes continue to materialize concerning this topic). She quotes a man who, when he enters a Lowe's hardware store, is appalled that the signs between aisles listed directory information in both English and Spanish and the man, in an attempt at humor, questions whether Lowes knows what country it's in (Drayton-Wood). Having spent a deal of time trying to learn a second language and visiting countries where I did not speak the language natively, I felt captivated and invested in this issue.

A part of this general idea of non-native English speakers in the United States, I found a particular interest in how these speakers learned English. I certainly knew how I learned a foreign language, but how do people who are already in this foreign space learn a foreign language? In many ways for a child it is simpler (although far from easy) as the resources at schools are available and many studies note the ease of language acquisition at an earlier age. But at a first glance, adult immigrants lack both of these aids. This steam of consciousness full of questions and not many answers had the ability to continue on and on for far too many pages than you might want to read through, so the next step of my process needed to be focused on the how.

How would I be able to find out this kind of information? It certainly did not feel like something I could conclude based on reading a number of different studies and analyses of other adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Instead I decided, why read about it, when you can go see it yourself?

It was a wonderful idea, fantastic idea, in fact. Except for a small issue that I really did not know much about any adult ESL classes in the southeastern United States area. Logically thinking, they have to be abundant in the area. As the gentleman from Drayton-Wood's article pointed out, even Lowes was aware and accommodating to this national language need and the southeastern region of the United States was not indifferent to these growing, transnational language developments. As I soon came to find out, I was completely right; there are a number of adult ESL classes even within a single district.

I researched the programs and contacted one that seemed to fit my project's goals and needs. Fortunately, the director of the program was not only kind, but also very accommodating to any and seemingly all of my requests. Observation time, interview time, questionnaire time, you name it, the director was open to it.

Now with a particular site in mind, I could formulate exactly what I was going to really mold this project into. As it may or may not already be clear, my project had moved into the literacy studies side of the English studies department. I was standing on an interesting combo that mixes both English compositional studies with social sciences studies. In fact, some universities categorize this kind of study under the communications department or education department. A lot of the work completed on this project is very similar to that of a social sciences project. I found myself strangely reminded of my days of scientific lab reports as I created the methods and evidence section of my paper. It felt most reminiscent of my days of scientific

writing when my advisor reminded me of the possible need for completing an Institutional

Review Board (IRB) application.

Initially this did not seem like filling out an IRB would take much time or effort. In fact, it sounded kind of exciting, as an English major I did not imagine I would ever have the opportunity to fill out one of these ever. First, I had to complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which was quick and easy. Then I began on the IRB application itself, which was slow and difficult. I drafted more revisions for that application that I normally do for any term paper draft. I grew to dread the emails back from the IRB campus coordinator because without fail, I needed to add something else or change something or delete something. This was a problem that most English undergraduate students, or English studies academics, probably never really encounter and I suddenly was envious of those people.

Through this process I was informed of some important aspects of research. For example, one of the moments that took quite a deal of effort and thought arrived in how to deal with the possibility of some of the students at the site being of an undocumented status. Many times undocumented individuals are considered a part of vulnerable populations according to the IRB standards and special measures needed to be taken in regard to confidentiality for individuals in the study fitting that category. Using what is considered an at-risk group posed certain additional ethical dimensions to the research process as well as a cause for reevaluating and revising the scripts I had written for consent forms. The program I worked with does not require documentation from students so there was a bit of uncertainty as to how many students were undocumented, if any. To maintain the upmost form of confidentiality and privacy for the students, the informed consent forms were oral consent forms, instead of the traditional written

consent forms. This lessened any anxiety the students had with a possible breach in the security of my notes and documents.

Despite my description of the IRB application process as occupying it's own special place in hell, in retrospect it was a great opportunity to broaden my research skill set, better develop my understanding of review boards, learn how to set up my project description in a clear manner, and understand how other departments conduct research. All those afternoons figuring out what needed changes and where exactly I went wrong on the application were not wasted. Thank God I was exempt for educational purposes or else my feelings toward the process might still be a little tense.

All of these changes and developments in my project led me to what became my real research question and focus. I looked at how adult, non-native English speakers acquire English literacy skills with a particular focus on one individual program in the southeastern section of the United States. It is a case study or ethnography of a program that caters to various different language backgrounds all trying to learn English.

New Literacy Studies

The lens through which I examine the program and the evidence I found is oriented toward the New Literacy Studies. New Literacy Studies arose as a reaction against the traditional understanding of literacy as something that is done solely cognitively. Scholars, such as Brian Street and Harvey J. Graff became large components of examining literacy with regard to the social environment in which it is situated.

Previously scholars defined literacy through, what Brian Street calls, the "autonomous model of literacy" (Street 431). For Street the autonomous model treats literacy as "independent

of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character" (431-432). That is to say that under this model language is studied in and of itself, outside of a larger context. Literacy, in this model, is contained to the individual and his/her own experience with reading and writing.

Theorist Walter J. Ong was a major illustrator of this autonomous model, which suggested that literacy was a cognitive event, separated from social or other contexts. Ong describes writing as "a technology," where people use tools, like paper and pen, to take abstract thoughts into permanent written structures (22). For Ong the process of writing remains a process solely between the writer and the written text, without regard to other structures. For Ong, "the objectivity of the text helps impose objectivity on what the text refers to…[e]ventually writing will create a state of mind in which knowledge itself can be thought of as an object, distinct from the knower" (25). This sense of objectivity that Ong notes seems to place all emphasis on the individual cognitive process of writing. For Ong and all scholars of the autonomous model, writing in and of itself can change the way in which the individual thinks. In other words, writing has the power to change people and those who write are significantly different than those who do not. Essentially, Ong states, "[w]riting is a consciousness-raising and humanizing technology" (31).

Scholars Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole complicate Ong's ideas, in their research with the Vai, "a Mande-speaking people of northwestern Liberia" (Scriber 127). The system of education and literacy practices were quite unique, having a number of different languages utilized in different contexts in this region. They found "no evidence of marked differences in performance on logical and classificatory tasks between nonschooled literates and nonliterates" (Scribner 132). This stands in great contrast to the autonomous model's basic notion that writing

has the ability to change the individuals. They concluded through examining non-literate individuals and literate individuals that no substantial cognitive changes existed They found that the "outcome suggests that speculation that such skills are the 'inevitable outcome' of learning to use alphabetic scripts or write any kind of text are overstated" (136). In other words, literacy by itself was found to not be responsible for much, but rather that the institutions in which they are given have more impact on the changes in people. Scribner and Cole present and set up the idea that context is everything when it comes to literacy and that should be examined further.

Street goes on to take this suggestion and presents the emergence of the ideological model of literacy, which places emphasis on exactly what Ong and others did not notice. In this model, "literacy practices [are] inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and recognise the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts" (Street 433-434). With this model, scholars take into account the different types of literacies that arise from different contexts.

Although some critics have noted that setting up literacy in these two models seems to create a divide between the "technical" and "cultural" bits of literacy, but Street argues, "the ideological model….does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power" (435). In a sense, the ideological model of literacy does not move away, necessarily, from the older view of literacy, but rather complicates and broadens the factors involved in literateness.

Street and other big names of the New Literacy Studies movement, who follow the ideological model of literacy focus on how power is created through these different literacies. Harvey J. Graff in his article, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Our Times," breaks down this

popular idea of the "literacy myth" (214). Typical examples of the literacy myth are quite apparent on many educational campuses or institutions. Many schools do this subtly by advertising big company names of where alumni work on recruiting brochures that they show and give to potential students. Admissions offices are abundant with literacy myths. As Graff notes, literacy has a "potential for liberation," as it is "used for order, cultural hegemony, work preparation, assimilation" and other things (211). The problem with this idea that literacy is a means to liberty is that "it is often claimed that literacy and schooling were required for economic survival but the data proved otherwise" (214). Frankly, literacy does not guarantee success.

As many of the New Literacy Studies scholars came to find, there exists a power structure that has a larger hand in how literacy and success from it are defined. In this form, Graff notes, "the benefits of formal education usually went to those who already had an advantage in occupation or property" (216). The playing field was not even from the start, so hoping that with the same literacy training students will become equal (in terms of literacy acquisition and success) is illogical from the start. Take Graff's example of literacy rates in freed slaves after emancipation. For this group, "literacy was both preparation and influence: former slaves from urban areas were better informed about the North than illiterate slaves from urban plantations, partly because of their having had better chances for learning to read" (229). During this era, literacy was considered a means to economic and social success and prosperity. Despite the differences between the higher educated urban-bred freedmen and the less literate rural freedmen, neither seemed to find great success. Graff notes that "this situation was not the result of a lack of literacy of schooling" but social prejudices and racism they faced (229).

Literacy is a tool, but a tool, which can only do so much. It stands as an instrument without a guarantee of results. If you were to consider literacy as a product, in economic terms, it would fair terrible, as its benefits are all based on a flux of different variables. Yet people everywhere buy into this idea that first comes literacy then comes success then comes economic benefits. Literacy is subject to sources of power, but also ruled by them.

Graff notes how in some ways "literacy training was to homogenize the speech of the pupils;" theoretically this was to give all literate pupils the same language, which would erase differences and perhaps provide a level playing field (224). This is the hope, but studies actually show that "more children were exposed to more regular and formal instruction, but learning could also be obtained informally, through daily life, interactions, work, recreation, and institutions, for which literacy was not always central" (224).

Literacy skills and acquisition does not start when the student enters the formal classroom and they surely do not end when students exit. A home environment is just as much a classroom as the formal schoolroom. And in continuance with that, any given day on any given street can be just as much a classroom as anywhere. While many people are taught that reading and writing assignments and books are the main sources of literacy, the reality is that literacy hides within every kind of communication that people engage in. As stated before, scholars have previously tried to divide literacy into that which is a personal experience and that which is racially-culturally-socioeconomically-etc. influenced activity. The problem with viewing literacy as an internal, personal experience is that it largely ignores all of these others controls and influences that push upon that personal experience. These are the reasons that literacy does not equal success, despite its advertisement as just that.

Literacy seems to come back to this notion of power continually. Deborah Brandt draws on this idea in her article entitled "Sponsors of Literacy," which was largely a response to her and other's ethnographic work. One of her larger points, zones in on the idea of literacy sponsors, which Brandt defines as "the figures who turned up most typically in people's memories of literacy learning: older relatives, teachers, priests, supervisors, military officers, editors, influential authors" (557). While this list does encompass some of the more personal literacy sponsors that people encounter, the list can be and is extended to those in positions of power; for instance, the school board can be a sponsor as they have specific power over curriculum and what students are provided in terms of literature. Any organization really has some form of sponsorship.

It is important to note that any given literacy sponsor is supporting a particular kind of literacy. Neutrality is not a real option. Sponsors create literacy that is in their interest and favor and "obligation toward one's sponsors runs deep, affecting what, why, and how people write and read" (Brandt 558). As a result of this, people have different ranges and kinds of literacy access. Based on different socio-economic statuses, for example, people have different access to literacy tools. A child with access to Internet resources, afterschool tutoring, a larger library, and other tools will have more opportunity to expand their literacy faster than a child whose sole source of literacy acquisition is through the tradition classroom instruction. As Brandt concludes, "everybody's literacy practices are operating in differential economies, which supply different access routes, different degrees of sponsoring power, and different scales of monetary worth to the practice in use" (561). Literacy sponsors have the ability to support particular kinds of literacy, but students also sometimes use literacy in ways in which the sponsor did not intend or consider.

The issues of literacy sponsorship that Brandt brings up the notion of the "literacy crisis," which is "the perceived gap between rising standards for achievement and people's ability to meet them" (559). Due to the emphasis literacy sponsors place on their own economic and social interests, which seep into their literacy sponsored individuals, the sponsored are only given access to certain kinds of literacy, which may or may not be the kind of things they need or desire. This is not because their needs *are not* taken into account, but rather the needs of the sponsor's *are* taken into account more so.

In order to fully understand literacy sponsors, the notion of literacy practices and events must be described. Some scholars decided to conduct ethnographies as a result of Brandt's work on literacy practices and events. David Barton and Mary Hamilton defined literacy practices as essentially "what people do with literacy," which can encompass "values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships" with literacy and also "people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about literacy and make sense of literacy" (6). Literacy practices cannot be observed in a single moment, but take into account all of the individual's relationship with literacy. Literacy practices can be seen in what people write down everyday, what people read academically, what people write academically, what people write informally, and more, but none of these give the entire picture on their own.

Literacy events on the other hand are the moments where literacy practices are observable. A classroom reading aloud story is a literacy event. Writing down the list for the grocery store is a literacy event. Writing a post to a Facebook wall is a literacy event. Reading the morning paper is a literacy event. And so on and so forth. Literacy events shape the literacy practices that are sponsored by particular institutions or people. The New Literacy Studies is

centered on this idea that literacy is a social and cultural molded concept that exists outside the individual well before, during, and after literacy acquisition.

This Project

This project examines the literacy practices of adult English as a Second Language (ESL) student through the context of the New Literacy Studies. That is to say that the project takes into account the social and cultural factors involved in the sponsorship of the program for the students.

This is not a project aimed at discussing the pedagogy of English as a Second Language courses or curriculum. The focus is on how the literacy is understood to be and in effect in this particular site. While there are numerous a program of this sort in the area and globally, the focus is on how this particular site functions. This is an ethnography of the literacy practices of both the instructors and the students of the program.

The research was conducted in a traditional manner, through data collection and then coding to understand the data in terms of the above-mentioned factors. Coding takes into account a number of different things, like students' literacy practices outside of the classroom, the practices within the classroom, students' attitudes toward literacy, students' concepts of literacy in both English and their native language and the program's own sponsorship of particular ideologies or principles. The study comes to find conclusions of the type of literacy sponsored at this location and the affect that has on students.

The big question this project aims to ask is how does the program act as a sponsor of literacy and how does that translate to the students' own literacy practices and literacy goals?

Chapter 2

Larger Context

The sponsorship of literacy looks very different depending on where that literacy is coming from and to whom it is going. The United States most recently "focus[es] on illiteracy [as] centered on functional literacy, which addresses the issue of whether a person's reading and writing levels are sufficient to function in modern society" (Snyder 9). As a result of this, in 1990 the National Education Goals Panel established the goal that "by the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (Goal 6). The language of this goal harkens back to the autonomous model of literacy described in the previous section. The focus on functional ability of literacy brings up the notion of the literacy myth for students who may assume that as a direct result of improved literacy they will gain employment and improved financial means. In many ways, the country is sponsoring this literacy myth through false advertising.

This and any other readings on American school systems and governmental education policies only reinforce the notion that America, and all its branches (government, business, academic, social), all value and expect a particular level and function of literacy from American citizens. America hopes to produce a high level of literacy, but what about the literacy that it imports?

As data from the Census Bureau has noted, "nearly 14 million new immigrants (legal and illegal) settled in the country from 2000 to 2010, making it the highest decade of immigration in American history" (Camarota). With increased immigration comes increased diversity in language usage and literacy (as defined by the Department of Education in terms of English language usage). These immigrants came in with varying levels of English literacy. The American Community Survey Reports notes that the Census Bureau found that "of 291.5 million

people aged 5 and over, 60.6 million people (21 percent of this population) spoke a language other than English at home" (Ryan 2). Of these people that reported they spoke a non-English language at home, "58 percent" reported that they spoke English "very well," "19 percent who spoke English 'well,' 15 percent who spoke 'not well,' and 7 percent who spoke English 'not at all'" (Ryan 4).

Based on these statistics, it may appear that the majority of these speakers do not need further English language instruction and already possess sufficient English skills sets. Do keep in mind that these figures do not break down the participants into native English speakers and non-native English speakers and utilized self-reporting surveying methods, which has proven to have effects on the outcome. Despite this, the small need suggested by the data for adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and the quantity of such classes seem contradictory. A basic search engine entry for ESL adult classes in the United States will bring up a number of different entries. The website ESLdirectory specifically searches for ESL classes within the United States and complies a list of 895 different programs (United States ESL). With these numbers and statistics in mind, it is clear that many non-native English-speaking immigrants within the United States desire and seek out programs aimed at developing their English language literacy. The programs fill literacy skill set needs for students, but may also serve as means of other needs for non-native English speakers.

The students instill quite a lot of confidence in these programs, as they financially, socially, educationally invest themselves in the organizations. The programs then stand as a large portion of the students' literacy sponsorship, as they are an authoritative figure over the students. The choices that the programs make have large impacts on what type of literacies the students

are actually learning. The program I examined, St. Francis, takes its own liberties at choosing what to sponsor, which at times may not match up to students' own desires and daily practices.

Methods:

Data Collection:

Due to the nature of this project being on literacy, the focus of the data collection was somewhat of an extension of that practice. Broadly speaking, the data collection was focused on both individual literacy narratives, as well as larger observations about the way in which a second language is taught within such a specific context. There were three parts to this data collection: written questionnaires, individual interviews with students, and general class observations.

The written questionnaires allowed for a larger range of data, as there were more responses to consider in analysis. This gave a broader variety of responses as well because of the large quantity of answers increases the amount of diversity in responses, as everyone's literacy narrative is not the same. This collection of data involved fifteen minutes of class time for a few weeks, which allowed students the time to sit and write out their responses. The written aspect of this part of the data collection allowed for students to have time to reflect inwardly, without the anxiety of having to come up with an answer on the spot or the fear of having to speak aloud and possibly being grammatically incorrect. At the same time, this method brought up fears of writing something grammatically incorrect, which may have taken away time or details from their responses. In addition, this method may have produced generic or short responses, as students tried to just complete the task as soon as possible.

The second method of data collection was the interviews with students. This one-on-one setting allowed for more time dedicated to specific students to gain more in-depth responses to

questions. There was less of this type of data, as the time restricts being able to interview large numbers of people with this focus. The more individualized approach here provided the student with a space in which she could reveal more information, as she felt fit, because follow-up questions were asked as needed. As a result, more clarity and focus in this type of interview was present. Many students do find speaking to be the most challenging aspect of learning a new language and this may have hindered some of the answers provided, as some students worry about grammatical corrections as they speak. At the same time, some students find themselves more comfortable with speaking and this method might have produced more detailed and involved answers to questions. Because this method of data collection was more intimate between the interviewer and the interviewee, times restricts on the research project ultimately had an effect on the interviewing process. As there was less time to build a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, the responses reflect some of that distance. In addition, the lack of a strong relationship between the research and the interviewee caused apprehensions about volunteering for this part of the research project. As a result, only one student volunteered to be interviewed individually. A longer-term project would allow for development of a stronger relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee for more detailed answers and larger volunteer pool, but this project is restricted by time and does not have that opportunity.

The classroom observations allow for more general data to be collection, focused not so much on student's literacy narratives, but on the general pedagogy of this particular ESL class. This took into account a number of different aspects of the class, including the curriculum, the class structure, and the focus of the materials utilized in class, amongst other things. In order to collect this information, I sat in on a two different classes over a period of a few months, taking notes on the classroom activities. At times, this method provided an opportunity to be involved in the class during activities as a kind of assistant to the instructor. On one hand, this allowed for

a deeper understanding of how the class works through participating in it and it allowed for a relationship to build with the students (instead of remaining a figure on the outside of the circle, so to speak). Although on the other hand, this may have removed some of my own objectivity, as I was now a part of the program, not just watching the class, but being an active member of it.

For IRB purposes all private and sensitive information had to be protected. I only collected a small amount of personal data from the students, including their first names, occupation, age, native country, and native language. To maintain anonymity of the students in the program within the research, each was given a pseudonym based on an alphabetical system of letter changes. The extra complication arose in that in order to preserve cultural authenticity I had to choose culturally specific and appropriate names for each student, based on their native country. In addition, the site name was also changed for similar reasons. As the program is a part of a Lutheran church's community center, I gave a Christian name, St. Francis, to the program to maintain that same sense of authenticity.

Students:

This research project looked at students enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class at a Lutheran church community center, St. Francis[1], in the southeastern region of the United States[2]. These students come from various backgrounds as students vary in age, ethnicity, nationality, amongst other things. There is no one dominant background that the organization focuses on. Various countries and native languages are represented in the composition of the student population of this ESL program. That is to say, the program caters to the growing diversity of the region.

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[1] The name of the program has been changed to maintain privacy and security for the participants in the study.

[2] The general description of the region as being in the southeastern section of the United States is utilized to continue to maintain a high degree of privacy for students and the organization.

The ESL class program itself attracts students for many reasons, but the larger motive surrounds employment opportunities. Almost every student at one point in the research noted having a desire to improve English as a means of improving job prospects. As many students are recent immigrants to the country, the need for fluency in English in a business setting drives many students to take the class. While job necessity is the need for many students, the acquisition of better speaking ability for casual, social settings also plays a part in the student's goals for the program.

The instructor is a former U.S. Peace Corps volunteer and certified T.E.F.L. instructor, who works with a range of different speaking levels through the ESL classes. The program offers basic, intermediate, and advanced level classes to accommodate the need.

Who are the Students?

Briefly described above, the program I examined, St. Francis, consisted of a large range of students. Over the course of the research, the group of students interviewed consisted of 15-24 per week in both classes total. Of these students, there were 17 countries represented and about 19 different native languages represented, as some students from the same country spoke different languages or had regional differences within the same language.

The largest region represented in the class demographics was Asia. Of the basic 5 regions present in the class (Asia, Middle East, Europe, Central America, and South America), the most students came from Asian countries, representing Japan, Thailand, South Korea, China, and India. After reviewing the latest Census Bureau's survey of this city and its outlying areas' population demographics, people that identify as Asian make up 1.6% of the population, coming in as the fourth largest group, after only those who identify as biracial (2.2%), black or African American (27.4%), and white (67%) (Profiles by Metro Area). In light of this information, it is

not all the surprising that the highest representation within the class is from Asian language speaking countries.

With the growing influence of Spanish speaking individuals immigrating to the country, the United States' physical proximity to its Spanish speaking neighbors to the south, and the United States' long held history between the two countries leaves no surprise that the second most represented region was South America. Students represented Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, and Brazil. The next best-represented region was Europe, with students from France, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Russia[3]. Following this was the Middle East with students from Jordan, Iran, and Turkey. The smallest student group was from Central America, with only one student representing this region, having come from Mexico. This may be surprising to many as the United States itself has a large population of people from Central America due to its proximity. No one region had a large representation, as Asia was represented by 7 students, Central America by 1 student, and every other region with a range in between. This is all to say that the ESL class does not have a focus on one particular group of people, but must has a diverse student population.

In addition, the ages ranged from the youngest at 25 and the oldest at 56. Most students were around the 30s or early 40s in age. Again, the students do not fit into any particular group based on age either.

Similarly, they come from a large range of backgrounds, academically and professionally. A number of the students have professional degrees and work in those fields. One man works as a researcher at the local college in the science department and a few others work as medical doctors. A variety of professions appeared, such as a priest, a housekeeper, physical therapist, editor, engineer, and many more.

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[3] For the purposes of this paper, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Russia will all be categorized in the European native country classification due to their strong political ties to the European continent.

The students present at the class rarely had overlapping characteristics between themselves, leaving the program to work in a way that all students, with their differing backgrounds, can benefit. Unlike some program where the instructor speaks the students' native language, here the instructor does not have that option.

Literacies that Students Already Have in Place: Daily Literacy Practices

Literacy practices are what the students engage in on a daily basis, even if they do not realize that themselves. They write text messages to their friends and family. They draft emails informally to those same friends and family, but they sometimes also use this medium to communicate in the work place or on job related business. Many write notes, be that notes for class or a list of reminders, like that of a grocery list. The students are constantly writing things, but they are also constantly reading things. Some students read in what people traditionally imagine when asked about their reading habits. Many have fiction books, nonfiction books, religious texts, newspapers, and magazines. In addition to this, in the social media realm, students may not realize that through Facebook, Twitter, and other sites, they are constantly involved in their own literacy practices.

When asked about their daily practices, many students were hesitant. Outside of traditionally understood mediums (such as books and newspapers) students had trouble thinking of their daily practices in terms of reading and writing. This may be due to the fact that many people do not think of things such as making lists as a literacy practice because it is not a traditional high form of reading and writing, although it involves literacy nonetheless.

To address this mind block of sorts, I provided examples of typical daily literacy practices: texts messages, emails, grocery lists, letters, books, newspapers, and social media outlets. Many of these outlets seemed to have expected answers. One of the students, who is

employed at the local college as a researcher, was the only person to note that he engages with academic papers, reading and writing them. He notes, "for my job, I have to read emails, scientific papers, manuals, posters, etc. I write emails and papers to publish in English."[4] Not surprising, this student engages in this literacy practice in English because his audience is only English speakers. It seems students perform certain literacy practices, logically, based on context that it is held within.

Text Messages:

The most complex practices arise when students seem be engaging not one but both languages (their native language and English), as this is a form of code switching. Scholars such as Chad Nilep have defined code switching "to describe either bilingual speakers' or language learners' cognitive linguistic abilities, or to describe classroom or learner practices involving the use of more than one language," but also "the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction" (1). The process of changing the language or manner of language a person utilizes depending on the environment they are in is a very complex literacy practice, one that is always dictated by the larger context. As this project examines how code switching exists between native language and English language usage, the code switchers engage different social situations with differing communicative language choices. As Nilel notes, "the relationship between speakers affects the choice of language variety" (7). That is to say, sometimes English is reserved for a particular kind of situation or audience, while their native language is only utilized in other literacy events.

For instance, when writing or reading text messages (either through a traditional cell phone service or an app such as WhatsApp), the majority of students engaged in both English and their native language. Only 2 students stated that they write text messages solely in English.

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[4] The entirety of the student writing has been kept in its original wording and grammatical structure to maintain authenticity and clarity to the students' intentions.

One of these two a 26 year old male student, Ivan[5], noted that he reserves texting for friends he has made while living in the United States and thus must write in English as a result. The audience dictates this literacy practice for him. The other student, a physical therapist, Tokemi, had a rather different reason for using only English while texting. She stated, "now most [text messages] are in English because my phone…. is programmed in English…and cannot use Japanese [characters]." While the audience dictates some students' practices, others are limited by technology. Students switch codes depending on the literacy event they are engaging with.

One student in particular gave an interesting rationale for his almost exclusive use of his native language when texting. Boris stated, "text messages on Russian language (my children started forgetting their native language)." There is both a push amongst students to practice English as much as they can, as well as maintain their sense identity through their native language usage. While Boris does seem to be the anomaly in the group of students, the kind of identity and cultural heritage preservation can be seen in his deliberate choice to restrict language usage on text with his children to only the Russian language. Language can here be seen as a means of identity, of which Boris hopes to maintain for his children via the reinforcement of their cultural background through language.

As shown by the chart below, most students are engaging with both English and their native language when texting. Students note that, of course, the person with whom they are corresponding commands which language they will utilize.

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[5] All of the names of the participants have been changed to maintain privacy.

Text Message Practices

English
12%

Both
50%

Native Language
38%

Email:

Another form of literacy almost all the students noted they engaged with on a daily basis was email. Many students having left homes abroad use email for speediness and availabillity to contact family members while living in the United States. Due to this, the majority of students (39%) use their native language only when reading and writing emails. One student, an electric engineer, Narcisa, notes that "most of the times write text messages for say Hi to my family in Venezuela, to know how they are" and "normaly [she] write[s] in Spanish." Others also incorporate email as a major aspect of their daily routine at their job. As a result of this, many of the students note having a high usage of both languages when writing and reading emails because it is a practice with both social and business purposes.

Email Practices
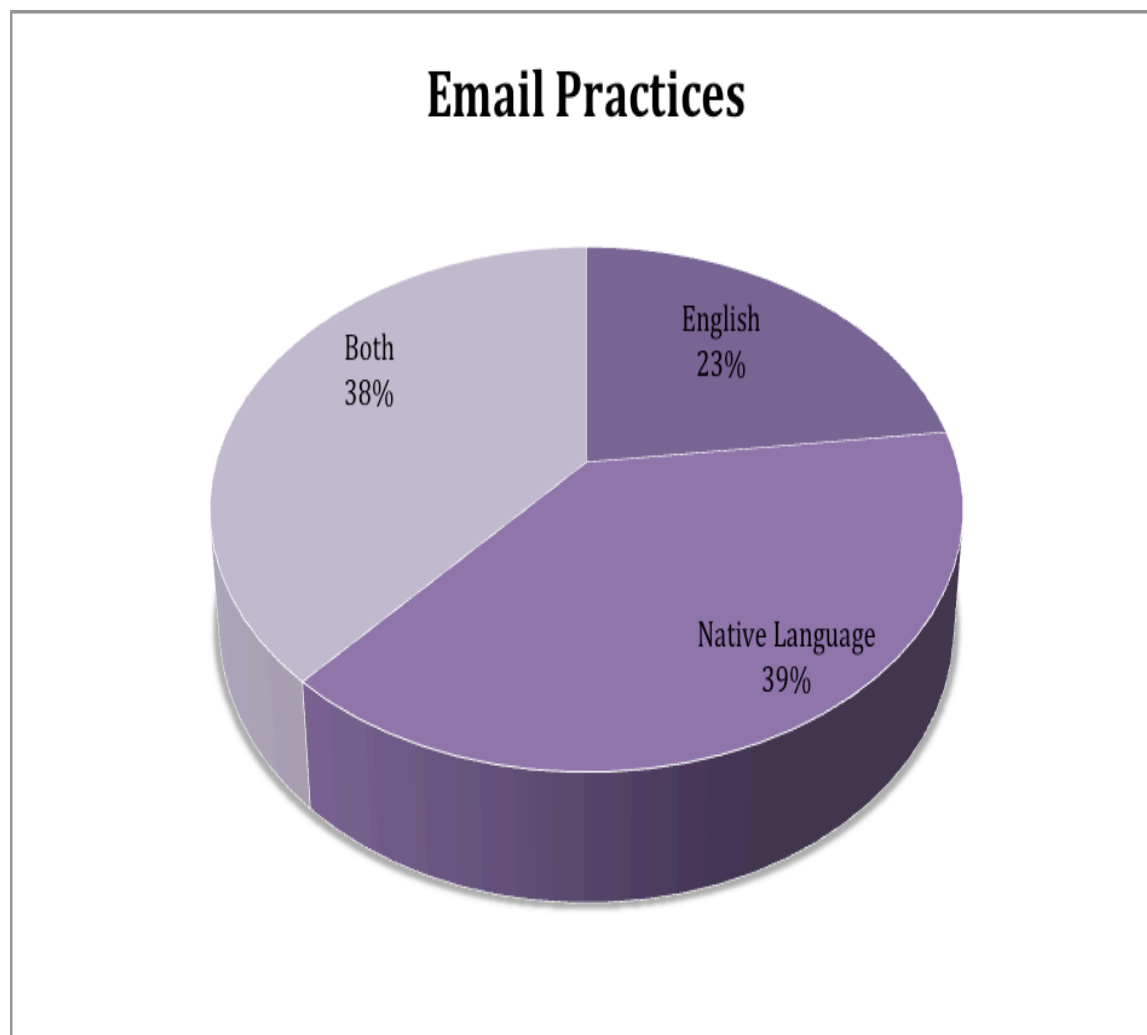
Social Media:

The students' liteacy practices on social media sites proved to be very intersting, as half of the students interviewed noted that they use both English and their native language on these sites, again engaging with the complex literacy of code switching. After conducting a written survey on this topic in one class, the instructor furthered the discussion and every single student present in the class that day (5 students) stated that they have their Facebook set on English as the default language, rather than their own native language. Many use this as a means to further practice their English literacy skills outside of class. One student, a laboratory technician,

Desiree, notes: "I have a blog, I write it in French and sometimes English." In addition, this student also notes reading "articles on Twitter in French and in English." It seems for many students social media forums present a space to practice their English literacy skills, while still using their native language when needed. Their practices here seem to be more diversified than in other areas, where writing literacy is concerned.

Social Media Practices

Both
50%
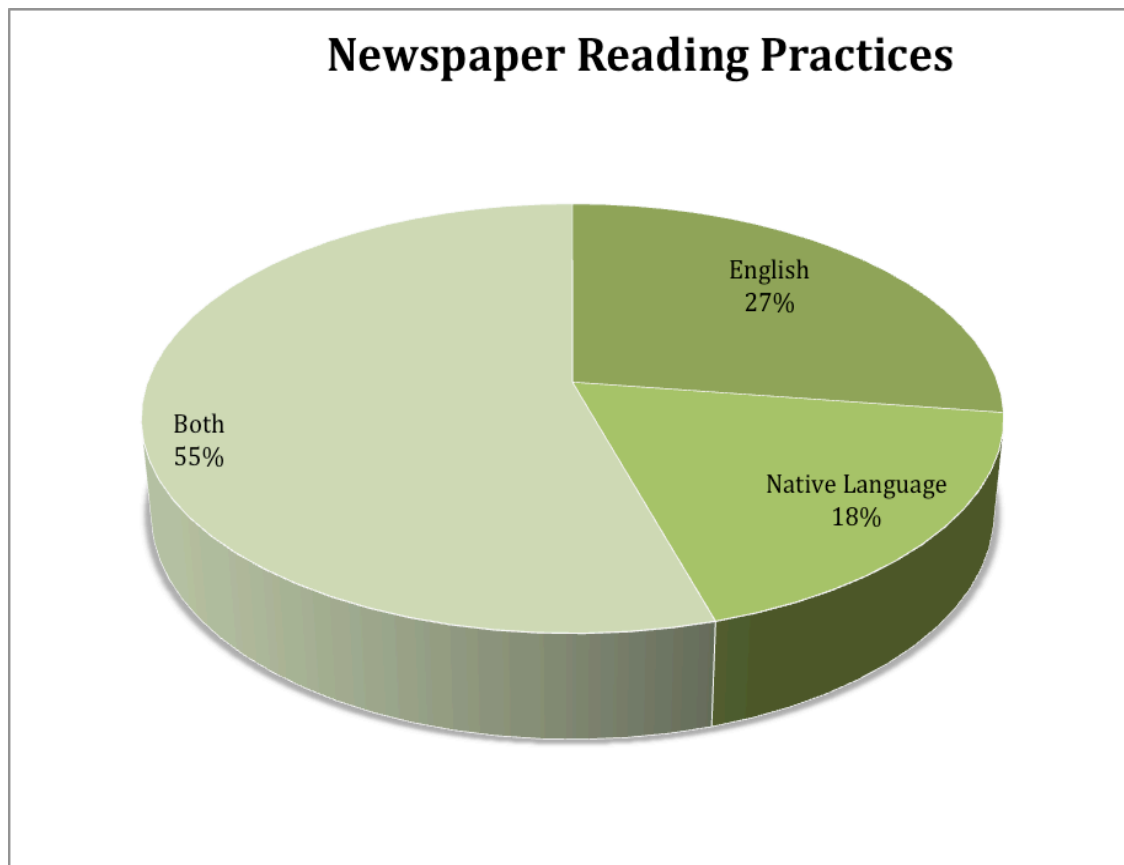
English
30%
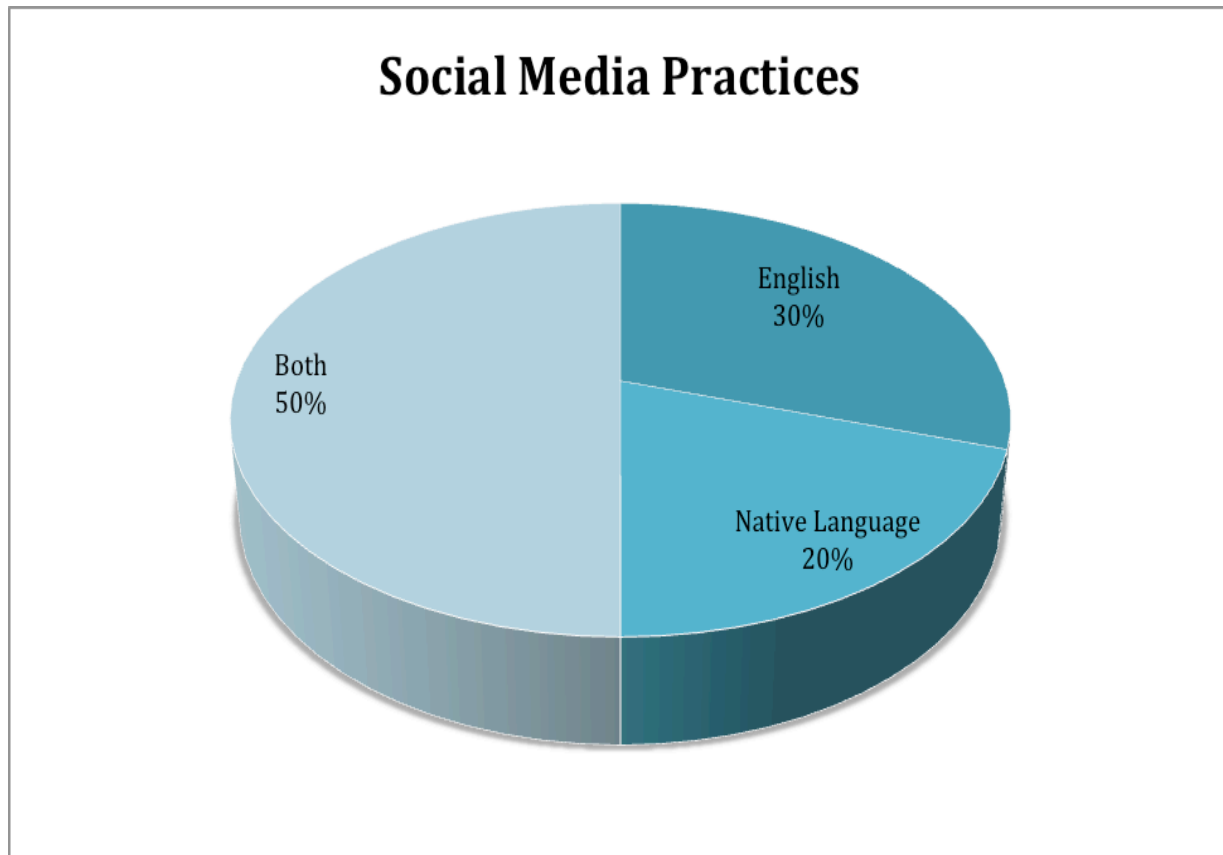
Native Language
20%

Newspaper:

Even more diversified in language usage for literacy practices was the students' consumption of newspapers. 55% of the students that answered the questionarie noted reading both newspapers in English and those in their native language. Newspapers as a source of literacy is intesresting because it does serve functions larger than just practicing reading; it, for

one, is a source of information about and from different viewpoints. Students, as a result of living far away from their native countries, use the newspapers in their native language as a means of connecting and staying in touch with their home and friends and family. They stay informed about their native ocuntry, while also reading something that does not ask a large amount of work of the students. Another student who is an engineer, Benito, states, "I read news…some Venezuela news in Spanish and others in English."

Many students read a mix of both English and their native language newspapers to bridge this gap between their need for current information about the world and their need to practice their English skills in a real situation outside the classroom. Another Russian student mentioned that he reads "only newspapers for improve English." Many take the form of media as a means of further practice outside the classroom.

Overall, students' daily literacy practices reflect a growing desire amongst the students to branch out into practicing the English language more frequently. The ability to use multiple languages in many of these forms allows students this liberty to practice English without having to worry about sticking to that practice strictly (like one would have to do in a traditional classroom setting).

From this general overview of students' daily practices, it is quite clear that students mostly engaged with different forms of media literacy, rather than the traditional forms of literacy. In fact, many students indicated that the only time they actually practice literacy, outside of media forms like Facebook, email, and text messages is in the English classroom.

Findings

From the classroom observations and the interviews with students and the site director, there are a number of similarities and differences in what the program teaches and sponsors and what the students stated in their desires of the program and the actual daily practices of students. The program's current literacy sponsorship can be understood through two different contexts: the instructors' structure of lesson plans, and the content and texts utilized in classes.

What the Program Is Currently Doing

Lesson Plan Structure

Generally speaking, the lesson plan is the source of English literacy for the students from this program; what is promoted through the instructor's choices is going to be what the students take back with them. That being said, it is clear from entering the classroom during a lesson with

different instructors at the program that each instructor teaches just a little differently. Not one instructor at the program does the same thing with the classes each time.

It was not surprising when the site director, Jennifer[6], informed me that the program is rather open with the different instructors, classroom management wise. In an interview with her, I asked, "Do the instructors get to construct their own lesson plan or is there a set they must use?"

"No, it's very flexible. I do have a template they can follow. It follows a typical lesson plan: presentation, practice, evaluation, and then application. It's pretty standard of most teaching programs," she informed me.

The director does not require a specific lesson plan for the instructors to follow for each class. Of course, the site director does stress the importance of how material should be presented through "presentation, practice, evaluation, and then application." Yet the instructors are able to design the class in whatever way they choose. That being said, each individual instructor has the opportunity to sponsor different kinds of literacies during class as long as they follow the basic teaching methods. They are told what methods to use, but not what contexts. The instructors even come from a very different background in their training. When asked about the instructor training, the site director noted how both instructor and student largely dictate how the program runs. I had noticed that during one of the classes I regularly observed that there was an assistant instructor and I asked if that is how all of the training starts for the instructors.

"Well it's so funny because I usually do a formal training. You get training and there is a class. But now a day, it's so hard to get everybody together at one time that they just slowly start observing and then assistant and then it goes from that," the director informed me.

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[6] The name of the site director has been changed in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

"So they don't need any formal certification?" I asked.

"No, and I think that's one good thing about our program. Somebody who is interested in teaching ESL is welcome to come sit in on a class and I can give them some help with lesson plans and they can take a stab at it." The program itself is a ground roots kind of organization, as they no longer receive any federal aid, and as a result they have quite a deal of freedom with their choices, curriculum and instructors. In response to TOEFL teaching certification (Testing of English as a Foreign Language) for the students, she stated, "I have my TOEFL certificate. Henry [another instructor], he went back and got his TOEFL certificate. Tamera went to a weeklong seminar on just adult ESL; it's not technically a certificate. So just a few of them [have the certification]."[7]

This freedom the program is allowed derives from their lack of funding from government organizations, which would strictly regulate their activities. The program previously, until 2014, received funding from a county program aimed at adult education, but as a result of time constraints their funding was decreased leaving them little to no choice, but to decline any further funding.

The program ran through the Office of Adult Education sponsored by the county school district and St. Francis was previously a part of the English Literacy portion. The county describes the goals of the program as:

> The goal of the ESOL program is for students to exit the program at a high proficiency level with the ability to understand and adapt to different cultures and become productive members of society. The courses are content based and integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a variety of modalities. Linguistically and culturally diverse

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[7] All of the names, of interviewees and those mentioned during the interviews are changed to maintain privacy.

students face many challenges everyday in order to achieve. The role of the ESOL

teacher in facilitating this process is a critical one. The successful ELL student in CCSD

will be well prepared to meet the challenges of a changing world. (Office of Adult

Education)

The objectives are ambiguous, if considered solely through this statement. It states that there will

be reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills gained, it does little to nothing to define what

that means for students. While it mentions challenges, it also does not explain what exactly those

are. The basic goal presented here is quite vague, but it is clear that they too are promoting the

literacy myth, as they hope their students meet the "challenges of a changing world" (Office of

Adult Education). This phrase seems to suggest that through the students' language learning in

this program, they will then be able to gain job security and financial benefits from that, which

may not be a realistic outcome. The phrase "productive members of society" also has a financial

undertone that implies benefits to the students that may not be present after finishing the

program's requirements. Yet through suggesting just that in their mission statement, they support

this myth. This office, which the St. Francis program was once joined with, still leaves traces of

this myth in St. Francis' own job oriented discussion in class despite their separation from the

county.

Although the program's message does suggest the equal usage of reading, writing,

listening, and speaking, which is something that the program of St. Francis does not seem to

have continued. The focus now is more so on listening and speaking than reading and writing,

which complicates the question of what kinds of literacy the program wishes to promote.

Literacy's definition is tied to reading and writing, and if the students are resistant to and the

program does not emphasize those practices, then what literacy do the students hope to learn and the program work to sponsor?

The program notes this change in funding and its effect on curriculum. "Our students are only here for a fairly short period of time. And… it's… [the][8] County was increasing the amount of time the student needed to be in the program to post-test them. For example, they were saying we had to wait until the student had been here for 60 hours before we could post-test them. And we have to post-test them to be able to show any progress to be able to get the money, and very few of our students are here for 60 hours, because they want to come learn English and then get a job, or live their life. They're not here to sit in class like a college student, and we don't have any power to say it's mandatory, you have to come to class. None of that. They're all here voluntarily and they, [the] County, just kept uping the hours and I was like they're not going to be here for that long. So what we were getting out of it was just getting smaller and smaller every year, and the paperwork I had to do was just not worth it." The director explained.

For these reason, the program is really only accountable to themselves and are able to decide basically everything on their own terms. Within that context, each instructor sets up the classes differently. During my hours of classroom observations, I sat in on two different instructors' classes. One was the site director, Jennifer's, class, which met in the mornings, and the other was a retired lawyer, Henry's, evening class.

Both instructors set up the lesson plan generally according to Jennifer's statement of "presentation, practice, evaluation, and then application." This is clearest than in reading activities in both classes. For instance, Henry begins each class with a quick note on the board; this note has a number of spelling and grammatical issues. The students come into class, copy the

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[8] The name of the county has been removed to maintain privacy and security.

note (with the issues), and then once everyone has arrived, the instructor will read the note (with

the issues) aloud to the class. This constitutes the presentation portion of the exercise. The

students will then practice reading the note aloud as well, making up the practice portion of the

exercise. Next the students will collectively correct errors as the instructor will physically correct

them on the board. Following this the students will read aloud the note (with corrections) once

again to reinforce the application. Each class begins with this exercise to reinforce grammar

concept discussed in the previous classes, bring new vocabulary to the students, and provide an

opportunity for pronunciation practice with words they have a history of having difficulty with.
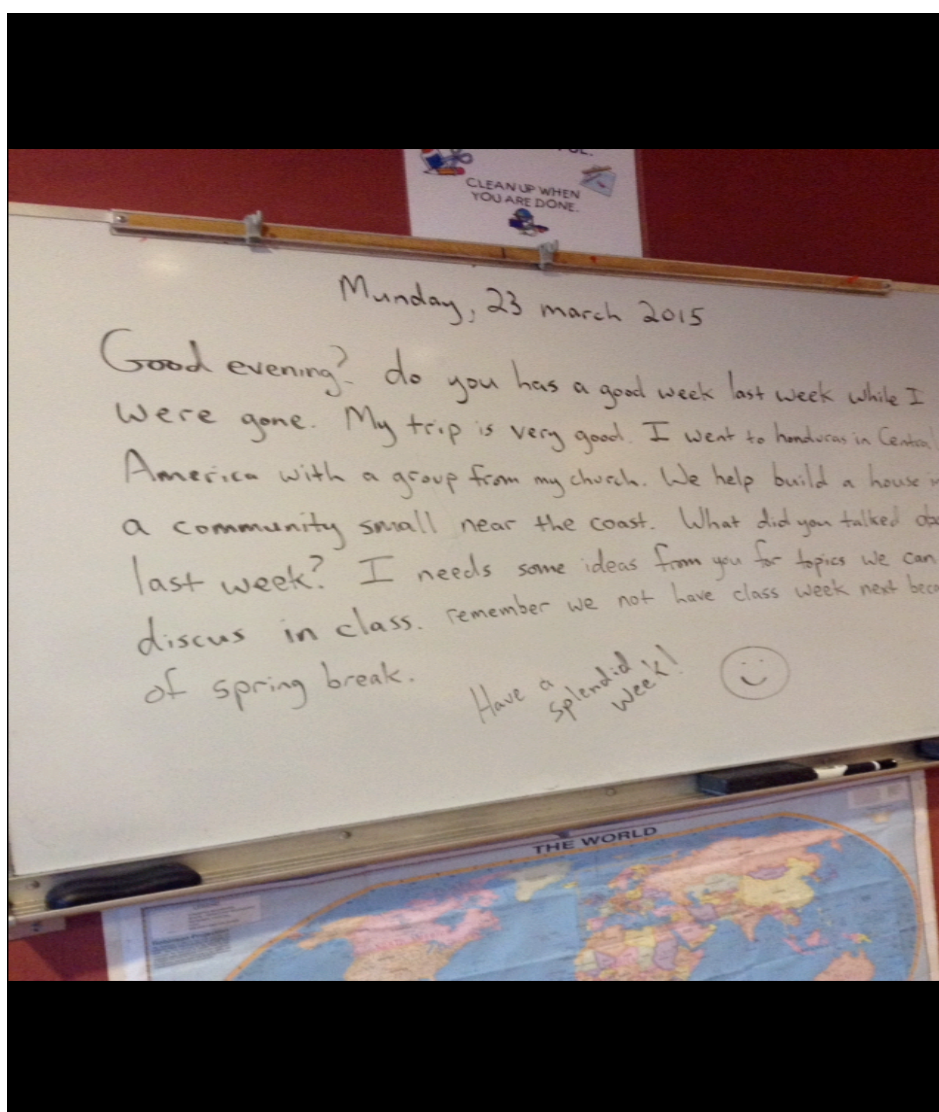
Example of Reading and Grammar Practice from Henry's Class:
"Munday, 23 march 2015
Good evening? do you has a good week last week while I
were gone. My trip is very good. I went to honduras in Central
America with a group from my church. We help build a house in
a community small near the coast. What did you talked about
last week? I needs some ideas from you for topics we can
discuss in class. remember we not have class week next because
of spring break.
Have a splendid week! ☺"

While in this practice Henry does stress conversational skills, there are a lot of other

moving parts to this activity. Based on content alone, Henry is using this exercise as an

announcement for upcoming events, or lack thereof, in the reminder that there will be no class

the following week. There is also a focus on interpersonal communication as he describes his

recent trip to Central America. As Henry wrote, his trip was with a church group as he did

missionary work abroad. In many ways this brings up the fact that a Lutheran church sponsors

the program at St. Francis, as they are located within the church's community center and many of

the volunteers working at this location are also members of this church. While there is no direct

church related instruction, the program itself is part of a larger history of Christian churches

promoting outreach into the community. The church sponsors the program and thus the church as

an extension sponsors the students. There is no direct indoctrination of students by the church,

but on a more subtle level by going to the ESL class, located right beside the church, students are

brought into the church community and end up speaking to church members every time they

enter the building. Church membership may not be sponsored, but a particular kind of attire and

behavior related to church ideal is. While there are no stated classroom attire requirements, all

students seem to have an understanding to wear conservative clothing, with modest necklines

and hem lines. Henry's exercise on the board does include this kind of sponsorship even if he is not actively aware of it while designing the activities.

Henry, in contrast to Jennifer's class, chooses to forgo the structured lesson plans that are defined by moving from a grammar lesson, a reading passage, and then a writing exercise. Instead, Henry's lesson generally is dictated by topic, with practice in grammar, reading, speaking, and sometimes writing included within those topics. First the class always begins with the grammar, reading, and speaking practice on the board described above, then there is always a review of last week's topic and vocabulary that corresponds with that, which is then followed by the day's theme or topic. Within each of these three-part lessons, there is a mix of grammar, reading, and speaking practice.

The emphasis in Henry's class by far is on the ability of the students to be able to speak and discuss topics relevant to their lives and lifestyles. Grammar is mostly focused and explained when a question comes up among the students while doing another reading or discussion activity. Hardly did the class have a section dedicated strictly to a grammar practice. Grammar appeared mostly when the students worked out of their textbooks to do assigned exercises. Even this occurred with less frequency. The more important aspect was application of these grammar rules within a larger conversation or discussion. Henry would correct obvious and meaning impacting mistakes if a student spoke using them, but rarely did Henry point out every grammatical error when students spoke. As long as the general meaning got across, the grammar appears to be less imperative.

On the other hand, when a student mispronounced words or whole phrases, Henry would stop and correct the student. Even having the whole class practice it aloud to reinforce the nuances of the pronunciation.

Similarly, Jennifer also seems to privilege speaking over other forms of literacy within

the classroom. Many of her activities also involve extensive speaking practice, with the emphasis

on how to not only pronounce a word, but where to place the stress. For instance, one activity

involved vowel pronunciation in words that have very similar pronunciation in English, such as

'cut' and 'caught,' 'dug' and 'dog,' 'bus' and 'boss,' 'done' and 'dawn,' and 'color' and 'collar.'

Students' ability to speak, and speak with proper intonation is the center focus of the program.

Take for example the following dialogue practice the students used during a class:

A: What does your son/daughter want for her birthday?
B: Well, my son, who is our youngest child, wants just a few things.
A: Like what?
B: He wants a new car that has GPS and Wi-Fi, a credit card with no spending limit and a
cashmere sweater that is dark green.
A: Wow! He isn't asking for much, is he? (type of humor called "sarcasm")
B: That is just what he is asking for, not what we are going to give him.
A: So, what are you going to give him?
B: Socks!

The most poignant aspect of this dialogue is its emphasis on finances. The dialogue

mocks overconsumption and praises the more economical present of socks over the expensive

products. St. Francis is promoting a financial literacy to its students by instructing them through

the content of their dialogues. As the dialogue deals directly with a child and a parent

relationship, the program in many ways is suggesting a particular kind of parenting as bad and

another as good by placing the two in opposition to each other in the dialogue. In some ways,

this could be slight extension of the sponsorship of the Lutheran church that the program has

strong ties to. Traditionally churches instruct against consumption, on both a biblical and moral

grounds and having this dialogue advocate against consumerism only draws that connection in deeper.

When students practiced this dialogue together, the instructor made a point to practice where traditionally a native English speaker would place an emphasis in conversation. The instructor underlined portions where students were directed to emphasize when practicing with a partner. Here the program is focusing on a more specific literacy practice of being able to interpret humor and the different intonations in English. Practices like these support the need for the students to be able to speak English in a way that sounds like native speakers. It suggests that just being able to pronounce English words and properly construct a sentence is not enough to really be considered a person able to speak English. In some ways, this slightly readjusts the definition of literacy for the students learning English as a second language, as well as the standard of literacy for non-native English speakers. For the program, if the goal is English literacy (which the director, instructors, and students all agree it is), then the definition of literacy includes not only the knowledge of the English language on a grammatical and syntactical level, but also English cultural nuances. In many ways, the program here seems to privilege intonation and general speaking ability over all other kinds of written and reading literacy.

In my interview with the site director, I brought up this pattern of privilege concerning speaking activities over all others and asked whether this choice is something the program is cognizant of.

"Yes. I try to put a dialogue in all of them. And I try to get them to talk as much as possible and so we had this survey that they had to ask their partner just questions about St. Patrick's Day, and then the dialogue when they had to talk about St. Patrick's Day, and then we had this little limerick. We do a reading, I'll read it first so they can hear the native speaker

reading it, and then we'll take turns….But I try to be mindful of what they call "teacher talk" and keep my teacher talk to a minimum and let them talk."

From what the director hears from student feedback, students seem to push for more speaking. "With ESL students I try to give them what they want, a lot of times. Not a lot of them like the writing, unless they're pretty academic or like the writing. So we might do a writing at the beginning of a class, what I do sometimes is give them a picture to describe, you know "this is a picture of a man walking his dog" or whatever, and so sometimes we will pick a picture and write it together as a group. And it's like a shared writing activity. So each person will give me like a sentence to describe the picture. They might describe their own picture. And then usually we go around the room and read it aloud because that I find, helps with self-correction." The director notes that the students even seem resistant to writing at times. "It's very interesting for me as a teacher, because many times I think I'm giving them a simple dialogue and then I saw write your own dialogue and they ….What I have to do is, I have to be super structured, I have to like underline like 5 words, say these are all descriptive adjectives, you put in a new descriptive adjective. It's got to be very tight. I can't say like write whatever you want. They just won't do it. So I don't know how that would work with that. So sometimes I do do write your own dialogues, but that's a challenge for them and unless I really have blanks and its very specific about choose an adjective or a describing word."

As a sponsor, the instructors and their lesson plans appear to focus and emphasis an English language literacy that plays on speaking, listening, and reading, instead of writing. There is a strange gap presented in this, between what the students claim to want by signing up for the program (total English literacy) and what the students actively seem to want in the classroom (a push away from writing literacy).

Class Content/Texts

As a sponsor, the content that the instructors discuss and utilize during classes is almost as important to the students' literacy as is the English language skills they acquire through class. The program allows the individual instructors a lot of freedom when it comes to how the lessons are taught, as well as what is included in these lessons. There is not set list of topics, which must be covered by the end of the semester, and there is no list of topics for the instructors to choose from to use in classes. Each class is subject to each instructor's choosing. As a result, while instructors teach language literacy, at the same time a number of different other literacies are also taught, ranging among cultural literacy, information literacy, multicultural literacy, political literacy, between others.

While the program at St. Francis has a textbook for the students to buy and work out of, it doe not get regular use from the students. Homework is rarely given from the books. Jennifer notes that, "Some instructors do [give homework]. I have never really given homework because their attendance is so sporadic. Some can only come Tuesdays and Thursdays and some only Wednesdays….a lot of them have children and as soon as they leave here they have to live their life and don't have time. Some of the other teachers do give them homework and me personally found that it works with." Yet even during class the textbook is not the focus. Instructors instead choose to use a number of different outside texts for instruction.

Occasionally the instructors will choose to use a source aimed at ESL students, such as *Easy English News* or *Learning English*'s "English in a Minute." *Easy English News* describes itself as a "monthly newspaper in simple English" aimed at "adult ad young adult immigrants and visitors to the United States" to help "[r]eaders build English vocabulary and reading skills

while they learn about their new environment in the United States" (Claire). At the same time "English in a Minute" is a group of videos that help students "learn all about idioms in American English in a minute," explaining expressions like "off the cuff," "down to Earth," and many more ("English in a Minute"). The bulk of the texts that the instructors utilize during classes are not pedagogically aimed productions, but rather everyday texts published in the local and national community with information that the instructors find pertinent to the students. That being said, the part of the *Easy English News* and "English in a Minute" that the program focuses on and uses is not the grammatical aspects (as *Easy English News* has crossword puzzles and other related exercises), but the readings and their cultural relevance. The program sponsors, for a large part of the class time, a cultural literacy alongside the English language literacy. From our previous conversation it was clear that the instructors are all at liberty to choose class topics and readings, so I asked the site director how she personally chooses readings and topics for discussion.

"I choose what I find interesting because it's much easier for me to teach that. Sometimes, the online resources, there are lots of them, sometimes I'll just flip through them and that sounds boring, that sounds boring, that sounds boring, and I'll…or you know I find it's culturally inappropriate. I like to keep it positive in the classroom. It's just what I like." Many times Jennifer notes, "We try to find articles focused on what the students would need."

Clearly, from many of the topics discussed a kind of American cultural literacy is sponsored here. For example, I arrived to class on St. Patrick's Day to observe and found a plethora of cultural teaching and instruction. The entire schedule for the day centered on the topic of St. Patrick's Day, but in terms of how Americans typically celebrate the holiday. Many students wore the green beads necklaces and donned matching four leaf clover stickers, having

earlier in the class gone to observe the St. Patrick's Day parade outside in the city. Someone

even brought green and white cupcakes to celebrate the holiday.

As for the lesson plan, the dialogue and reading for the day surrounded the topic of St.

Patrick's Day. The students practiced a dialogue that included a number of American traditions

for the holiday as well as some background:

A: Why are all these people wearing green clothes and funny hats?

B: It is St. Patrick's Day.

A: Who is he?

B: He's the patron saint of Ireland. They love him there.

A: Why? What did he do?

B: Well, first of all, he was captured by pirates and had to work as a slave for 6 years in

Ireland. Then once he was free, he became a priest and decided to go BACK to Ireland to

teach them about Christianity.

A: You mean he wanted to go BACK and help the people who made him a slave? I

would NEVER do that! I would hire a lawyer and sue that country.

B: Sorry, they didn't have lawyers in the 5th century.

The instructors try to bring in American culture to the classroom, almost as a means of providing

them with a sense of cultural community and identity. In addition, this dialogue again ties the

program back to its religious sponsorship of the church. While St. Patrick's Day is in fact a

religious holiday, many in the United States do not treat it as such and the fact that the instructor

chose to utilize a dialogue that emphasized the religious history of the holiday suggests a

religious sponsorship of sorts. The stress on the fact that St. Patrick was a priest and that he

"help[ed]" the people of Ireland as a result by teaching them the doctrine of Christianity promotes the church in a very good light.

The instructors, as the Jennifer notes, try to pull topics that students find helpful and relevant to their lives. For this reason, many times the program also promotes an emphasis on financial literacy. Many of the articles Jennifer pulls for her students revolve around spending and saving money and how to make the most of financial assets. For instance, students read Jonathan Clements' article "How to Live a Happier Financial Life" from *The Wall Street Journal,* which provided a guide to financial success, such as "biggest time waster: commuting" and "key to financial success: cheap housing" (Clements). Another one Jennifer pulled for class revealed ways to shop smarter, in Jeanette Pavini's article "You Can Shop Smartly Every Month," offering tips like "shop seasonally" and "never pay full price" (Pavini). Through these texts, instructors focus the class on financial literacy, even answering general questions students have about American finances (as the Social Security system brings about many questions from students) as well as finances in general (as many of the students are in the age range between mid-twenties and late-thirties).

Even further, a sense of cultural survival is taught on almost literal levels. During on class, Henry decided to make general road signs, the topic of class discussion. He provided a chart full of signs, not all that dissimilar from those someone would find in a pamphlet at the Department of Motor Vehicles Office.
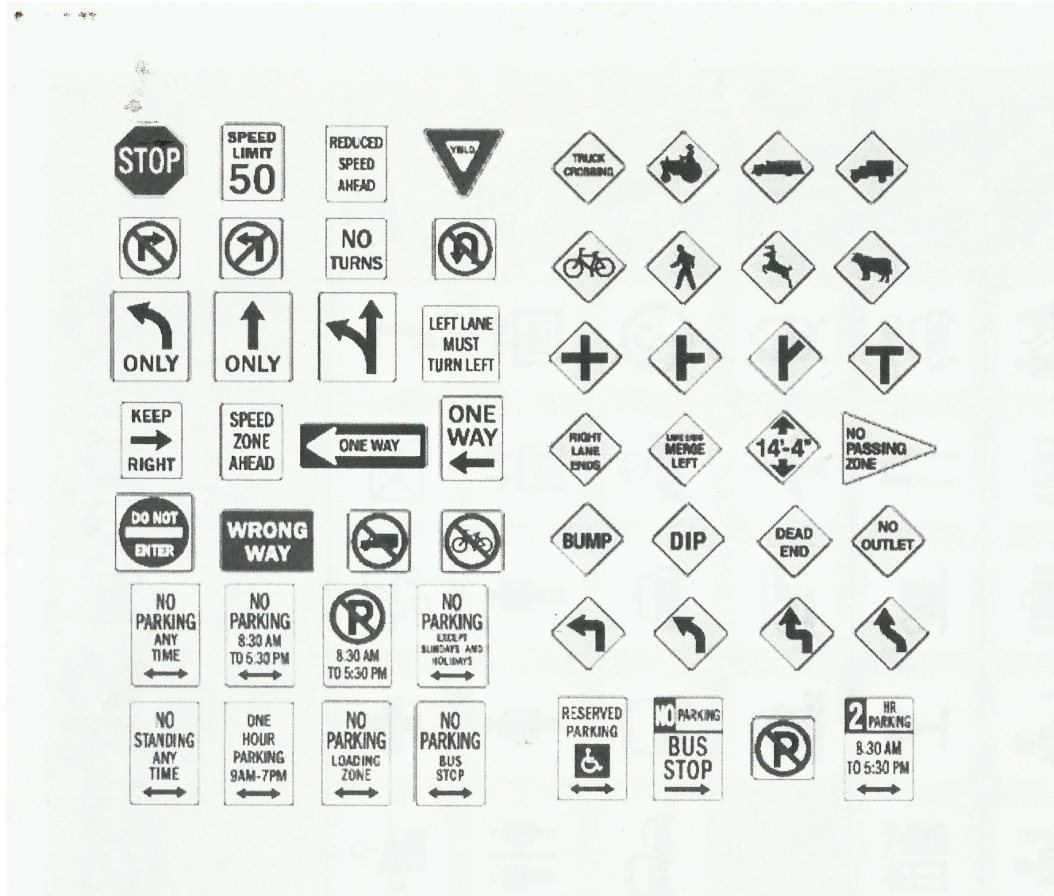
Handout of the common street signs given to students.

In this example, the cultural and civil literacy sponsored here promotes proper citizenship. Knowing the streets signs is a part of the general knowledge needed in order to obey the laws, as is expected of citizens. The literacies that the program sponsors are far greater than the English language literacy focus that the program is advertised as solely promoting. In some ways the literacies promote American citizenship and civics. The instructor Henry addressed this specifically. In one of his classes, the theme was the kind of questions and information the students would have to know to pass a citizenship test.

The class went over the Constitution, the 3 branches of government, the first 10 amendments, the Senate, the House of Representatives, political parties and current their

representatives, and a number of other important facts that would help someone pass a citizenship test. Beyond this, the classroom walls are decorated with posters that promote this same knowledge. By displaying the rights and freedoms of citizens of democracy, the program again promotes law-obeying citizenship, which the church also has a stake in, as citizens pay taxes and that indirectly benefits the church too.
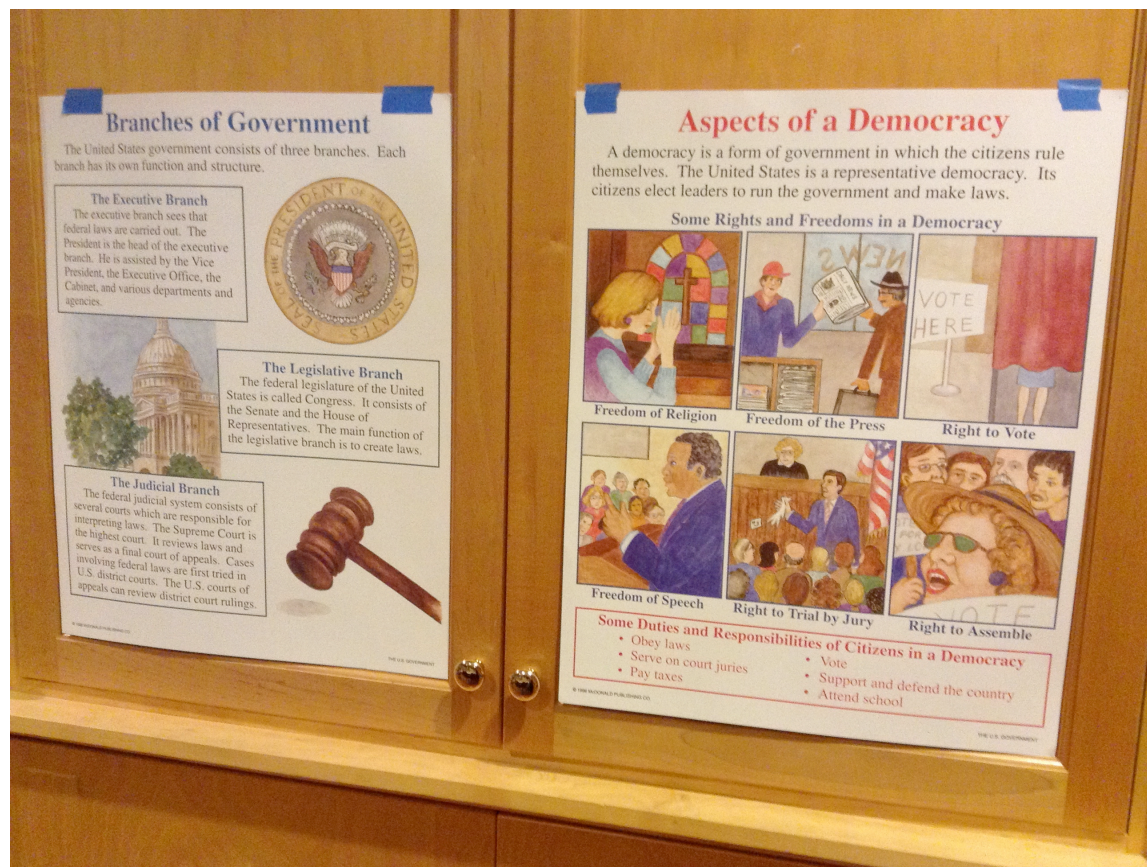
Poster from inside the classroom at St. Francis.

The program at St. Francis is promoting not only literacies that will help the students survive on a basic level while living in the United States, such as their language literacy, financial literacy, but also a cultural literacy that will instill and educate the students in American citizenship. The program sponsors the students' immersion into American culture in terms of

almost all aspects of their lives, be that through language as the program advertises itself or

through financial, cultural, political, and information literacy they receive as well.

Student Desires and Goals

       In the interview, the site director made the statement that the program tries to cater and

work toward the students' needs and wishes. In theory, this means that the program sponsors the

kind of literacy that students want and thus the class exercises work toward this goal. In my

interviews with students, I found that many of the students' desires and goals were, in fact, met.

       I had noticed when I began this project that many of the students, when presented with

the written interview questions seemed rather unreceptive to the idea of providing written

responses to the questions. At first, I considered this a symptom of my newness to them and their

possible apprehension with myself as an interviewer. In retrospect, after interviewing the

students over the past few months, it has become clear that the students' hesitation with the

written questionnaires was not uneasiness with myself, but rather uneasiness with their writing

abilities. One student, Ivan, even requested to do the first set of questions verbally, because he

expressed that, in his own opinion, his speaking ability is better than his writing skills.

      In the questionnaires many students consistently wrote of their own ability to write in

negative terms, always praising their other skills (speaking, reading, listening) over writing.

Neva, a new student to the program this year, when asked about her writing ability stated, "I

need more words in english." Her fear stems from feeling that she lacks vocabulary, but other

students cited other reasons for their lack of confidence in writing skills. In an interview with

Tokemi, she mentions her lack of confidence as stemming from lack of use. When asked about

her about the different skills sets (reading, writing, listening, speaking) she stated, "Yeah, of

course everything is important, but I think for daily life, you know, speaking and listening are most important. Because I am not a writer." Students seem to place less important on written literacies because they perceive themselves as using them less. While students like Tokemi think that they utilize writing rarely, my research found this to be untrue. More likely students are not considering their social media practices, email usage, and text messages as a form of writing literacy because it is not in a traditional setting of paper and pen. While I asked Tokemi if she kept a diary or journal of sorts, she responded with a no, but in many ways a collection of Facebook statuses could be considered a running, public journal. For this reason, it seems that students' own misunderstanding of literacy practices confuses their own literacy goals because they want skills they use often, but they ignore or invalidate a lot of their own practices.

Students also expressed the importance they place on speaking and listening over grammar and writing as a result of their experiences with native English speakers. Tokemi stated, "I am always think which word is right, but I remind sometimes people do not pay attention to the grammar, but I do." Many students, like Tokemi, found that through their experiences speaking with native speakers the emphasis is less on grammatical correctness and more so on content and thus many students have emulated this.

Instead, much like the program does through its sponsorship of speaking activities, the students place a large emphasis on speaking. Narcisa stated, "I'm feel the I need speaking more for lose the fear the communicate effectively." Another student Iva found moving to the United States difficult for her to create friendships and meet people. She stated, "I didn't like speak english. The pronunciation is very difficult for me. I want to be able to speak easier with english speakers." Speaking seems to take on more importantance because it fills an immediate need,

more so than writing. Speaking, as many students note, is more essential to community and friend building than other skills would be for students at this time.

Other students note the importance of speaking over written literacy in their quest for a job. Tavita expressed, "I want to learn speaking English because I live in here and I need to communicate with people. I want to apply for my postdoc in MUSC after defense of my thesis. I need to learn English speaking for getting job too." Many students also express this desire for speaking fluency in order to obtain or better their experience on a job site.

One student, Neva feels that English fluency, in particular speaking fluency, will help with her job as a nanny. She stated, "I decide to take this class because is very frustrating don't understand what people said, or when i need to do something always need help. And i like to help my girl at the schools works. english is very very necesary and i just want to do evething. when i come here (USA) i feel like a 3 years old, and finally i found a ESL class."

Many of the students view literacy still in terms of the literacy myth; that English fluency will equal a job, or a better job. Unfortunately many of the students have felt the harsh reality of the literacy myth first hand.

Tokemi, in her interview, voiced her frustrations with this exact situation. "I think American people are really, how can I say, very can't understand from other countries people, so no one say 'you have to study English real well' but it's assumed. And it will be much easier to find." Currently Tokemi continues to search for a job, but in the meantime has found the English program at St. Francis to fill another need: a need for a community.

The program at St. Francis sponsors students in a way that is not a direct intent: in their community base that forms amongst student over the course of the semester. Students many times stay after class, talking amongst themselves. Other times, students will bring in a tray of

food for everyone on special occasions. The students build their own sphere of friends through this program. Tokemi spoke of this community, "the class will be better, and we can meet each other outside of classes, have lunch." For many who are recent immigrants to this country, the class provides a community base of people with similar experiences and challenges. It is not uncommon after class to hear some of the shared native languages spoken between students. The program, in this case, sponsors literacy of the students' native languages through providing them a space and group of people to speak with.

Restrictions on the Project

As mentioned before, this project was very much so constricted by time and resources. Projects of this sort would benefit from a longer time line for observations and extended interviews with students. This project must work within the time allotted and thus may not get the same amount or quality of data as a longer project would. The resources were also a limited source. Students regularly attend the ESL class at this program, but sometimes differ on days they attend. This made getting regular questionnaires from the same students difficult.

One of the goals of this research was to be least invasive as possible to the studies and time of the students. Due to this, conducting interviews was subject to students that are willing and have the time to put into the interviews.

In addition, in working alongside and in many ways through the ESL program, students may have seen my research as an extension of that program, which could filter into how they conducted themselves in the interviews and responded to questions. While I stressed that the students need not be worried over grammar and small technical writing issues, many did. This may have hindered their answers resulting in shorter, more general responses. Students might have felt that their performance in the interview or written questionnaire would reflect on their performance in the class and this might have promoted fears of being graded or evaluated on

those terms, instead of for the content of their responses.

One of the more obvious restrictions on this project was the language barrier that has been discussed previously. These students did feel completely proficient in their English language skills (which is the whole reason for their enrollment in the class) and then providing responses and stories in English may have been a difficult and trying task for students.

Conclusion

The program as a sponsor of the student literacy does not only focus on their language literacy, but rather a number of other literacies. Through the texts and content discussed in class, the program sponsors a lot more than strictly English language literacy. There is a large emphasis on cultural literacy; instructors constantly discuss American culture and how it differs or relates to their own native countries' culture and customs. The program provides students with financial literacy, political literacy, and various other forms of literacy through the texts the instructors bring into class. In addition, the ESL program stands as a major sponsor of the students' literacies, but the other more subtle, yet very present, sponsor is the Lutheran church that the organization works with. It financially really only sponsors the program through the community center space, but realistically its values and ideologies are also promoted through class content, be that if the instructors and students realize this or not.

In the curriculum, while it may seem that there is a privilege on speaking, reading, and listening skills and a lack in the place of writing skills, the students' needs and expressed desires overall are met. It is not only the program that privileges conversational abilities; the students also reinforce this choice.

As noted, the program at St. Francis sponsors a number of different kinds of literacy, which the students largely engage with. Many feel a desire not only be able to speak English

with Americans, but the desire to feel more comfortable living in the United States. In fact, the cultural literacy aspects of class appear to be when students are most engaged. The articles bring about a lot of questions from students, about their finances, American customs, and all of the things the program sponsors through readings and discussions.

Although, a gap exists in one aspect: technology. The program does not promote or sponsor really any kind of technology literacy despite the majority of the students' written literacy being through social media, text messages, and email. A program such as this one, which has far less regulation on their activities, has the freedom to pursue sponsorship of a variety of different literacies, in particular technological, but their real predicament is in their financial situation. The program has a lack of funding, which largely dictates what they are and are not able to do for their students. As the site director noted with a laugh, "we do not have any money for advertising," let alone enough to fund any technological additions to the classroom. The program does seem to hold back from technological literacy, the real reason behind this choice might be in their own misinformation about students' daily practices. With funding and other logistical constraints, the program has little time or finances to dedicate to evaluating students' own daily literacy practices and may not be aware that there exists a gap when it comes to technology usage and its possible benefits to incorporating it into the classroom.

The program goes on to provide sponsorship for something that it may not intend: the building of a community base within a larger population that does not provide one otherwise. The students who find common languages amongst themselves in the group at St. Francis use this space as a place to make build friendships and continue to speak their native language. In many ways, the program at St. Francis is both sponsoring English language literacy as well as a number of different native language literacies. They are providing the space and opportunity that

the students may not have found outside of the program. Earlier in this paper, the gap between

the limited need for adult ESL programs and the large quantity of programs available across the

United States was noted. The answer to this seemingly inconsistent grouping of statistics could

be the sense of community that these programs bring to the students.

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