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Editorial Board

Language Experience Forum Journal is a refereed journal of the Language Experience Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association. The journal is aimed at teachers of literacy at all levels. It provides a forum for discussion of new ideas and issues related to the teaching of literacy to all groups of students.

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Message from the Editor

Welcome to all members of the Language Experience Special Interest Group. This fall 2011 issue introduces a new electronic format. The newsletter has a new name and a new look. The Board of the Language Experience Special Interest Group voted to move to a journal format this spring, including a name change, voted on by members of the editorial board. The Board wanted to make the journal more accessible to members and to provide a forum for the discussion of ideas and research in the areas of literacy.

Now we need your submissions to make the journal a vibrant outlet for this discussion. The journal will publish articles on any issue of language experience or literacy, working with students from preschool to college age. Many teachers are finding Language Experience especially useful when working with English Language Learners or other special needs students.

Currently, the deadline for submission is open-ended. Manuscripts of 5-8 pages are preferred, but longer or shorter manuscripts will be considered. Submit manuscripts electronically, with a title page indicating your name, professional affiliation, address, telephone number, and email address. This information should not appear on the other pages of your manuscript. The first page of the manuscript should begin with the title. Follow APA format throughout the manuscript.

Submissions will be acknowledged and will be reviewed by the editor before being sent to the Editorial Board. The editor reserves the right to edit all manuscripts selected for publication.

I look forward to launching this journal as a resource for our Special Interest Group and as a forum dedicated to the discussion of literacy, teaching, and research.

Manuscripts should be sent to Jeanne McGlinn at jmcglinn@unca.edu.

Use of a Broadened Form of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) with English Language Learners

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The broadened form of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) may be used to teach English as a second language to ESL students, to improve their writing skills, increase their vocabulary knowledge, and improve their comprehension in academic subject areas (Knipper & Dugan, 2006; Gipe, 2010). Through Language Experience students use their own experiences to construct sentences about what they read, and because they are paired with a person more knowledgeable in English, either an instructor or peer, they get immediate feedback. Through the broadened approach of language experience, students will engage in the following instructional acts:

- Seeing the one to one correspondence between spoken and written language;
- Using meaningful context based on background knowledge and/or experience;
- Engaging in repeated reading of the LEA text as well as repeating high frequency words;
- Using meaningful context to examine components of language (words, phonemes, and morphemes).
- Creating sentences based on modeling by the instructor;
- Building comprehension by answering questions.

Case Study of Two LEA Students

A case study method was used to investigate the impact of LEA on two middle school students whose native language was not English. The study examined increases in vocabulary quality and retention after engaging in LEA. The number and quality of written sentences were also analyzed. Student A was an eleven year old female whose native language was Romanian. She was born in the United States, but is being raised by her grandmother who only speaks Romanian. She was enrolled in a public school. Student B was an eleven year old male whose native language was Korean. He was in the fifth grade in an alternative school setting. He speaks both Korean and English**.** Both students were at least two grade levels below grade level in reading achievement.

Procedure

Student A and Student B received instruction with LEA for eight consecutive sessions and in the ninth session they were given a vocabulary assessment based on the words in their cumulative word bank. In each session, students were asked to use their background experiences or content information to create meaningful text. In the first session, students composed a message (story) based on a topic from either a content area or the students' personal experiences. For example, the instructor could use a textbook chapter as a prompt. The instructor wrote the student's message/story as

dictated by the student, read it out loud, and asked if the student wanted to make any changes. Then the instructor and the student read the message/story together several times. A word bank was created for difficult words, and comprehension was assessed through questioning.

In the second session, the student repeats any unknown words from the word bank of the first session. The student then reads the message/story from the first session two times. The instructor assesses if the student had mastered all the sight words in the word bank. If time permits, another message/story is begun. This procedure is followed for subsequent sessions. The student is tested to see if he/she has learned the difficult words, the passage is re-read, and then a new message is created. Students who have not learned the vocabulary repeat the vocabulary words and reread the message. By the seventh session, both successful and non-successful students review the words in the word bank and begin a new message/story. The message/story is edited and read by instructor. Then the student reads the passage two times. In the ninth session, the teacher assesses the oral reading of all of the words in the word bank and comprehension of the messages.

Observations and Results

For this project, curriculum based evaluation included assessment of words in story/message, number and quality of sentences in the story, and words missed when the students read the message that they had composed in the session. The words that were miscued during the rereading of the story/message written by the student were placed in a word bank. The total words in the word bank were assessed in the ninth session. (The student was asked to orally read them to the teacher.) For the purposes of this study, the students were named Student A and Student B and their profiles, an LE story/message example, and results are listed below.

Student A

Student A is an eleven year old female whose native language is Romanian. The teacher noted that she appeared to gain most of her information from listening to the discussion of other students in the classroom. Her comprehension of independent reading materials at her class level was weak. Even when the teacher read to her, Student A struggled with comprehension. In the area of word recognition, Student A needed prompting to listen to the syllables in words. She struggled with grammar, mechanics and spelling when writing.

The teacher also observed that Student A paraphrased inaccurately from reading material that was used as a prompt during the tutoring sessions. However, her oral language is her strong point. She expresses herself as any average to just below average fifth grader would do.

During the first tutoring session the teacher observed that the student did not comprehend well the LE story that she wrote. However, with each successive reading, her reading became more fluent with prosody and expression evident. Student A's greatest difficulty in accuracy was substituting words and omitting endings. The words that she substituted were the more abstract words rather than the concrete words. Furthermore, the word substitutions she made were usually with words that began with the same sound as the accurate word. As the tutoring sessions progressed, Student A began self correcting using the language structure as a cue.

The following is Student A's writing from the eighth tutoring session. The focus

of the LE writing was on information concerning her native country, Romania:

Romania is like going back in time. Boceik is my town. I wake up in the morning and I can feel the breeze in the air. I look out the window And I see my friends waiting for me. We went to the lake like we always do and we do our experiments. We find objects in the water and use them as an invention, but my mom tells me not to get wet.

The people have sheds as houses. Rich people have bigger houses. There is a bathroom next to the bedroom. Some people have bathrooms outside. In the kitchen, they have a stove and they light logs in it with fire. Every morning we go down to the lake and get water because water comes down tube for the mountain. This is fresh water. You don't have to pay anything. This is the water you use to drink and cook with. There is different water to use to take a bath. The bathtub is way different. It's a big metal tub. You have to boil the water to take a bath.

If you need to get milk, you get it from a lady who lives two blocks away and she has four cows. You have to buy the milk. It's still warm. I like to eat the skim off the top.

By the eighth session Student A's messages had improved greatly. Table 1 shows a comparison of Student A's LE writing during the first tutoring session and during the eighth tutoring session.

Table 1: Student A's LE Writings from the First and Eighth Tutoring Sessions

First Session:

Words in story: 167 Sentences: 13 Words Missed: 3 Word Bank: 3

Eighth Session:

Words in story: 225 Sentences: 23 Words Missed: 0 Word Bank: 0

In the first session, Student A wrote 13 sentences and 167 words in her LE message/story. She miscued three words in the rereading of her LE message/story and these three words were placed in her word bank. In the eighth session, Student A's LE writing contained 225 words and was comprised of 23 sentences. She miscued no words. Thus, there was an increase in the number of words that she wrote and in the number of sentences that she completed from the first tutoring session to the last session. By the last session, the teacher noted that Student A also made strides in fluency, decoding skill, and self monitoring.

Student B

Student B is an eleven year old male whose native language is Korean. Although he had trouble comprehending the prompt in the first session, he made an effort to compensate by guessing at the meaning of the story using pictures. During the first few tutoring sessions, Student B had difficulty focusing on the topic or material because he was very moody. If his day had been smooth, he was in a good mood and could concentrate much better. The teacher observed that he is easily frustrated,

distracted, and has trouble focusing on a task.

When Student B read orally, he paused at inappropriate places. He was using phrasing that was appropriate for Korean, but not for English. He also read orally at a very rapid rate. When the teacher instructed him to slow down his rate, his accuracy and comprehension improved greatly.

The following is Student B's writing from the eighth tutoring session on a social studies topic, Egypt.

We learned that King Tut was the one who ruled Egypt for a few years. And that they can't find King Tut's tomb. I don't even think, now, King Tut is the most famous mummy in the world.

When the mummies are wrapped up they are, they pick their brains out with a stick. They put sap in their bodies, that would be like a hard shell and they stuff their bodies with rags. They put rags help it keep its shape. They put false eyes on the faces. Finally, the mummy is ready for wrapping.

They have to protect the mummies by wrapping them in layers of cloth, so they won't be torn apart. To do that, they cut long pieces of cloth into long strips. They put the strips around the head and body. They even put jewels and good luck charms in the mummy. They put a mask on the mummy. Then they put a mask on that looks like as person's actual face. And they put the mummy in a special box called the mummy case. Then they put each person's favorite things in the mummy case. And symbols of their wealth are put in the mummy case. Even pets are put in the mummy case. Even some of the mummys [sic] *are over 2000 years old and they still look okay.*

The pyramids over in Egypt are over 4000 years old. When each pharaoh dies, they are buried inside the pyramids. It's hard making each pyramid. Each pyramid took 20 years to build. It takes a lot of planning and supplies. The pharaohs started planning his burial pyramid as soon as he came to power. Preparing each pyramid was hard work. The pyramid lays flat otherwise the pyramid would look different. It would look lopsided. So the builders came up with the method of making the pyramid base flat. First they made trenches in the ground. Then they flooded the trenches and bumps of sand appeared above the water. The sand was leveled off and the pyramid was made flat. Some builders had one other problem – the sides of the pyramid had to be the same distance apart otherwise they wouldn't meet at the top. So four priests marked where each side should go. They started at the center and went north, another went east, and another went south and the fourth went west. They each walked the same distance from the center.

Table 2 shows a comparison of Student B's LE message/story writing during the first tutoring session and the eighth session.

Table 2: Student B's Writings from the First and Eighth Tutoring Sessions

First Session:			
Words in story: 254	Sentences: 48	Words missed: 10	Word Bank: 10
Eighth Session:			
Words in story: 405	Sentences: 37	Words missed: 9	Word Bank: 9

During the first tutoring session, Student B wrote 48 sentences and 254 words in his LE message/story. He miscued ten words in the rereading of the LE message/story and these words were placed in a word bank. In the eighth session, Student B's message/story contained 405 words. His written message contained 37 sentences, but the teacher noted that the sentence structure was greatly improved from the first tutoring session. His vocabulary inclusion in the piece increased tremendously and he was able to properly place and use descriptive vocabulary in his dictated messages.

Comprehension improved as the sessions progressed. This was mainly because he dictated the information and knew what the content was. His oral reading also became more normal because he was using proper English phrasing. By the eighth session, Student B began to correlate what he was writing to an understanding of the text material for class.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of the study was to determine if there would be an increase in vocabulary quality and retention after using the LEA. The two students in these cases made tremendous gains as indicated by the results. Both students increased the number of words that they included in their messages. They also increased the number and quality of sentences. Student A wrote more sentences from her first to last sessions. Student B wrote fewer sentences in his last message, but the teacher indicated that quality of the sentences improved.

The broadened form of LEA gives students an opportunity to write and read in a non-threatening atmosphere. It also affords the instructor teachable moments in which confusions about English constructions can be cleared up and vocabulary can be expanded (Gammill, 2006). Pronunciations and spelling can also be addressed in the sessions. When these things are treated with the student's spoken language, as he/she writes, language skills improve and there is a direct transfer to other content classes. Repeated readings also lead to enhanced retention.

Using a broadened form of LEA with these students enables instructors to assess language competency (Bears, 1998) and to identify gaps in spelling, writing, and depth of vocabulary. Constructions in spelling which are problematic for the students can be isolated and sentence structure can be assessed. If the student's problem is complicated with a learning disability, this approach is imperative as the instructor is working one on one with the student (Lerner, 1997; Lerner & Johns, 2009; Stokes, 2000). But the biggest impact this technique has is enlarging vocabulary and strengthening functional sight words. Because the student is working with their speaking vocabulary, which is usually more advanced than their reading level for recognizing words, sight word recognition improves. There is ample time to work with word structure as well sentence structure.

Some ESL students may also experience problems in reading comprehension (Robertson, 2000) and retention and short and/or long term memory problems (Bos & Vaughan, 2006). These students benefit greatly from an LEA approach because content material can be related in the LEA writing. Relating, from memory, facts and concepts learned in social studies, literature, science or history can be checked against the text and notes and then edited for accuracy. These writings can comprise summaries and paraphrasing and thus, these skills are taught/ reviewed. Students' knowledge of information from a text can be enhanced if they review the text after their written messages are edited. This can become a

valuable review tool and allow the student to go directly to the text for more extended information.

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From Verse Novels to Language Experience

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Reflecting trends in contemporary post-modernist fiction, writers of adolescent novels are equally as innovative, frequently blending various genres, using nonlinear plot structure and multiple narrators. One group of authors uses verse exclusively to create the story and develop the characters. For example in *Bronx Masquerade* Nikki Grimes combines poetry and first-person monologues to construct a plot about the interactions of a group of high school students. The best selling novels of Ellen Hopkins (*Crank, Glass, Burned, Impluse*) are all written in verse. According to one critic of adolescent literature, "Children's literature today is catching up with mainstream literature in its so-called postmodern phase, which has as its most prominent slogan the violation of generally accepted literary norms" (Nikolajeva, 1996, p. 119). This post modernist aesthetic frees the author to experiment with genre and to blend different genres to tell a story, creating aesthetic values of "irony, parody, displacement" (p.114). In children's literature, this experimentation serves a "pedagogical" purpose: "in order to entice children to read, books pretend to be something other than they really are" (p. 114). So the white space of poetry can make a novel seem less daunting to a reluctant reader. The free verse format can signal that "what the writer really intends to tell lies beyond" (p. 114). The purposeful gaps of poetry invite readers to construct the meaning, make connections, and see multiple possibilities in the stories. Post modern verse novels leave readers with a feeling of spontaneity, discovery, and even incoherence. The narrative twists and turns, keeping the reader off balance. At times this experimentation is almost self-conscious, as if the author is calling attention to his ability to manipulate language and point of view. But rather than being negative, these techniques can be freeing, giving the reader permission to draw out deeper meanings. Reading verse novels can provide an experience for adolescents which can develop critical thinking and lead to a variety of language play.

Verse novels deal with all types of contemporary situations, from teen sexuality to suicide to the death of a parent. Some verse novels explore historical situations, others are mysteries. Reading and exploring how the authors create stories through verse can lead students to create their own poems. For example, by discussing with students how the author chooses details to create the story, students can become aware of the power of language and the compression of poetry. Students can work with a partner to rewrite a poem in the novel from the point of view of another character which will lead them to select key details to convey the character. Students can also practice dramatic readings of poems. Again this helps students to think about the choices of language that the author has made.

Following are suggestions for how teachers can create language experiences for adolescent readers, using particular verse novels.

Writing Poems: Bronx Masquerade

Masks, mirrors, confining boxes are the symbols used by the students in Mr. Ward's English class, who have been reading the poets of the Harlem Renaissance. These juniors in high school write about the expectations that limit their dreams. Diondra, who wants to be an artist, is expected to be a great basketball player just because she is tall; Devon, a star athlete, is afraid to show how much he enjoys poetry and hides out in the library when he wants to read. Other students describe their fears of what will happen if they let go of their dreams. Steve Ericson wonders if he will be like his father who let his dreams die. His friend encourages him, saying "If a dream is in your heart, you never lose it" (p. 116). Tyrone speaks for all these students when he writes, "I believe in Martin's power, though the King is gone./But the last I heard, 'I Have a Dream' keeps living on./So will I…/I will hold on to tomorrow. I am here to stay" (p. 130). Through their poems the students reveal their inner dreams and personalities and also break down the barriers between them. They begin to see what they share, instead of what makes them different. Again Tyrone speaks for everyone when he says, "I look around this class and nobody I see fits into the box I used to put them in" (p. 86). Grimes provides a powerful lesson of how poetry and language can become the tools to break down barriers and open hearts.

After reading the novel, ask students to journal about their dreams of what they want to do or be in life. After sharing these reactions, students can each write a poem, describing their personal dreams, using the poems in the novel as models.

One theme of the novel is the impact of the masks we wear that keep others from truly seeing who we are. Discuss with students: Are these masks created by the person or masks imposed by others? Brainstorm all the masks worn by students in your high school. Ask students to choose one of these masks and write a poem or character sketch describing how this person is viewed and how he/she feels about the mask. Collect these writings to create a book about the students' own High School Masquerade.

Using the Sonnet Form: Keesha's House

Helen Frost uses the traditional poetic forms of the sestina and sonnet to tell the stories of teens in crisis who find a refuge at Joe's safe-house. There they can stay for as long as they need without any questions. Their problems represent the full range of issues facing teens today: unplanned pregnancy, abusive situations, alcoholism, dealing with absent parents, and sexual identity.

The author uses a "hybrid sonnet": half English and half Italian, rhyming abba, cddc, efgefg in some of the poems in Part III. After analyzing the sonnet form, ask students to write poems about their own friends using this sonnet form.

Point of View in Reader's Theatre: Witness

Witness covers events in a small Vermont town in 1924 when the Ku Klux Klan infiltrates the community. The novel is divided into five acts with a range of townsfolk contributing their unique, and often one-sided view of events in order to create the story of this time. Latent racism turns into open violence to intimidate people of different races, ethnicities, and religions. Leaders in the community buy into the economic advantages associated with the Klan; others are simply silent. A leading preacher mixes racism and sexism with religion and nationalism and advocates

hatred which affects two young motherless girls. Eventually the townspeople confront their racism and take a stand for justice.

Although there isn't a main narrator, the authorial point of view is represented by Leanora Sutter, a twelve year old African American girl, still dealing with the grief of her mother's death, caused by latent racism. Eleven voices narrate the arrival of the Ku Klux Klan. Divide students into groups and give them a copy of the part spoken by their characters. Students should read through the section several times, planning their reading and practicing varying pitch, speed, and voices. Students can make notes on their copies and then practice two to three times to make sure that their reading has an impact on the listeners. Ask students to present their characters in sequence. Then discuss with the class: What was the impact of hearing this character's story? What kind of person is this character? What can you tell about the character's motivation?

After students have read the novel, assign a creative writing assignment. Ask students to change the character who is telling about an event during this time in the town and to write a new first-person narrative in which listeners can hear the voice of this character. After sharing their stories, ask the class how the story changes based on the point of view of who tells the story.

More Verse Novels

This annotated bibliography provides a sampling of the variety of topics and genres in adolescent verse novels.

Brisson, P. (2010). **The Best and Hardest Thing**. New York: Viking.

When fifteen-year old Molly decides she's been a good girl for too long, she sets out to catch the eye of "bad boy" Grady Dillon. Soon she finds herself pregnant and facing the prospect of having a baby on her own. The story is told through a series of poems—haiku, sonnet, and free verse.

Bryant, J. (2004). **The Trial: A Novel**. New York: Knopf. MS

Katie Leigh Flynn (twelve years old) lives in Flemington, New Jersey, in 1934, a quiet town where nothing ever happens and where Katie dreams of becoming a news reporter who travels to faraway places. But things suddenly change when Flemington becomes the site of the murder trial of Bruno Richard Hauptmann who is charged with the kidnapping and murder of the Lindbergh baby. Katie has a front seat at the media circus that ensues when she is called on to be the scribe for her uncle, a news reporter for the local paper. Observing the witnesses and lawyers and listening to the evidence, Katie becomes convinced that there is a reasonable doubt that Hauptmann committed the crime. When he is convicted and sentenced to death in the electric chair, Katie realizes life's complexity and moral ambiguity. This novel explores themes students will find in *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

Crist-Evans, C. (2004). **North of Everything**. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. MS

The poet Crist-Evans uses sparse, but evocative, language to explore the theme of rebirth and hope. The prologue describes the cycle of the seasons "north of everything" where fall turns to winter and then to spring, symbolizing the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The young narrator encounters this cycle during several years in his life when his family moves from Miami, Florida where "Everything smelled like flowers/All the time!" to a farm along the banks of the Winooski in Vermont. Starting over "closer/ to the earth/to the sky/closer/to each other," the family is happy working the

land and expecting a new baby until the father is diagnosed with cancer. Each person in the family deals with the reality of death in different ways. In the end they find the courage to go on, realizing that "Dad's spirit lives/in every blade of grass,/in every tree, in all the ways/we learn to keep on breathing."

Glenn, M. (1999). **Foreign Exchange: A Mystery in Poems.** New York: Morrow Junior Books.

Students from a high school in the city are invited to a weekend in a small, rural town—a "foreign exchange." Glenn uses a series of poems, spoken by different students, teachers, and townspeople, to explore the fabric of peoples' lives in each place. Stereotypes and expectations have serious consequences when a beautiful local girl is found murdered and a black student is accused of the crime.

Herrera, J. F. (1999). **CrashBoomLove: A Novel in Verse.** Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Cesar Garcia's life spins out of control after his father leaves and he struggles with feelings of abandonment. He makes bad choices with accelerating consequences that almost cost him his life. Herrera creates a realistic picture of urban high school life for a Mexican American boy.

Hesse, K. (2003). **Aleutian Sparrow**. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books.

Vera, an Aleutian girl, is separated from her village, as a result of the Japanese invasion of the islands following the attack on Pearl Harbor. All the Aleutian people are relocated to Alaska's Southeast. The people are stricken by their sudden dislocation. One grandmother says, "Our villages empty of Aleuts, and all along the windswept chain the islands grieve for the loss of our laughter." In their strange new home, the exiles try to adjust, to find ways to survive.

Hesse, K. (1997). **Out of the Dust**. New York: Scholastic.

Billie Jo tells the story of her life growing up during the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma and the terrible accident that takes her mother's life and leaves her scarred with severe burns. She is troubled by guilt that she caused her mother's death and angry at her father whom she blames. Her burned hands, now "lumps of flesh" prevent her from enjoying her one outlet, playing the piano. As the year passes, Billie Jo learns to see that she is very much like her father who refuses to give up even in the face of the terrible and unrelenting drought that withers his crops and brings dust over the land. She also realizes that running away will not help. As Billie Jo begins to deal with her feelings, there is hope in the small steps she and her father take together.

Johnson, A. (2003). **The First Part Last**. New York: Simon & Schuster.

In a story that alternates between the present and the past (now and then), Bobby, just turned sixteen, learns he is going to be a father and later adjusts to taking care of his baby. He has to learn how to change from the impulsive and irresponsible person he has been to the father his baby needs.

Johnson, L. L. (2002). **Soul Moon Soup**. Asheville, NC: Front Street. MS

Twelve-year old Phoebe lives on the streets with her mother until she is sent to the country to her grandmother. There she finds a home but longs for her mother and an understanding of the secrets her mother carries. In time Phoebe finds her own resources and comes to realize that her mother is "just another person trying to keep her head above water."

Sandell, L. A. (2006). **The Weight of the Sky**. New York: Viking.

Sarah, feeling isolated as the only Jewish girl at her high school, travels to Israel during the summer of her junior year to work on a kibbutz. There she embraces Jewish culture and finds herself and what she really wants to do with her future.

Sones, S. (1999). **Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy.**

Based on events in the author's life, this novel describes the emotions and fears of a younger sister trying to understand the mental illness of her older sister. She realistically charts the stages of her sister's illness and her frustration and loss.

Testa, M. (2003). **Almost Forever.** Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. MS

It's Christmas 1967 when the narrator's doctor father gets orders to report for duty in Vietnam. In lyrical poems, the child tells the story of this year while she, her mother, and little brother write letters, hold on to their memories, and try to be brave, even though it seems like "forever."

Woodson, J. (2003). **Locomotion**. New York: Penguin. MS

Eleven-year old Lonnie lost both his parents when he was seven and now lives in foster care. His teacher encourages him to write poetry and Lonnie experiments with various forms as he explores his loneliness and loss.

MS= More appropriate for Middle School readers

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International Reading Association Special Interest Group (SIG) Committee Survey Analyses

Dr. Chhanda Islam, Chairperson

Jennifer I. Hathaway, Member

Elizabeth M. Baker-Rall, Member

Michael E. Bowden, Member

As part of our work as the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) Committee, we conducted a survey/needs assessment to **better serve** SIGs. SIGs responses to this inventory helped us target our support where the SIGs needed it the most. The purposes were to identify areas of concern and to examine the current/future needs of the SIGs.

A survey/needs assessment was created and sent electronically to the chairpersons of each SIG during the summer of 2010. Only twelve SIG Chairs responded. IRA has more than 35 SIGs focusing on a wide range of topics. SIGs serve educators who have a deep interest in topics ranging from balanced reading instruction to disabled readers, from content area reading to technology in literacy education. The real goals of reporting needs assessment/survey results to the SIG's Chairs were to address all the major problems that SIGs face, to discuss attendance at the annual IRA conference as well as the program issue for maintaining interest in the SIGs.

SIG Committee's Work Completed

IRA has relaxed one appearance policy on the convention program. The professional educators are allowed to present at BOTH the IRA and SIG sessions.

SIGs have been advertised through *Reading Today.* The IRA Division of Council and Affiliate Services has reserved a booth for IRA SIGs in the exhibit hall during the Annual Convention in Orlando. Each SIG chair has been requested to bring brochures/handouts/journals/books for the IRA display table. The purposes are to have an informal opportunity for networking, exchanging innovative ideas, and for useful feedback and discussion with its members.

Because IRA knows how much conference participants enjoy sharing practical ideas and strategies, we have set up a brand new offering for 2011- a series of informal idea swaps that will take place in the exhibit hall. This is a wonderful way to network with educators from around the world who share the same concerns.

Needs Assessment/Survey Results

Based on survey data, 83% said that the SIG Committee should continue to lobby for financial support for publications produced by the SIGs (Figure 1). Seventy- five percent said that IRA should host SIGs' web pages (Figure 2). SIGs' orientation webinar should be available on the IRA Website.

Figure 1

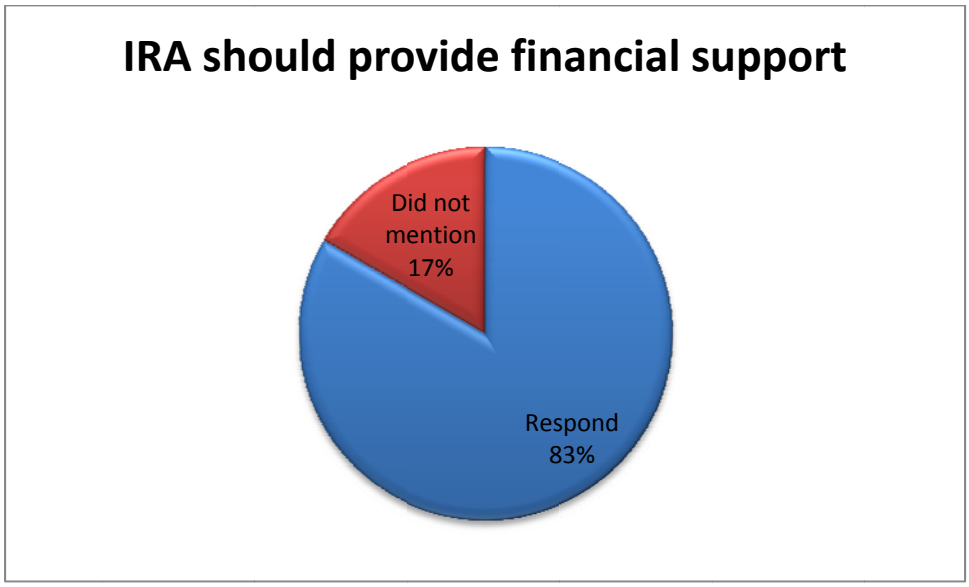
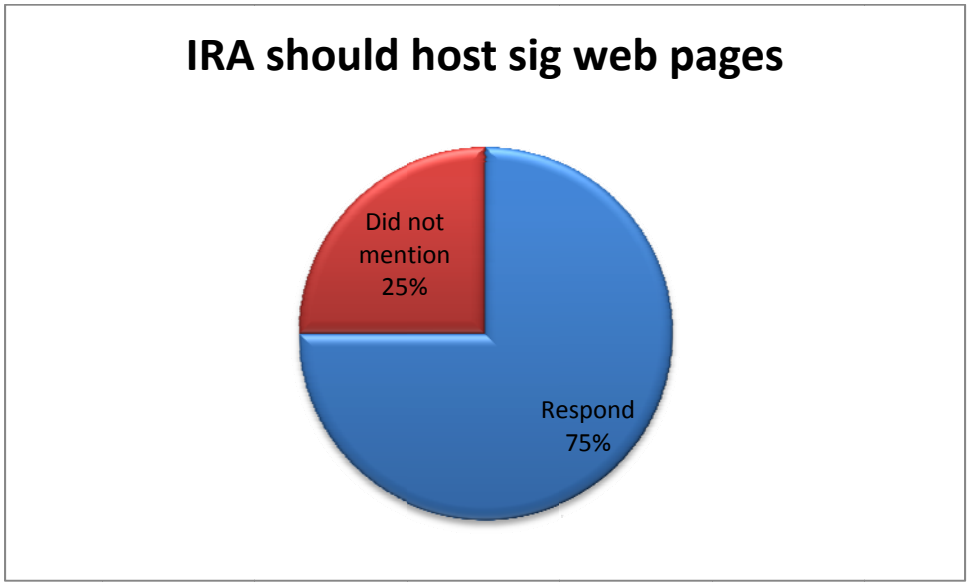
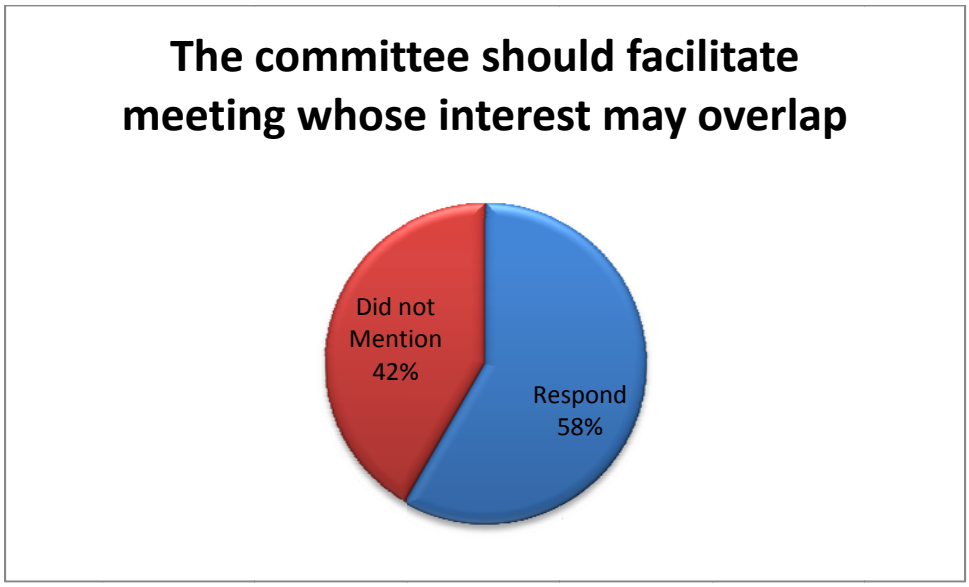


Figure 2



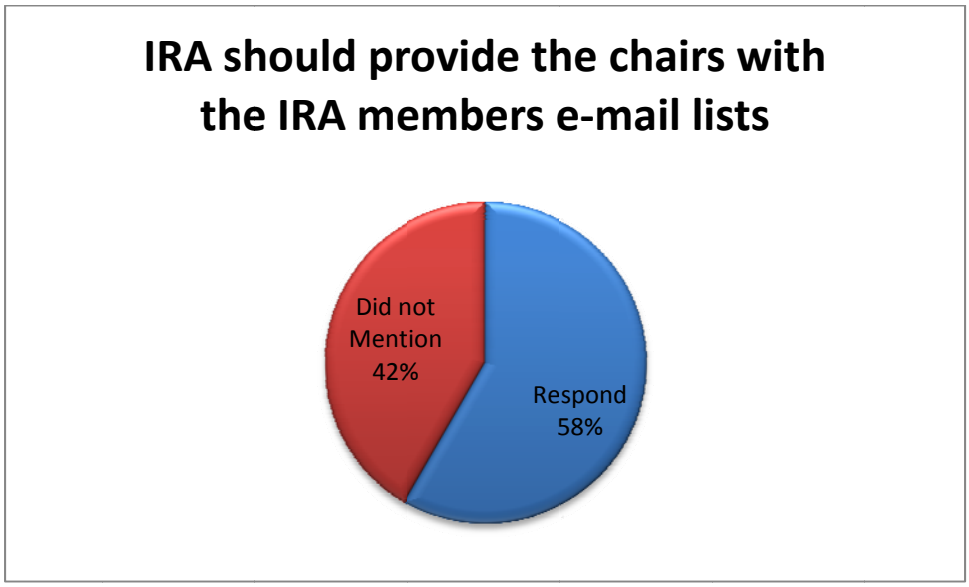
Money is an issue for small SIGs. IRA should host an evening event where SIGs could share information and recruit more members. All SIGs need to share and get to know one another to find common areas of interest. Fifty-eight percent said that the committee should facilitate meetings of SIG leaders whose interests may overlap (Figure 3).

Figure 3



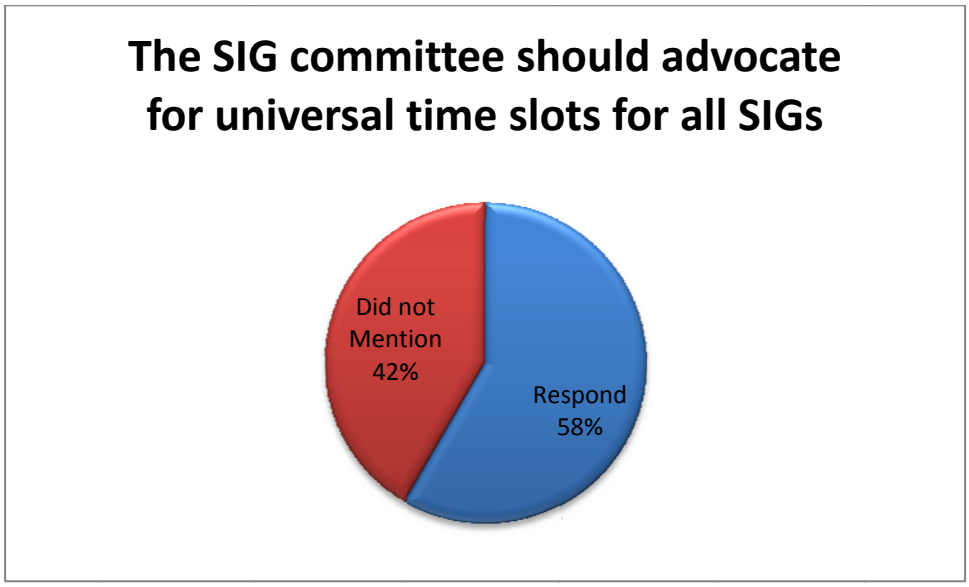
SIGs need to reach out to members electronically. Fifty-eight percent said that IRA should provide the SIG chairs with access to IRA members' e-mail addresses (Figure 4). IRA should encourage expired members to renew their membership as well as their membership in SIGs. IRA should offer to do radio spots on the different SIGs and allow SIGs chairs to use Adobe Connect to schedule meetings.

Figure 4



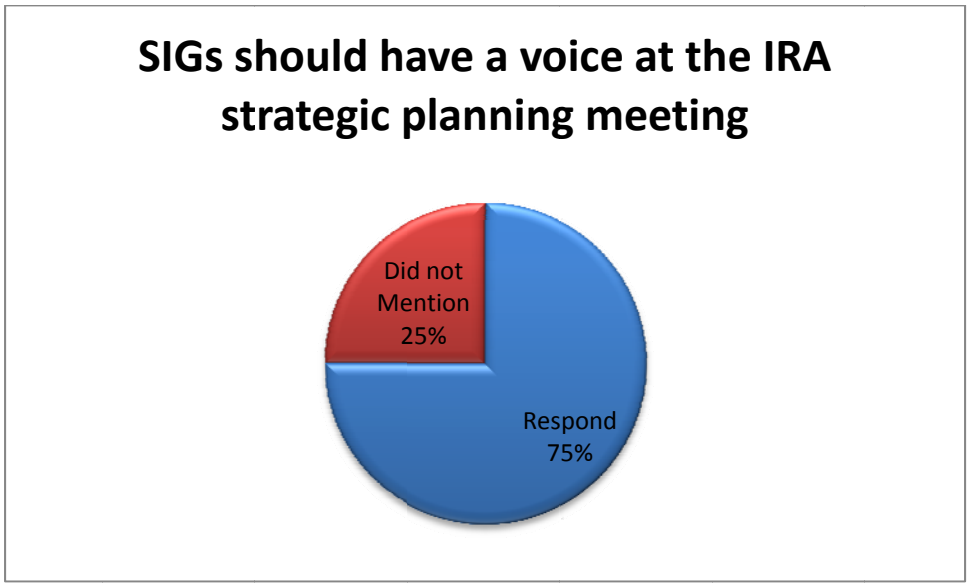
Questions have been asked about the IRA Board's decision to assign time slots for SIG sessions according to the size of the SIG's membership. This policy states: SIGs that have 100 or more members (all must be IRA members) will continue to have 2 hours and 45 minutes for a session. SIGs with fewer than 100 members will have 1 hour and 15 minutes for a session. Fifty-eight percent said that SIGs should be allowed to select either the longer or shorter time block depending upon the purpose of the session, not based on membership count. Universal time slots for all SIGs will be most appropriate (Figure 5). SIGs should be allowed to remain in the same room for the subsequent session for networking and recruiting.

Figure 5



Seventy-five percent said that SIGs should have a voice at the IRA strategic planning meetings so that SIGs' interests are represented (Figure 6). SIGs' chairs should be invited to the IRA Leadership Workshop.

Figure 6



Committee's Recommendations/Work in Progress.

Based upon the analysis of the survey data and SIGs' chairs' input, the committee made a number of recommendations. The committee's recommendations were forwarded to the Board of Directors for appropriate action.

- SIG orientation webinar should be available on the IRA Website. As chairpersons change, sometimes yearly in different SIGS, new chairpersons will be able to use additional information.
- IRA should provide financial support for SIG publications. More support should be provided for creating SIG websites and/or listservs.
- When new SIGs are added, care should be taken that they add something new to the professional development of IRA rather than overlapping existing SIGs.
- IRA should continue to provide time to meet and share, and to keep SIGs abreast of new policies and rules.
- SIG chairs should be receiving access to members' email addresses.
- IRA should list ALL SIG presenters and their presentation titles in the program.
- IRA should NOT schedule SIG presentations during Keynotes and General Sessions.
- IRA should invite SIG chairs/presidents to the IRA Leadership Workshops.
- IRA should connect SIG chairs to IRA committees working on the same interests.
- IRA should schedule sessions in strands (Ex: include Secondary Reading SIG in Adolescent literacy strand).
- IRA committee should facilitate meetings of SIG leaders whose interests may overlap (e.g. during the SIG session, allow time for the Adolescent Literature, Middle School

Reading, and Secondary Reading SIGs to meet together).

- IRA should improve the way it cultivates members (need a sense of appreciation, a "go-to" person at IRA HQ who promotes SIGs, regular presence in Reading Today).
- IRA should create a more prominent place on the IRA's front page of the website so the SIG groups can be located more easily.
- IRA should revise the # of members/session length formula.
- SIGs should be allowed to select either the longer or shorter time block depending on the purpose and scope of the session, not membership count.
- IRA should staff the SIG table at convention to promote SIGs, especially to state councils.
- IRA should host SIG web pages/connection to the IRA website.
- IRA should put SIG presenters' papers in the online papers repository.
- Radio spots should be available on the different SIGs.
- IRA should allow/facilitate SIG chairs in using Adobe Connect to schedule meetings.
- SIGs need a voice in IRA strategic planning meetings.
- IRA should encourage renewing membership in SIGs when sending out notices to expired members.
- It is really a challenge to get members from the developing world to keep up their membership even at a reduced rate. SIGs need help with increasing their membership. IRA might encourage some of their exhibitors to make a donation to SIGs, perhaps even to a general SIG fund! Decreasing attendance at the annual convention is a concern for maintaining interest and membership in SIGs.
- IRA should host an event at the annual conference at which information about SIGs could be shared and new members could be recruited.
- IRA should provide more space on IRA's website for SIGs to post information (or perhaps BLOG space).
- IRA should relax the space constraints for the SIG sessions so that participants can remain in the room to continue networking after the session ends.
- SIGs' goals and objectives should be aligned with the IRA's strategic priorities.

The IRA Board will decide what action, if any, is appropriate to address these concerns. All recommendations and actions of the Board will be reported to the chairs in writing.

Common Core Standards and Language Experience

Jeanne M. McGlinn
University of North Carolina Asheville

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics are on the way to being implemented across the nation. Teachers are attending workshops on the standards or meeting in learning communities to plan the transition to the new standards. As of April 2011, 44 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards. The only states not ratifying the standards at this time are Alaska, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Texas, and Virginia. Minnesota adopted only the English Language Arts standards.

The standards define the set of college-ready and career-ready skills that students should know and be ready to do by the time they graduate from high school. The committees that generated the standards aimed to identify knowledge and skills that are essential in the 21st century global community. According to a brief issued by the James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy (2011), the standards are designed to "include rigorous content, and require the application of knowledge through high-order skills" (1).

The English Language Arts standards cover individual grades, K-8, and then two year bands for grades 9-12. The standards require that students read more complex texts and that skills of comprehension are emphasized just as much as reading skills. There is a significant focus on informational text in grades 6-12 in all content areas. Writing emphasizes argumentative, informational, and explanatory modes. Students will conduct research in increasingly sophisticated electronic sources, and they will read sophisticated texts, "including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare" (3). Comprehensive assessment systems are being developed to measure students' attainment of Common Core State Standards, with the new assessments set to be implemented in 2014-2015.

For the language arts (speaking and listening, reading, writing, and language), in addition to Core Standards there are "College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards," which provide broad standards for what students should understand and be able to do at the end of each grade. For example, the Anchor Standards for writing require writing arguments; writing informative or explanatory texts to communicate ideas clearly; developing the ability to produce writing, using the writing process; being able to conduct research effectively from multiple print and digital sources; and being able to vary the length of written documents, from extended research to shorter pieces for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Given this extraordinary effort to create standardized outcomes for our nation's K-12 students, it seems reasonable to ask what teachers of literacy anticipate about the impact of these standards on the teaching of language arts. The Language Experience Forum Journal invites members to address this topic in future issues. What do you see as the role of Language Experience in the new Core Standards? How are teachers reacting to the new standards? Will the standards improve ELA teaching? How will students fare under the new standards?

Please send your reflections, research, and vignettes about the implementation of Core Standards for future issues of the journal.

Higher Ed and the Common Core State Standards—Critical Connection. Issue Brief. (2011). James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy. Available at http://www.hunt-institute.org/elements/media/files/2011_Hunt_SHEEO_meeting_issue_brief.pdf

Simple Teaching Tool Boosts Student Reading Performance

Matt Shipman
North Carolina State University

Research from North Carolina State University shows that utilizing a freely available literacy tool results in significant advances in fundamental reading skills for elementary school students, without requiring schools to drastically overhaul existing programs. The research focused on children who were characterized as "struggling readers" at risk for a learning disability in reading.

"Our goal is to put effective tools in the hands of teachers," says Dr. John Begeny, an associate professor of school psychology at NC State, lead author of the study and creator of the literacy tool. "This research shows that our program works, and it's easy to use."

Begeny developed the literacy program, Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies (HELPS), to give teachers a new tool to promote reading "fluency." Reading fluency is effectively a child's ability to read with sufficient speed and accuracy, while also reading with good expression – for example, pausing at commas when reading out loud. When students read fluently, they have a greater capacity for understanding what they read, and they are also more likely to choose to read.

Begeny focused on fluency, in part, because it has been the most neglected component of early reading instruction, with some studies showing that as many as 40 percent of U.S. students are not fluent readers. In the study, researchers found that teachers whose reading curriculum incorporated the HELPS program saw a significant increase in reading fluency – and several other reading skills – compared to students whose curriculum didn't include HELPS. Specifically, the study showed that the HELPS program also led to improvements in reading comprehension and basic reading skills (such as sounding out words). Because schools have limited resources, the HELPS program is available to teachers and parents for free. This is made possible by a nonprofit organization Begeny founded, called the HELPS Education Fund.

The paper, "Effects of the HELPS Reading Fluency Program when Implemented by Classroom Teachers with Low-performing Second Grade Students," was published online this month by the journal *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*. The paper was co-authored by Begeny; Scott Stage, an associate professor of psychology at NC State; NC State Ph.D. students Courtney Mitchell and Mary Whitehouse; and community volunteer Fleming Harris. The research was supported by a grant from NC State.

For more information about the HELPS program, contact John Begeny, Associate Professor at NC State University, at john_begeny@ncsu.edu or research the program's website:

http://www.helpsprogram.org (HELPS Reading Fluency Program).

Reading Today Magazine and Reading Today Online Submission Guidelines

The International Reading Association's new Strategic Communications Department is in the process of converting *Reading Today* from a newspaper into a magazine with an online component. The first magazine will come out in September, with stories added to *Reading Today Online* on a weekly basis. The magazine is accepting stories for the online component on a rolling basis. They plan to feature a different special interest group each month and are interested in updates about awards, projects, outreach, partnerships, issues, success stories, and all activities supporting literacy.

The guidelines for submission are listed below.

Word Count:

- One magazine page is 500 words.
- Two pages are 1,000 words.
- Three pages are 1,500 words.
- Book reviews: one page includes seven short reviews.
- Online articles should be around 300 words.

Style:

- Use the IRA Style Guide at http://www.reading.org/styleguide.aspx.
- Consider inserting short section headers every three or four paragraphs.
- Include captions for photos.
- You can include references but keep them to a minimum. This is a magazine, not a journal.
- Include a short bio: "*Name is position at organization, email@email.com*."

Photos and Images:

- Save photos in JPG, TIFF, or PNG format. Please no BMP (bitmap).
- Save images like charts, maps, and line art as GIF, TIFF, or PNG format. Please no BMP (bitmap).
- For the magazine, image resolution should be at least 200 dpi, and 4" x 6" in size. For online, image resolution can be 72 dpi.
- Do not place photos in the Word document with your text. Programs like Microsoft Word reduce the quality of photos and make them unsuitable for professional printing.
- Do not submit photos taken by cell phones.
- For the magazine, do not submit photos that you "Googled" and downloaded from the Internet. They often do not have a high enough resolution.

For more information, you can contact Sara Long, Digital Content Manager for the International Reading Association at sigfeed@reading.org

LESIG MEMBERSHIP

Please complete the form below to join or renew your membership. Checks should be made payable to: LESIG. Send form and check to:

Dr. Michelle Brunson
Northwestern State University
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
Natchitoches, LA 71497

Check one: _____ new member _____ renewal

Check one: _____ regular membership ($20.00 – 1 year) _____

_____ regular membership ($50.00 – 3 years) _____

_____ student membership ($10.00) _____

_____ graduate student complimentary one-year membership

(Sponsor signature: _____)

_____ retired membership ($10.00) _____

Total _____

Your name: _____

Your mailing address: _____

_____

_____

Home Phone: _____ Business phone: _____

Fax: _____ E-Mail: _____

RA Membership number: _____ Expiration date: _____

***Note: It is important that all LESIG members include their "official" IRA membership numbers. This is crucial if LESIG is to maintain an active role at the IRA conferences. We need to be certain that we have a minimum of 100 members. Please take a moment to document your IRA membership number . . . it counts a lot!