Are you Dreaming in English Yet?
Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL)

Cathy Romans, Sacha Schick & Shelley Steer
Vancouver, British Columbia

A different language is a different vision of life.
—Federico Fellini

Let’s face it, English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant, nor ham in hamburger; neither apple nor pine in pineapple. English muffins were not invented in England or French fries in France. Sweet meats are candies while sweet breads (which are not sweet!) are meat. And skating on thin ice can get you into hot water (Franklin P. Jones, 1919). English speakers tend to take these contradictions for granted and yet they are confusing paradoxes for new English language learners. How might educators help students navigate the muddy waters of the English language?

It is crucial for educators to recognize that English as Second Language (ESL) students come to them with a prior knowledge of language. They are seeking to learn English, not language. Elements that constitute effective teaching strategies of English language are as diverse as the learners themselves. The teacher’s job is to help students navigate the voyage leading them to fluency in English. Language teachers like to say that a person has mastered a new language once they are able to comprehend jokes, use appropriate slang, and finally, dream in the language. The question ESL teachers often pose, “Are you dreaming in English yet?” is a benchmark for new language speakers, and it was a question that initially stimulated us, as educators, to seek ways to improve the writing skills of our ESL students.

Our goal as teacher-researchers was to see if a specific, directed, non-fiction writing strategy would foster success for ESL learners in our classrooms. We used a simple, step-by-step set of lessons based on research from the Disadvantaged Schools’ Program established in Australia, and passed on to us by Russell Collins, a former principal of Shelley’s, who wanted to share his work on non-fiction writing with us. The rationale behind the Disadvantaged Schools’ Program was a need for the educational community, including parents, to improve the literacy standard in schools. Many of the students in the Australian project came from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Program emphasized the need for educators to pay attention to the social contexts for which the language is to be written, the structure of written text, and the grammar for written language.

The Language that is Me

Our mother tongue has particular significance to our being. It is the language through which the norms and values of our culture are acquired, and it is while learning our mother tongue that we come to know the world and ourselves.

—Promislow, 2003

Countless manuals, theories, and handbooks have been written discussing how best to teach ESL students. Canada has always been a popular nation for immigrants. Many varied ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups are represented in our teaching
environments. In the lower mainland of British Columbia, there is currently an influx of ethnic groups, requiring new strategies to assist in second language learning. A narrow approach suited only to a specific linguistic orientation is neither practical nor useful.

Our guiding philosophy on ESL learning is to acknowledge that all ESL students arrive in Canada with language. The majority of these children have the ability to speak, read and write, although not necessarily in English. Our job is to take that prior knowledge and apply it to the acquisition of our students’ new language. It is important to remind ourselves, as classroom teachers, that the level of language proficiency in a second or third language of a student is not necessarily an indicator of intelligence nor an inability to learn. Educators need to be empathic to the struggle by ESL students as they search for the words to express ideas, and to be patient when dealing with the varied speed with which students acquire the tools of communication.

ESL education is evolving; renouncing culture and language is no longer an expectation of ESL students, although the practice continues in schools where new students are required to speak and behave as Canadian students do. The documentation and consequences of such assimilation experiences and practices are explored by Promislow (2003) and Aoki (1999). This approach ignores the importance of the application of the linguistic skills of a first language, the creation of meaning that language essentially is, as well as the cultural knowledge and understanding that is part of language. Losing the mother tongue is akin to losing part of a history and sense of self.

When your mother tongue is at risk of being lost because you are in a different language environment for an extended period of time, you may become aware of the fact that it is not replaceable, that you cannot express your “self” or your feelings in another language in the same way.

—Promislow, 2003

Sara Promislow (2003) worries about those educators who do not engage culturally with ESL students nor build on the resources that students already bring with them, and she fears that their mother language is not being respected. The mother tongue has previously been viewed as a constant block to the absorption of the new language:

Sometimes the presence of the native language is so obsessive and dominant that it shuts off the second language. The patterns of the first language turn into containers into which the second language has to fit itself. The process of breaking away from the confinement of the mother tongue is a painful one. It sucks out the learner’s energy and creates an insurmountable barrier.

—Gomaa, 2001, 2

Promislow (2003) argues that educators today are not educated themselves in how to best teach ESL students to become successful. As she says, “In-service educators often do not receive instruction in this area at all, and find great difficulties in adapting their instruction to meet the needs of a growing diversity of students in their classrooms” (7).

Hudelson (1989) supports the philosophy that educators should embrace what children already know about their first language and culture, and that the first language should not be discarded. “The process of first and second language acquisition in children are more alike than different” (3). She suggests that language is easier to assemble if it is viewed as culturally significant. “Young writers, whether in their native language or in a second language, creatively construct written language and develop their understanding of writing within their homes, communities, and schools” (3). Children who learn to read

and write in their first language apply those skills to acquiring a new language. Hudelson examines a whole language approach to learning another language. “Learning is enhanced through the use of all four modes: reading, writing, speaking and listening” (78).

Not all second or third languages are taught or learned in the same way. The ESL students we teach all come from such distinct linguistic backgrounds. The common link is that currently they are learning English. Ted Aoki defines multiculturalism as “a polyphony of lines of movement that grow in the abundance of middles, the “betweens” and “ands” that populate our landscape...a landscape of multiple possibilities in a shifting web of rhizomean lines of movement” (1993, 7). We try to make meaning based on our histories. The process of integrating into a different or new society poses interesting and particular challenges for our ESL students. Learning the new language is only part of the process. Aoki tells us that language is not only to communicate; learning a new language shapes us into different people (1999, 81).

Power Structuring to Writing a Report

Our directed strategy for report writing accommodates ESL students who have little or no writing experience in English. Our strategy is like a math equation; following the steps promotes success and reduces feelings of inadequacy. A few months before we started our research, we prepared our students with a short unit teaching Power Structure. Russell Collin’s term, Power Structure is an outline format for teaching organization through headings and sub-headings and provides a necessary hierarchy framework for report writing. For example, power one (p1) is a main topic heading, while (p5) is lower down on the list of points. Next we embarked on a ten-lesson unit as set out by Russell Collins to help our students use Power Structure to organize and write a report. The step by step approach takes students through the process of identifying the elements (main ideas, facts, subtitles, bibliography), organizing facts under key headings, and stages of report writing to final presentation. Strategies of deconstruction, cutting/pasting and categorizing were key to helping the students learn how to write a report.

Ten Lessons on Report Writing

Writing a Report on Appearance and Family Life of an Animal

Lesson 1: Elements of Reports

1. Do a KWL of a what a report is. (i.e. Know, Wonder, Learn). What do you know about reports, what do you wonder about reports, what would you like to learn about reports?)

2. Deconstructing a report. (Ed. note: Readers are encouraged to choose two grade appropriate reports as exemplars for which these lessons can be applied. For this research project, a report about a beaver, and one about a raccoon were used).
   • see patterns
   • ask, “What’s a report?”
   • discuss when we use a report
   • point out Elements of a Report (Introduction, Body of Main Ideas and facts, Conclusion, Resources)
   • do Colour Coding activity to identify elements
   • do step #1 (KWL) together as a class (Raccoon)
   • do step #1 (KWL) alone (Beaver)
   • exit slip #1, “List the elements of a report.”
Lesson 2: Working with Powers
1. Review the Elements (use arms for main ideas, wiggle fingers for facts, etc.)
2. Raccoon report: cut up the words and re-organize using powers
3. Ask the students to explain the variables of a report (i.e. Tense, Introductory Sentence, Topic Sentence, and Opinion).
4. Exit Slip #2: “List the Writing Variables”

Lesson 3: Working with Powers
1. Give students the words from the Beaver report and have them cut and paste them into powers. (This can be done in a small group).
2. Give students sentence strips and have them cut and paste them into the correct order. (This can be done individually).
3. Exit Slip #3: “How is this process useful?”

Lesson 4: Report Writing
1. Have each student choose an animal. Make them aware that this will be their Power 1.
2. Have students choose their Power 2s (Put Appendix A on a piece of 11x17 paper)
3. Send children to school library to find some books on their topic.

Lesson 5 & 6: Research
1. Students can use 2 periods to collect information on their animal and power 2s. They can record their notes onto the 11x17 paper and should keep a bibliography of books they use. Bibliography should include ISBN, title and author.
2. Optional: When a student finds a good photograph or drawing of their animal you could photocopy it for them to include in their final copy. (Teach students how to cite photographs and images.)
3. Exit Slip #4 (after lesson 6): Thumbs up or Thumbs down.

Lesson 7: Notes into Powers
1. Photocopy their 11x17 sheet with all their notes on it.
2. Have students cut the notes into Powers.
3. Glue notes as powers onto a new sheet.
4. Exit Slip #5: “How do you feel about not having to rewrite your notes?”

Lesson 7A: Demonstrating Notes to Sentences to Paragraphs
1. Model these stages for the class using the Beaver story.
2. Give each student the notes from the Raccoon story and have them turn the notes into sentences and then into paragraphs.

Lesson 8 & 9: Notes to Sentences to Paragraphs
1. Take the notes and put them into sentences and then paragraphs using the computer.
2. Review the format of report writing and organizing information by powers.
3. Exit Slip #6 (after lesson 9): “List the stages of report writing.”

Lesson 10: Report Presentation
1. Each student shares his or her report with the class.
2. Exit Slip #7: List three important things you have learned about report writing.
(See Appendix B for exit slip used by researchers)

(Ed. Note: For further information on Russell Collin’s 10 lesson unit plan, contact Shelley Steer, shelleysteer@hotmail.com)
The success of the set of lessons is highly dependent on the ability of students to link information to previous steps and build their report through precise and deliberate instruction. This methodology of scaffolding is supported by educators including Mary Eckes and Barbara Law (1990), who suggest that providing scaffolds for students allows them to concentrate on the content. Students are able to model and imitate a structure given to them. They feel that this is “especially important in the upper grades and for the content areas as writers need examples of good writing in order to write well themselves” (1990, 121). Eventually, say Eckes and Law, students are able to gain more control and ownership of their writing as their confidence and knowledge of the English language increases. The feeling is that “with some instruction on how the sample is organized, students can follow the same format for clearer, more readable papers” (1990, 122). Eckes and Law also state that when teaching ESL students, the most important focus for teachers is to provide students with an organizational structure.

The data we collected comprised all the steps involved in the writing of their report by students and their responses to the process. This data also included informal observations through field notes as well as exit slips completed by students at the conclusion of some lessons. As novice researchers, our research project had challenging moments, but the experience was valuable for a variety of reasons.

**Reporting on Our Experiences as Teacher-researchers Using a New Writing Strategy**

**Shelley’s Story: A Researcher’s Stress**

My research took place at a west side Vancouver elementary school. There are approximately 280 students at this school, which is located on the west side of Vancouver. I taught a Grade Three/Four split class which was composed of twenty-four students—eight Grade Threes, and sixteen Grade Fours. In this class, sixteen students spoke another language other than English at home. Most of my students were of Chinese descent—speaking Cantonese and Mandarin. There were also students from Vietnam, Japan, and India.

The term during which I undertook my research project was fraught with tensions: I never realized how subtly a teacher’s mood affects how students learn. The teacher for whom I was substituting was returning soon and the reality of my leaving became a daily discussion with the students. I knew my employment was coming to an end, and my impending departure affected my students and me. I clung to my students almost as much as they clung to me. There was also pressure for the students to finish the research projects that they were working on because I needed to generate marks for their report cards. To top it off, I had asked my students to help me with my research project for my Master’s program!

I am not sure if it was just my nerves or my excitement that added confusion and some chaos to the research. Eventually, I found a rhythm in teaching someone else’s lessons (as set out in the ten lesson strategy). This experience of teaching from a structured set of lessons was confusing for me until I became comfortable with the expectations and reality of teaching the report writing strategy in a way that my students could understand. Happily, my students (and me) were successful in the end.

When the research began I felt excited and intimidated. Was I in over my head? I was not sure how the process would work with my students and I wanted them to succeed. There
was some initial frustration and stress. Many of my students understood the value of the research, but it was tricky for others. A small group of boys had been acting up the entire week and remained silly through the first lesson. As a researcher-teacher, I worried that I would miss something in the instructions and/or in the research. I wondered how successful the technique was going to be, and pondered whether this handful of boys was going to somehow alter my results. I had no idea what to look for—perhaps I was looking too deeply in the wrong direction.

The students did the next couple of lessons mainly on their own. A few students immediately connected the writing strategy lessons to the previous work they had done on Power Structure and saw the benefit of organizing in this way when writing a report. However, it was immediately obvious that the majority of students did not see the connection. These children had initial concerns about the process. Many students were unsure of themselves, and worried about doing things the right way. I think initially the method was an abstract way of working for many students: terminology was confusing.

“This might be useful later on but now it is frustrating.” Mary Beth
“It’s frustrating. I need more practice.” Marrietta
“I think it was great even though I did not finish it.” Elizabeth

Our fourth lesson seemed to clear up some misconceptions, although many of my students were still frustrated. The students had time to think and work through some of what they did not understand. I reviewed again the organization and use of Power Structure.

“It is frustrating but I think I can do better and learn more.” Diana

We then began our research projects. We kept relating our work to powers.

“It is easier cause there is p1, p2, p3, p4.” Martin
“I like the taking note it helps me!” Mark
“I like the method because it help me organize notes.” Trevor
“I liked that we cut and pasted.” Cici
“I think it is more easy and fun than writing again.” Lily

The students were less frustrated and became extremely excited. The note taking and working through the steps was reasonably trouble-free—although the process was new to some. The next challenge we met was changing the notes back into sentences. The organization was a more straightforward step now that they had some experience in what was expected.

“I think this is helpful because its going to be helpful in the foche (future).” Sasha
“I love it cause it will maybe me much better.” Brianna
“I like this research because I learn the power and stuff.” Thomas
“It helped me sort stuff.” Markus

The excitement of the project was obvious. Students were excited to share their work. There was a feeling of accomplishment that many had not experienced before.

Our research question, Can a structured non-fiction writing structure help ELS students improve their writing? is important to me as a teacher because of the needs of my students, many of whom speak English as their second language. I also know that many of my other students, who require extra support in organization, will benefit from doing a research project that is laid out for them in a step by step process. What I learned from

doing this research is that taking the time to understand my students’ perceptions and misconceptions encourages my students’ success as they work through their own understanding with other students and me. I learned that it is important to ask students what they have learned from my lessons to ensure that they understand the process that I am teaching them. To work through misconceptions and misunderstandings with students is a valuable process to experience.

**Cathy’s Story: Engaging Others in Research**

My research was conducted in a stable middle-class suburban neighbourhood, of a stable middle class area with established community services and facilities. Although this area is culturally diverse, the Indo-Canadian population is dominant. The school is the largest elementary school in the district with almost 600 pupils in both French Immersion and English. This school was largely rebuilt after a fire destroyed all but twelve classrooms in 1997. The Grade Five class chosen represents the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the school that is the essence of the Vancouver environs. Of the 31 students, twelve were are girls and nineteen were are boys. Students here represented many cultural groups including: Indo-Canadians, Caucasian Canadians, Middle- Eastern Canadians, Aboriginal Canadians, Chinese Canadians, Filipino Canadians, Fijian Canadians, and African Canadians. The academic abilities of this class covered the spectrum, from high achievers to a student who is mildly intellectually delayed. The largest group represents students who struggle with academics, either because of learning disabilities or behavior issues. To teach here is akin to juggling and eating fire at the same time!

I collected data at first by selecting some target students from both the ESL group and the mainstream group who were average and slower learners. I tried to use a chart system, but that soon failed because of the make-up of the challenging group of students I was working with. I found it easier to focus on three areas: what was happening with the students, how I was feeling, and what kinds of interplay were occurring between the classroom teacher and me. Students provided insight about their thoughts of the process on exit slips.

According to my data, and the students’ own voices, there were advantages to using Russell Collins’ method for writing a report. The students found the process steps were logical and sequential. They were immediately thrilled to embark on a new project and pleased to have autonomy over the subject.

> “I liked to read the [article] “Raccoons in the City” because I like to read with the teacher.” Deepak

The many steps in the process were modeled and the students were successful in linking the steps to their own work.

> “It’s useful to know how to break the subject into categories.” Esha  
> “This process is useful so you know how to make key words into sentences.” Rupinder

As my co-researchers, my students came to recognize the long-term value of learning about researching in the classroom. Students had quite a mature outlook on this research experience in terms of their future.

> “This gives us a few steps ahead for U.B.C.” Monnkeet  
> “This is making me think harder about working.” Bryan
As we worked on the research project, I found that I preferred to work in the classroom rather than use a pullout method to work with students individually. With two teachers in the room, we could rely on each other to deliver lessons. My partner teacher met with me weekly to collaborate and check our progress. He offered suggestions that would address the needs of his diverse group of learners, published the criteria sheet, and offered to photograph the students.

But there were some disadvantages too. Dueling teachers on the same stage sometimes created confusion. For example, one time when I was teaching a lesson, my colleague jumped in and began to draw bubble formations on the board as an example of a graphic organizer. Even though his input was useful, the students were not sure whom to follow. Another time, when one of my lessons tanked completely, my colleague simply chuckled rather than help me salvage the remnants of the lesson.

Classroom management styles were at odds as well. Finally, we reached a truce, and the class functioned in a regular manner.

The Russell Collins’ strategy for writing research papers provided some difficulties for the students.

“I didn’t like how we had to read, because I am not a reader.” Esha

Self-evaluation, a part of the process, for this group was problematic. All but a handful of students gallantly gave themselves higher marks than they had achieved based on the criteria of the project. They were simply unabashed fans of their own work and the disparity between their own assessment and the teachers’ assessment did not faze them.

I was amazed too that the students and I conquered this report-writing task in only twelve lessons! It took drill-sergeant-like discipline, a small army of staff and helpers (learning assistants assigned to students because of learning or behavioral needs also helped students through the process) and loads of encouragement to drag these ten and eleven year old scholars into the world of research. My main finding was almost an unfinding: All students, except those with written output difficulty, were able to produce a written document and share their findings report with an audience. The ESL students’ work mirrored the mainstream students’ work in both content and form, suggesting the success of the writing strategy for both ESL and non-ESL learners.

On a personal level, I experienced some of the pitfalls and wonders of working with another professional. I also discovered that several students who I had initially thought of as ESL students needed their support to be shifted to Learning Assistance. Sometimes ESL students have learning challenges that are masked by poor English language skills. This project has reaffirmed my understanding that as teachers we need to allow a little blending of the black and white rigidity of some established teaching methods and allow a little of the more relaxed gray teaching methods to seep through. It has also encouraged me to be more ambitious in what I want the students to accomplish. So it comes down to this: I need to expect more, celebrate more, and relax more.

Sacha’s Story: Research Intentions Interrupted

My research took place in a west side Vancouver school where I teach pull-out ESL and Core French. For this project I chose eight children from two different ESL groups that I saw two to three times per week. I chose these two groups because, of the five groups

that I taught, these two were the most stable. By stable, I mean that I was fairly certain that none of the children would leave the school for an extended period of time; that they would not be leaving the group to join another group; and that their schedules were the most consistently kept. Each group had four members. The first group, Group One, was composed of one boy from Thailand in Grade Seven and three boys in Grade Six, one Mandarin and two Korean. Group Two had two Grade Five boys, one from Korea and the other from Finland, as well as a Korean boy and girl in Grade Four. The four boys in Group One were fairly quiet, did not have a lot in common and, therefore, did not spend much time socializing. Group Two was the opposite. The students were younger, very talkative and all friends who played at lunch and recess, so keeping them on task was a constant challenge. Everything I did with Group Two took longer because there were so many questions and discussions.

Once I began the project, I quickly realized that the ten lessons would take much longer than I had planned. Since the students came from different classrooms to meet in my room for the forty-minute block, we always seemed to lose five to ten minutes at the onset. I had initially hoped that this disadvantage would be compensated for by the fact that I was working with small groups. I was wrong.

Group One generally comprehended instruction and directions much more easily than the Group Two. They tended to only ask questions if they got stuck on something while Group Two loved to explore all of the “But what if…” type questions before embarking on the activity. In the end, all ended up being successful, but Group Two took much more time than Group One to complete all of the tasks. The impact on this research project was that Group Two did not finish their reports within the allotted time for my research data collection.

My continuous frustration with this project was the time factor. I was always running out of time and ended up rushing the kids through certain parts of the unit. As a teacher, I hated doing this because I feel that a big critical part of learning is letting the children make discoveries on their own. By rushing them, I often had to give answers rather than allowing the time for them to figure them out. Ideally, a research project of this nature that requires an extended period of time would be much better suited to an enrolling class where the teacher could allow for double-block periods and make it a daily focus. I found that I had to review the material with the children frequently because sometimes a week would pass where I was not able to see the students due to my schedule being flexible for classroom teachers.

It is so hard to create a consistent, flowing program when interruptions are so frequent. This research project is the perfect example of the challenges faced by pull-out resource teachers. An on-going issue with being a pullout resource teacher doing research was that I am vulnerable to other people’s timetables and must be accommodating and flexible. I had to get used to the students and they to me. My research participants would forget to come and I found myself running from room to room collecting them, wasting valuable teaching time. I got used to students’ teachers asking me if I minded not taking their students on a particular day or being asked to help out with a project that an individual child was are struggling with, not thinking that I had spent time prepping for the period already. I understood these conflicts of priorities—those of the classroom teacher and my own as a pull-out resource teacher and frustrated Master’s researcher with a deadline—because I had to or else I would have gone crazy taking it all personally! Understanding aside, however, I do feel there is a lack of respect for resource teachers; perhaps the pull-out model is to blame…

In the end, all of my students were successful in writing a report that I know was above
the standards of what they had been capable of writing previous to the project. They were all proud of their work and I can only hope that they will retain the writing process and be able to apply it to future writing activities.

**Realizing the Dream**

The process of researching our classrooms is an incredible undertaking. At first glance it seems almost simple; teaching is a daily reality. Researching is, however, an overwhelming task, not only to document the process but to know what to look for and to then understanding what it means or how to make sense of it. Overlooking important information was a constant fear. Teaching and observing simultaneously seemed like a job meant for two people rather than one. As teacher-researchers, we found it hard to step back from the lesson and just watch the process unfold while we were teaching.

Organization was the foundation for this strategy to teach the genre of report writing that we were investigating. Through strategies of Power Structure, deconstruction, cutting/pasting and categorizing, the students had concrete examples from which they produced their own research reports. In reviewing our data, it became apparent that this strategy for report writing was highly successful for the majority of our students, whether or not English was their first language. Students who had previously produced short, unstructured, unorganized reports were now producing lengthy, structured, and organized ones. The students were able to replicate the structure that they were taught.

We believe their success is partially attributed to the fact that students were given autonomy of choice of research topics along with a structured process to follow. Students were able to follow all of the steps throughout the unit and share their findings with their peers. Our experience highlights some fundamentals of effective teaching, which include clarity, pacing, and student choice. Time was spent learning how to take and organize proper notes while also spending time ensuring that students understood the purpose of the tasks.

Although all students met with success using this strategy, it became apparent that this approach works best if used by classroom teachers and then reinforced by resource teachers, where necessary. The writing strategy that we researched proved an important method of support for ESL students in understanding English; it follows a step-by-step format to ensure that students know what is expected of them. The strategy also benefited those students needing extra support, whether English was their first language or not. Ideally, this strategy would be most successful in situations where an entire school adopted it and used it as its writing scope and sequence. We know that there are some schools in the province of British Columbia that have done just that.

**From Writing Reports to Dreaming in English...**

The writing strategy that we have examined in this project is a simple, straightforward strategy which ensures that students receive the instructions that they need to succeed in report writing. It allows success for at-risk students, many of whom are ESL students. These are the students who often misunderstand their teachers’ intentions or instructions. Russell Collins’ writing strategy, based on the Australian research, proved very effective in our classrooms. It clarified the processes of categorizing information, note-taking, and writing a specific type of research report. Students were able to clearly communicate information and experience success in writing a research report. This success reaffirms our belief that teachers need to recognize and celebrate the importance of a student’s first language and culture. And as ESL teachers, we need to teach students the tools necessary
to succeed in their new language.

Teachers need to think about what is most important for their students. Is it to communicate understanding of the material taught or grammatical correctness? We propose that many of the concerns and frustrations of our students arise from the fact that they are not able to communicate what they know. All students have background knowledge of all subjects; they all interact and live in the world. The problem is to find the ways in which they are able to communicate this knowledge.

My experience transcends language and place, although it is defined by them, embodied in the geographical distance, in the history contained in my languages, my life history, the history of my identities. I am bilingual, I live in two worlds in tandem. I am here both in English and in Hebrew, I am both with my family in Israel as I am here in Canada. I carry with me memories from Canada as a child, before emigrating to Israel, before becoming bilingual, memories of Israel of becoming and being bilingual, memories of Canada since I returned. My present is shaped by these memories, their continuity fragmented by change. My experience is shaped by the fragments of my present, not here but here all the same...I am in Israel, but I am not there. I am here.

—Promislow, 2002

Reflections a Year Later….

The experience of working through our research project reaffirmed the way in which each of us works with ESL learners. We each believe that it is important to look beyond the language of the ESL learner and find ways for our students to meet with success in their learning of English. The importance of our research was to share with other teachers a process in which ESL learners can be successful in our schools. Each of us felt the frustration of our ESL learners who were upset because they could not produce written assignments that received grades that they felt they deserved. They knew how to research information and present it to an audience but did not know how to put it into proper format or wording expected in Canadian schools. Our research strategy was a process for ESL students to learn a step-by-step way in which to write and succeed in writing a research paper.

While each of us has not formally utilized the strategy this year, we still believe in the process. In the hectic reality of classrooms sometimes what we want to teach is not the reality in the everyday routine of our schools. As resource teachers there is also the reality of different teaching methods. This strategy will not be effective for every research project that a teacher would want their students to work through. The frustrations of ESL students still remain a reality in many classrooms.

Resources


Gomaa, S. (2001). ESL writers T.A. handbook. Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts Available at:

Romans, C., Schick, S. and Steer, S. Are you Dreaming in English Yet? Improving the Writing Skills of ESL Students *Educational Insights, 10*(1).

http://www.enl.umassd.edu/InteractiveCourse/assistant/TAHndbook_ESL.htm.


**About the Authors**

**Sacha Schick** has been a Resource Teacher in Vancouver for eight years. She completed her Masters in 2004. Sacha enjoyed taking the time to research in her own classroom. It was an interesting experience and she looks forward to future challenges in her teaching career.

**Cathy Romans** will begin her twentieth year teaching in Delta. She has had various teaching assignments, and finds working with ESL students one of the most rewarding. This research process allowed her to embrace the diversity that these students bring to the classroom. Sacha and Shelley showed great insight into working with these students, and she is grateful to have had the experience of working with them.

**Shelley Steer** is an Elementary Teacher in Vancouver. She has been teaching for five years and thoroughly enjoyed the process of researching and working through her Masters. Shelley also enjoyed working with her research partners and gained a lot of respect for both of them in the process. She learned that she still has a lot to learn about how her students learn. Shelley is currently contemplating a future research paper on ways in which different students learn.