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The Perceived Impact of a Short-Term Monolingual Karen Language Learning Experience on the Teaching Practices of Low-Literacy Adult English Language Instructors

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THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF A SHORT-TERM MONOLINGUAL KAREN LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE ON THE TEACHING PRACTICES OF LOW-LITERACY ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS

By

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ABSTRACT

Dakin, L. The Perceived Impact of a Short-Term Monolingual Karen Language Learning Experience on the Teaching Practices of Low-Literacy Adult English Language Instructors (2016)

A limited amount of research on low-educated low-literate adult English language learners exists. An even smaller body of literature addresses innovation and teacher change of the instructors of this demographic. Adult refugees need basic language competency to participate with dignity in a new culture. This study explores the impact of increasing teacher empathy for the monolingual language learning environment that most first-wave refugees encounter upon arrival in the United States and identifies the instructional innovations and modifications that result.

Nine participants, all low-level adult ELL instructors from a number of community-based adult language schools, took part in a Karen language class over several weeks. Questionnaires, journaling, audio-recording, and researcher observation were used to study the perceived impact of this professional development language-learning experience on the participants' teaching practice. The results fall into two categories: *Experience* and *Impact*. Within these categories are additional areas where a sharp increase in empathy results as each teacher-participant reports direct and immediate impact on teaching practices. Findings include: a renewed appreciation for the difficulty of the learners' task, a recognition of the futility of extraneous teacher-talk, a deeper understanding of a variety of classroom behaviors, and a reinforcement of previously learned educational principles such as allowing silent periods for absorption, theme consistency and teaching a limited amount of content per class session.

Findings demonstrate that this non-Roman alphabet monolingually-taught class is an experience that deeply challenges the current thought and perspectives of the teacher-participants. Reflective teaching practice is enhanced via this study as a means to create improvements in teaching and in adult learning. (286 words)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I love to learn languages. I love trying to distinguish and replicate new sounds. I delight in the variety of ways that cultures choose to express similar thoughts. It reshapes the parameters of my perceptions of the world. It changes the connections I make between thoughts. I have had the privilege of studying languages at my leisure and choice. A lifelong experience with the format and structure of a Western-culture educational system gives me the ease of focusing on content and taking the variety of methods in stride. I have always had the advantage of teachers who were also proficient in my home language: English. This made the task of asking for clarification or repetition a non-event.

My student, Saw Baw (a pseudonym), is having a markedly different experience. He is a Karen (pronounced ka-REN) refugee from the mountainous jungles of Burma. He was a rice farmer. He used to build a new home of bamboo every three years. There was no school to attend, and no reading or writing of his home language. Stories, poetry and song orally passed on important information and kept the culture alive. Saw Baw knew which plants of his environment were for eating, which were for healing, and which were poisonous. He toiled in rice paddies and worked fields with water buffalo. Saw Baw could tell you the best ways to avoid a tiger or how to miss the searching gaze of a

Burmese soldier. He could tell you how it feels to lose your lower left leg to a landmine. He could tell you what it is like to be a 43 year-old man spending 20 of his prime years of life in a refugee camp. He could tell you how it feels to move to Minnesota, USA in the month of January. He could tell you how impossible it feels to learn English at the age of 63.

Due to war and the genocidal intentions of the Burmese Army, a great number of my learners have stories similar to Saw Baw's story. They have survived great risks, endured devastating losses, and undergone horrifying journeys to arrive at refugee camps in Thailand. Some have spent 20 years of their lives in the limbo of those camps. Many of their children, now young adults, have never known life outside of the camps. My learners often bring medical excuses to school because of appointments with the Center for Victims of Torture in St. Paul, Minnesota. My students dream of a better life for their children and grandchildren. They are generally not hopeful for themselves. They know that the jobs they may eventually get will be physically arduous, low-paying and often mind-numbing. However, like all war-forced migrants throughout history, they voyaged with hope and faith to another land, another language, another culture in the service of a dream for their children. Refugees, in particular, rarely get to choose which country will host them. They don't have the option of selecting the climate, the culture or the language in which they will live.

My students are well past the age where they can be presumed to be within any sort of window of language learning ease proposed by Penfield & Roberts' *critical period hypothesis (*1959), or even the more generous *sensitive* period offered by Long (1990). Their challenges include not only the great dissimilarities between the target language,

English, and the home language, Karen; many of them are learning an alphabetic print language for the first time, and they are doing so as adults. The courage, perseverance and frustrations they bring to this task are indeed daunting.

In the United States, they come to adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes taught by a variety of organizations with a wide range of teacher preparation. Few adult basic education and literacy instructors receive significant guidance specifically regarding teaching adults (Smith & Hofer, 2003). Often the teachers themselves have difficulty investing time or monetary resources into any available credentials due to the dearth of financially-sustaining positions in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) field that could begin to compare in stability or support to those in the K-12 school system (Smith, 2010). Sometimes the available instructors are self-selected volunteers with little or no ABE background, only good intentions and fluency in English. Sometimes they are retired teachers with K-12 teaching licenses. Occasionally, a geographical area has a literacy organization that offers pertinent volunteer training. Perhaps the students get a teacher with a graduate degree specifically focusing on adult language learners. Is that person a native speaker of Karen who has an English competency to start the students on their English learning journey? Maybe arrivals several years from now will have an English-speaking native Karen teacher, but definitely not today. Will they have the simple, taken-for-granted advantages that most of us from literate, educated backgrounds experience in a language classroom: Asking a question of a teacher? Asking that teacher to repeat? Requesting clarification if the material is not understood? Understanding the general format of Western culture education? These are simple daily classroom

interactions that beginning learners cannot have with their monolingual language teachers.

In my experience, most teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) are people who have had a positive experience of learning. I believe that my teaching techniques and philosophies grow from similar personal experiences. I believe my teaching is also limited, and that I am blinded in a way by this educational history. I count on my past to tell me that I know something about the experience of sitting in a classroom and being a learner. Lortie (1975) validates this discomfort of mine when he discusses the "apprenticeship of observation"-- the concept that we as teachers teach the way we were taught. We have learned to be comfortable in a classroom environment, an experience not often shared by my refugee learners. Although Lortie's writing has often been perceived as explanation for a sort of sluggishness on the part of teachers as far as changing their practices, others have pointed out that both the positive and negative experiences that students remember vividly have been guiding forces in their development as teachers (Mewborn & Tyminski, 2006). When the fact of my understanding of education as described by Lortie is compounded with the radically different life experiences of my learners, I suspect my teaching practices can benefit greatly from an opportunity to examine and challenge the comfort of my perspective.

Whatever sort of teachers refugee learners encounter through luck or intention, I have noticed that more often than not, the teachers I have worked with are fluent only in English. Most of them have studied another language to some extent. However, almost all I have met have never tried to learn a language when their instructor couldn't understand a clarifying question, let alone answer one.

People who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are generally in their home cultural environment and likely have a formal education background. This is the sort of environment where I and many of my peers have learned a variety of languages. After class, we resumed life in an English-speaking culture. Learning English as a Second Language (ESL), however, generally involves learners who for a variety of reasons are living in an English-speaking country and are immersed in the culture. There is not a break at the end of the day when they can revert to their home language in order to carry out tasks such as banking, shopping, or communicating with their children's teachers. The unrelenting English environment outside of the home adds copious amounts of stress and urgency to this learning endeavor (Breen, 1991).

The professional preparation that I have received through the Minnesota Literacy Council and through my graduate studies at Hamline University has been excellent. The skills I have learned by observing and team-teaching with my peers have been transformative. However, I cannot shake the feeling that an integral component of perspective is missing. As Ong (1982) has described quite eloquently, being so steeped in literacy culture hampers us from truly being able to conceptualize what coming from a primarily oral culture entails. It is not a lack of literacy that oral culture exhibits so much as it is a way of perceiving and communicating reality that print-heavy culture has long forgotten. Ong gives a beautiful analogy comparing this lack of conception to an individual attempting to describe a horse to a person who has never seen a horse. The individual enthusiastically explains the ways a horse differs from a car. Useful? Not especially. On a more immediate and practical level, Vinogradov (personal communication, 2013) synopsizes Ong noting that once we are literate, we cannot

become ‘unliterate’ again. Literacy changes us forever, as individuals and as a culture, and we can’t change back, or ever accurately imagine our way back to orality. Vinogradov goes on to say that we, as literate teachers, cannot ‘get’ what our students are going through. My research asks: how do teachers predict they will change their teaching if they have the opportunity to gain a deeper direct understanding of the affective layers and the cognitive load of learning a new language with a non-roman alphabetic script? What if added to that opportunity is an instructor who was not educated in western systems, and who cannot answer questions in English? According to Guskey (2002), teachers’ beliefs and attitudes change significantly when they have direct evidence of improvements in student performance. What if teachers have a chance to experience direct evidence of their *own* improvements when they are placed in the language learner position? I want to examine the impact of offering this sort of immersion experience to low-literacy level ELL teachers. Might it serve as a similar sort of direct evidence that they may then be motivated to incorporate into their teaching practices? This sort of inquiry offers important possibilities for the growth of competency and innovation in my field, and it is an area as yet not investigated in the scholarship of teaching adult ELL.

Questions driving the current study include: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers’ views of their learners and on the teachers’ subsequent instruction?*

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, the research is introduced with a brief description of the learners and some of the ways their backgrounds differ from that of their English language instructors here in the United States. The variety of teacher preparation brought to the work is discussed. The chapter continues with an explanation of the researcher's motivation in exploring teachers' language learning experiences and the impact that experience may have on instructional decisions. In Chapter 2, the literature regarding second language acquisition theory pertaining to adult English language learners (ELLs) is presented. Next, the general challenges Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA)[1] learners face is discussed, along with the particular strengths and barriers that adult Karen refugee learners bring to the adult ESL classroom. The impact of low-literacy in one's native language (L1) on the task of learning the target language (L2), in this case English, is considered. Chapter 2 continues with a brief look at why the Karen people are in the United States. Next, a cursory examination of the structure of the Karen language, including its similarities and differences from English, provides some context for the complexity of the learners' task. Current literature on teacher cognition, teacher change, and reflective teaching practices is offered to provide a foundation for the intentions of this research. In Chapter 3, the procedures of the inquiry, namely, the methods of data collection and analysis are introduced. Findings are presented Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5, conclusions, implications for practitioners, and recommendations for future research are offered.

[1] LESLLA is the acronym for Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition, an international forum of researchers focusing on the development of new language skills by adult immigrants with little or no schooling prior to entering their new country. www.leslla.org

It is my sense that my colleagues and I are missing some vital piece of the language and teaching puzzle as we work with our Karen refugee adult students. This project has allowed me to explore this understudied area of adult education. Through such close inquiry, I hope to have an impact on the efficiency and the possibilities of teaching the wide variety of nationalities of adult ELLs with limited first language literacy.

CHAPTER TWO:

Literature Review

Overview

In this chapter, previous scholarship is shared in order to give context for the study and also to illustrate the gap in the current body of research. This chapter presents an overview of literature pertinent to the research questions: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of monolingual Karen language instruction on the teaching practices of low-literacy adult ELL instructors?* The teachers in this study are participating as adult language learners in order to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges their students confront daily. This study seeks to determine if this experience in empathy has enough of an impact to cause teachers to modify some aspect of their practice. I begin this chapter by synthesizing a range of published research discussing adults as language learners. Next, major characteristics of Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) learners are presented. Following this, the challenges and strengths of refugees in particular are explored through a lens of trauma and resilience. Relevant research on why literacy in the home language (L1) matters to the target language (L2) development is proffered. To provide the reader with a framework for understanding how the teachers will experience Karen language instruction, a basic survey of some of the sharp contrasts between English and the Karen

language is offered, along with a short explanation regarding why the Karen people are refugees. The chapter concludes with recent research on the concept of teacher cognition, teacher change, and the importance of reflective teaching in order to prepare for understanding how the participants' teaching was impacted by this experience.

Adults as Language Learners

Second language learning is a different experience for adults than it is for children (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Birdsong, 1999; Brod, 1999; Kurvers, 2009; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Magro, 2007; Parrish, 2004). Children can appear to learn language effortlessly and research suggests that they may be, in fact, wired to learn language as part of normal human development. Chomsky (1995) hypothesized an initial preparedness of the brain specifically designed for language acquisition that perhaps dissipates as the home language is learned and may not be available for the task of learning a new language later in life. The concept of a *critical period*, originally proposed by Penfield & Roberts (1959), suggested an age range when the brain is more sensitive to language learning, generally the time encompassing birth up to puberty. Whether or not one subscribes to these theories, most children are exposed to a great deal of language input, particularly from family, school, and peers (Parrish, 2004; Lansford, Deater-Deckard & Bornstein, 2007), and are taught language intentionally by the culture and people surrounding them. Before they even begin to speak, children of every culture are exposed for months or years to the rhythms and sounds of their home language (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Children who are still learning their home language at the time of acquiring a second language seem to be able to develop a similar sensitivity for what

"sounds right" grammatically for both languages, an advantage seemingly denied to most later-age learners (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Another advantage children as language learners enjoy is that learning is usually the primary job with which they are tasked. In contrast, adult learners are generally parents, spouses, community participants, wage-earners and members of an extended family with varying roles to fill (Auerbach, 1989). Among refugee and immigrant learners, students are often survivors of the violence of war, and are simultaneously acclimating to a new and vastly different culture (Vinogradov, 2013). These factors can have a tremendous impact on how much time and energy (both inside and outside of the classroom) can be devoted to reinforcing learning. Adult learners have a lot on their minds while they are trying to concentrate in class.

An additional aspect of language learning that impacts adults is evidence of an accent. They may never acquire a native-like accent that children do, but that in itself is not always a primary concern. Retention of an accent can be a source of proudly-maintained identity with the home culture (Parrish, 2004); it can also be a source of discrimination or deliberate misunderstanding when interacting with native speakers. Either way, there appears to be a minimum level of pronunciation clarity that language learners need to acquire in order to be comprehensible at all, independent of the amount of grammar or vocabulary they know (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Graham, 2010). Adult language learners in general are at a disadvantage in the area of acquiring native-like pronunciation (Birdsong, 1999).

Gass & Selinker (2008) also note that the overriding difference between the language proficiency of children and adults can be found in phonology, the basic sound

patterns of the target language. Children appear to have a greater capacity for developing the mental inventory of possible sounds, and for simultaneously developing the intricate facial and vocal muscular structures for creating these sounds. Adults often experience a definite disadvantage in the ability to hear and replicate clearly the more subtle auditory aspects of the target language (Kuhl, 2000; Yamada, 2004).

Adult language learners, however, do bring much strength to this endeavor. They are self-motivated and enthusiastic. They are attending class because they want to be there (Magro, 2007). Attendance is most often an inconvenience in their daily lives, and family and work responsibilities are frequent interrupters of their learning commitment (Auerbach, 1989). They have years of life experience, coping skills, and problem-solving abilities for a myriad of situations. Adults have full oral language competency in their L1. This means they have the advantage of a firmly established large vocabulary and also a facility with various forms of discourse (Parrish, 2004; Young-Scholten, 2013; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).

Characteristics of Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) Learners

LESLLA learners are a population that is glaringly underrepresented in general second language acquisition (SLA) research (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). The preponderance of research focuses first on children, and then secondly on literate adults. A possibility must be considered that the acquisition process for non-literate adult language learners varies significantly from that of the other oft-studied language learners (Tarone & Bigelow, 2012). This particular population is the focus of dedicated research by the organization of the same name with the goal of

improving instructional practices and policies affecting the acquisition of a target language by these learners (www.leslla.org). Some characteristics of this group of learners include learning to read in an alphabetic language for the first time, learning to hold a pencil, recognizing sound-spelling correspondences, identifying word boundaries, and learning to navigate a print-intensive culture (Parrish, 2004). Some are going to school for the first time in their lives, and learning how to participate appropriately in that setting. It also must be considered that LESLLA learners do not have the underlying learned orientation to the printed word that literate learners take as a given. This implies that their visual strategies for approaching texts are likely to be non-systematic (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010).

The task of acquiring literacy differs significantly from the task of acquiring spoken language. Spoken language has different structures, patterns and conventions (Rigg, 1985). To become literate in one's home language (L1) is a task requiring years. To become literate in a new language (L2) without ever having become literate in one's home language means starting with such basics (as listed above) that a person who has grown up with literacy can never accurately imagine (Vinogradov, 2013).

One implication for these differences between literate and non-literate learners, as is clearly pointed out by Farrelly (2013), is that the techniques and strategies taught in many teacher education programs are not effective in the LESLLA classroom. LESLLA teachers frequently create their own materials, specifically targeted to their learners. This study, conducted in a monolingual, non-Roman alphabetic environment, attempted to duplicate as closely as conceivable, an environment in which the participants' literacy

would not be functioning to its usual fullest advantage. How would the teaching materials and practices of the participants be impacted by participation in this endeavor?

Trauma and Resilience in Language Learning

Adult refugee learners bring with them many challenges and many strengths (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010; Magro, 2007; Isserlis, 2009). Some come to the United States directly from a war zone, fleeing for their lives. Others come after multiple years of experiencing their lives on hold while they live with no citizenship status in refugee camps of host countries.

The challenges are numerous and overwhelming. Refugees are often torn violently from the most precious aspects of the meaningful lives they had already established, and then are deprived of the ability to use their own language in daily interactions (Magro, 2007). Often, any formal education process they were involved in is abruptly halted. Refugees may have loved ones who are dead or their whereabouts unknown. Refugees experience the strain of coming to a new life in a country where not only the customs and language are sharply different from one's home, but most of the people in the new country have never even *heard* of their people or their language. There is the stress of financial insecurity and the dependence on monthly government allocations that can be reduced if school hours are missed, even if the absences are due to illness or family needs (P. Vang, personal communication, March 2015). Another, probably unanticipated, pressure is the upheaval in family power dynamics as the younger family members acquire language and cultural savvy faster than the elders (Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 1999). Parents find themselves relying on their children as

interpreters and mediators at hospitals, when using social services, and in other cultural arenas (Ali & Kilbride, 2004; Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 1999; Momirov & Kilbride, 2005; Tyyskä, 2005, 2006).

Striving for transference of a current skill set to local workforce needs can be another frustration. Refugees lucky enough to be hired can expect to be exhausted from physically demanding, and often dangerous, labor that frequently involves more than an hour's travel time each way. Many people find work so far from their city that they see their families only on weekends. The housing that they are placed in is usually sub-standard and expensive. There are stacks of inscrutable paperwork that must be filled out correctly and submitted or loss of health insurance and/or food support result. Twenty hours a week of English language instruction with teachers who do not speak their home language isn't the easiest way for them to learn. For people coming to Minnesota from the jungles of Burma, the climate change is more than severe. Post-traumatic stress from war, rape, and torture often result in depression, inability to concentrate, and/or memory loss (Isserlis, 2000; Center for Victims of Torture website: www.cvt.org).

Despite that prodigious list of challenges, adult refugee learners bring numerous strengths to the endeavor. They are amazing examples of the resilience of the human spirit. In spite of the hardships of their past and current lives they are hopeful, kind, and generous with their limited resources. They have a sense of perspective about what is truly important, which sometimes contrasts sharply with the consumer trivialities of American culture. They prioritize the importance of family and community. In the classroom, their problem-solving skills and life-learning experiences are evidenced in creative adaptive strategies. Other strengths that work to their advantage are a great

ability to memorize vast amounts of information, a strong motivation to learn, and a remarkable persistence despite all the odds that they will not become adept at a new language (Adkins, Sample, & Birman, 1999).

L1 Literacy Impact on L2 Acquisition

Learners who bring any sort of literacy proficiency from their home language (L1) to the task of learning English (in this context, L2) have a significant advantage (Tarone, 2010; Kurvers, 2009; Parrish, 2004; Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Genessee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2006). These students are already cognizant of the link between oral and written language, something easily assumed in a print-intensive culture like the United States, but mysterious until actually mentally connected by the pre- or non-literate learner. Learners with L1 literacy take significantly fewer years to gain competence in L2 (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Individuals only need to learn *how* to read once, so learners with this skill can proceed to the actual language content itself (Genesee, Geva, Dressler, & Kamil, 2006).

Ong (1982) points out that an oral culture organizes its mode of thinking and processing in a manner almost diametrically opposed to the thought structures of literate society. He specifically differentiates oral from literate culture in the following ways: proverbs vs. formula, additive rather than analytic, redundant vs. parsimonious, participatory rather than distant, and situational vs. abstract. Olson (2002) goes as far as saying that the quality of being literate makes it possible for one to even contemplate the language process itself.

To provide added clarity to the present discussion, brief descriptions of the varying sorts of past literacy exposures present in the particular classroom environment of this research are herein provided. Brod (1999) offered descriptions similar to the ones below:

> *Non-literate*: Although the culture possesses a written form, the students have not had literacy instruction available to them.
>
> *Semiliterate*: Students have had some opportunities to learn a small amount of reading and writing.
>
> *Non-Roman alphabet literate*: Students are able to read and write proficiently, but in an alphabet that is non-Roman, such as Thai, Russian, or Arabic. [Note: Karen literate learners would fall into this category.]

The learners populating the classrooms in which the teachers participating in this study work generally fall into these three categories. Pre-literate, where the L1 has no written form is a rare occurrence in the current ELL classroom.

All classrooms are multi-level within the categories established by each school organization. Students who are able to read and write in their home language share a classroom with learners who have never attended school in their life. The non-Roman alphabet learners often have the advantage of awareness of sound-syllable correspondences and can apply that knowledge to the similar task of learning written English (Tarone, 2010). They also can take notes and make written translations as needed (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). They usually have spent a few or many years learning in a classroom environment and generally have confidence in their ability to learn

academically. The non-literate and semi-literate learners more often acquire knowledge by watching, listening and doing kinetically. They are usually experiencing the classroom environment for the first time. They are just finding out how they respond and interact in that environment. They are new to the rules and the structure of the language classroom, as well as to the content they are studying. In fact, they are learning not only content, but they are beginning the very process of acquiring alphabetic literacy itself (Vinogradov, 2013). They rely more on repeating words to remember, and may have a difficult time distinguishing between what is more important or less important information (Brod, 1999).

As Paolo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) emphasized so strongly, literacy can be meaningful to students only if it has impact and relevance to the reality of their current situations, and in some way empowers them to be active participants in their own lives.

Building a sense of belonging to the new culture and gaining skills to build a new community with other language learners can help to ease ongoing apprehension about the future (Magro, 2007). Poverty acts as a barrier to transportation, good nutrition, safe housing, and at least one study has shown that the experience of poverty itself negatively impacts the cognitive abilities of learners (Dennis, 2013; Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013).

Karen People and Language

The Karen are an ethnic group indigenous to Burma (now referred to as Myanmar by the international community). For the past 65 years, they have suffered persecution by

the Burmese military junta. This appears to be partly due to allegiances chosen in past wars, and partly due to the rich resources of their land (www.mnkaren.org). There are twelve Karen tribes with varying dialects. The two most prevalent dialects of the refugee English learners in Minnesota are S'gaw Karen and Pwo Karen. These two dialects are not mutually intelligible; however, many Pwo Karen speak S'gaw Karen although the reverse is not true. Students tend to use Burmese as a common language (T. Hoe, personal communication, March 2015). Minnesota is home to more than 8,000 Karen people, many who live in St. Paul and the surrounding suburbs. This is the largest Karen community in the United States; over 60% are under the age of 25 (www.mnkaren.org). The learners at MORE School are predominantly S'gaw Karen speakers, but the population of Pwo Karen has been increasing slowly. This section will focus exclusively on S'gaw Karen because of its strong representation at the school where this study was conducted.

The Karen language is strikingly different from English both visually and structurally. These differences require learners to acquire not only new alphabetic and numeric characters, but also the concept of placing a space between each word. (See Appendix C for a sample of Karen text) Teachers who have never studied a non-Roman alphabetic language may unknowingly have less empathy for the task their Karen learners are taking on. One goal of the research is to provide teachers with an opportunity to increase empathy for the additional burden of this learning endeavor, and then to find out what instructional responses and changes this experience may invite. Is it possible that teachers with less information about the Karen language will teach differently from those who have more?

This section provides a general overview of the Karen language. Michael Swan and Bernard Smith's work on learner English and interference issues was used as a general structural framework for this examination, although Karen is not a language addressed in their work (Swan & Smith, 1987). An introduction to the basic characteristics of Karen is presented in order to acquaint the reader with some of the marked contrasts the participants in this research will be engaging with during the study of this language. Challenges and advantages regarding pronunciation, orthography and grammar will each be considered separately.

Karen is a Sino-Tibetan language, under the sub-heading of Tibeto-Burman. It is written with a script similar to Burmese. Although the Karen language is a relatively new addition to the United States, information can be gleaned from a variety of sources including missionary documentations (Gilmore, 1898), The Drum Circle website (www.drumcirclepublications.org), and personal contacts with bilingual Karen native speakers. These listed sources provided the information presented below.

Karen is a monosyllabic language, although some exceptions occur, as with any other language rule. Karen is also a tonal language. The meaning of a word with the same spelling may vary based on the tone of the pronunciation rising, falling, or moving in a particular wave shape. Tonal languages are difficult to represent with the constructs of the Roman alphabet.

Karen word order is comparable to English (Subject-Verb-Object, SVO) in that it relies on the order of the words to transmit meaning. It is also written from left to right on the page. Karen, however, is not inflected. Instead, particle words are placed in the

sentence to indicate past (*mah hah*), present (no particle) and future (*guh*). Meaning is also conveyed by the context of the conversation and the initiating time-marker words contained within. For example: *Tomorrow I go to the store* indicates a future activity with no change to the verb root.

Adjectives follow the nouns which is a significant differentiation from English. Nouns do not have a plural form (in English indicated by attaching –s or a variation), because the plurality is already established by a number or the context of the sentence. In a similarity to English, nouns do not have a masculine/feminine designation as they do in the Romance languages (French, Italian, and Spanish), so there is no need for adjectives to express agreement with the nouns that are modified. Articles are also present, but are not definite/indefinite or singular/plural as they are in English.

When Karen speakers begin to learn English, there is a natural tendency to place adjectives after nouns. Pronouncing the final –*s* of a plural is often omitted. This may be due to the fact of the plural form being unnecessary in Karen, or because final consonants in general are dropped. The reason final consonants are commonly a challenge is because Karen words consistently end with a vowel sound. Spoken comprehension is often negatively impacted due to the omission of final consonant sounds which are critical to the clarity of so many English words. Consonant clusters, noticeably prevalent in English (*str*, *chr*, etc.) are also a source of difficulty. The labiodental fricatives *f* and *v* are non-existent in Karen, so the mouth shapes and dental involvement, in conjunction with the expelling of air, must be taught explicitly.

The Karen alphabet is a separate alphabet from the Burmese although they have a similar appearance to the Western eye. The alphabet has 25 consonants and 14 vowels, along with six tones (see Appendix B).

Karen punctuation uses the same symbols as English (commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points). A structural challenge, however, is the lack of space between words required in English. Students who have learned to write some English in the camps often place dots between each English word in a sentence as a holder of the space needed.

Considering all that has been discussed in the preceding paragraphs, it becomes profoundly apparent that LESLLA teachers are undertaking a formidable and not-well-charted path. In order to support teaching professionals in this arena, an understanding of how they access knowledge, how they change, and how they reflect on their work will assist us further in answering our research inquiry. *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Teacher Cognition and Teacher Change

The catalysts which impel teachers to change their instructional practices are many and varied (Borg, 2003; Lortie, 1975). The distinction between changes in a teacher's thinking and changes in a teacher's actions are not always easily definable (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003). In this section, current research regarding teacher cognition and teacher change is presented. The context of reflective

teaching practices is critical to generating the data needed to understand how teachers may perceive the impact of this professional development opportunity on their practice. This study is about perceived change resulting from participation in the intervention event.

There are a variety of professional development opportunities for education professionals. Conferences, workshops, study circles, short-term coursework, training videos, as well as peer observations and mentoring are a few examples (Vinogradov & Liden, 2009). Many teachers also engage in independent study to augment their skills. Whether or not teachers take advantage of these opportunities may be impacted by cost, location, level of commitment to the profession, necessity of credits to maintain licensure, length of time as a teacher, and participation by peers (Smith et al., 2003). The current study can be seen to fall into the category of professional development events, and depends upon the impetus of commitment to the profession to attract participants.

There is general agreement in the field that teacher change takes time, and its impact may be related to whether the change is imposed as an arbitrary ruling from administrators or whether teachers feel that there is a compelling reason for their practices to change (Guskey, 2002).When teachers are involved in professional development that draws upon their knowledge base and requires some inquiry on their part, they are more likely to initiate change on their own (Richardson & Anders, 1994; Smith et al., 2003). Teacher change is also impacted by the deeply personal nature of the teaching experience itself. Practices are a result of previous learning and teaching experiences, knowledge of practices, and individual beliefs about teaching and oneself (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Angelova, 2005). A model proposed by Desimone (2009,

p.184) clarifies critical features of professional development that result in positive outcomes for teacher change:

1. Teachers experience effective professional development.
2. The professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills and /or changes their attitudes and beliefs.
3. Teachers use their new knowledge and skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve the content of their instruction or their approach to pedagogy, or both.
4. The instructional changes foster increased student learning.

This study is situated in the larger questions of teacher change and development, teacher cognition, and the concept of reflective teaching practices. There is a limited amount of primary research regarding adult education, specifically addressing the concepts of teacher cognition and teacher change (Smith et al., 2003). The abundance of K-12 research on teaching practices (the Desimone model above is an example) can provide some guidance; however, a complete summary of that literature is beyond the scope of this project. More importantly, the fundamental differences that exist between the targeted learner-audiences seem to point to a need for research specifically aimed at teacher cognition and teacher change in the adult education field. As noted by Farrelly (2013), this research area exhibits even greater gaps in applications for teaching tools for the adult-refugee English language learner. One of the obvious differences is the developmental maturity levels of the targeted learners. Another important distinction is that students on which the preponderance of K-12 teacher-research is based are orally fluent and were exposed daily to English as native-speakers for almost five years before entering the K-12 system. So although the process of teacher change itself is likely

consistent across context, there are specific components necessary to the knowledge base of LESLLA teachers in particular (Figure 1.1) which are not addressed sufficiently in the body of K-12 literature currently offered. It is these particular critical components in relation to teacher cognition and teacher change that require greater attention from the research community.

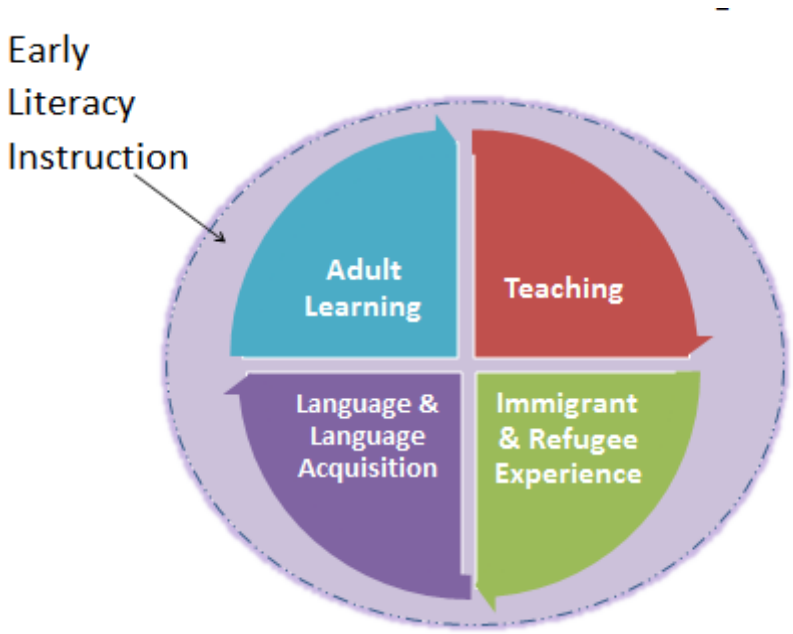

Figure 1.1. LESLLA Teacher Knowledge Base

From "Defining the LESLLA teacher knowledge base," by P. Vinogradov, 2013, *Low-educated second language and literacy acquisition,* Proceedings of the 8th LESLLA symposium, p. 10.

Training for K-12 teachers is well funded and focused directly on its targeted population. Adult educators, although often equipped with K-12 licenses or masters degrees from other fields do not consistently receive pre-service training for teaching adults. As seen in Table 1, being specifically knowledgeable about *Adult Learning* and additionally trained regarding the impact of the *Immigrant & Refugee Experience* is what makes up at least half of what is necessary for success in the LESLLA educational

experience. It is worthy of noting that formidable barriers are created when adult educators' positions are under-paid, lack benefits, and little financial support exists for professional development opportunities when they are presented (Smith et al., 2003).

Three factors from Smith's 2003 research that are intentionally incorporated into the design of the present study are:

- A strong emphasis on analysis and reflection.
- An impetus, in this case an imposed structure, to help teachers contemplate the experience of their students.
- Participation from teachers sharing similar work environs in associated organizations.

Bridges (1991) delineates a three-step process for the journey a practitioner takes through incorporating a change into regular performance. There is the ending of the old behavior, a neutral phase where the new behavior is pondered, and finally an initiation of a plan that incorporates the new behavior.

Reflective Teaching Practices as an Impact on Teacher Change

In the current study, the teacher-participants are being asked to specifically examine their classroom learning experience. The actual learning of the Karen language is not the priority objective, although it is believed to be of benefit to the teacher-participants. An interesting and informative perspective regarding the importance of making this clear to the study participants is brought through the work of Boulton-Lewis, Wilss and Mutch (1996, p 91):

"For some people, learning had become an object of reflection and could be explicitly discussed, whilst for others the act of learning was taken for granted and conceived of as an activity that required 'getting all the facts into your head'".

This study depends upon the willingness and the ability of its participants to examine their personal language learning experience at a meta-level. It requires a conscious retraction of the usual perfectionism of acquiring information and demonstrating competency in the service of noticing the process itself. As Farrell (2008) has noted, this willingness of teachers to scrutinize their own beliefs in a critical analysis of the teaching and learning process is particularly important for teachers of adult learners. Breen (1991) concurs and expands on this idea when suggesting that promoting teachers' reflections and asking them to evaluate their beliefs will only cause change when actually based on classroom events.

Lockhart (1994), Cruickshank & Applegate (1981), and Costa & Garmston (1997), all agree that the ability of teachers to practice their professions in a reflective manner is critical to change likely occurring. The ability to continually challenge one's assumptions and preconceived notions is at the heart of a reflective teaching practice. As stated previously, teachers' ideas and beliefs undoubtedly influence their teaching practices. Challenging one's own beliefs about what students are in fact learning, practicing self-inquiry and self-evaluation through journaling, peer observation, and other forms of professional development can be a complicated task. It appears, however, that these activities will cause teachers to develop a deeper understanding of the teaching process, and places them in a position to discover if there is a gap between what they are teaching and what their students are actually learning (Lockhart, 1994). Components of the

teaching event that may change include both activity structure and classroom interactions (Lockhart, 1994). This research is specifically asking teachers to recognize and acknowledge how the experience of monolingual Karen instruction will impact their teaching structures and interactions.

Teacher-participants in this study are presumed to be taking "the act of learning for granted" (Boulton-Lewis, Wilss, & Mutch, 1996, p. 91). They are also presumed to be "blinded in certain ways by their own literacy" (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004, p. 692). This intervention is designed to disrupt that comfort and engage the teachers in a reflective practice that may cause change in teaching practices and perceptions of the learner experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter an overview of literature concerning adults as language learners, as well as a description of the LESLLA learner were presented. Strengths and challenges that are characteristic of refugees as learners were noted. Information was provided regarding the importance of L1 literacy in L2 learning. An introduction to the Karen people as well as a brief summary of some salient characteristics of the Karen language was given. The chapter explored the realms of teacher cognition, teacher change and the concept of reflective teaching. A clear gap in the existing research was shown regarding our understanding of low-literacy instruction of non-Roman-alphabetic adult learners. The research being presented will guide the answering of this primary question: *What is the perceived impact of monolingual Karen language instruction on the teaching practices of low-level adult ELL instructors?*

The following chapter, Methodology, will provide a description of the type of research conducted and the procedures utilized to gather data. It will describe the participants and the environment of the study, and will examine perceived limitations of the research study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological case study is designed to explore one aspect of the adult language learning experience. It uses an intervention which invites low-level ELL teachers to endeavor to share part of their learners' daily challenge. The research approach and specific methodologies chosen for this study worked together to tackle two specific research questions: *What are the reactions of a group of low-literacy adult ELL instructors to a monolingual Karen language learning experience? How do they perceive the impact of this experience on their teaching practices?*

Overview

This chapter describes the methodologies used in this study. An overview of the paradigm of qualitative research in general is provided. Second, the rationale for and description of case studies in particular are presented. These are then followed by a presentation of phenomenology as a lens that further focuses this case study's requirements. This chapter also describes the participants of the current study, the background of the researcher, the Karen class instructors, the course content chosen, and the setting where the study occurred. The data collection protocols of pre-intervention interviews and post-intervention interviews are discussed along with the methods and materials used to collect and analyze additional data.

Qualitative Research

In order to answer the research questions, the methods for data collection needed to accommodate the deep complexities of human experience. The methods chosen also needed to permit an expression of the myriad of ways that teachers draw from their experiences to make decisions in the classroom. Qualitative, also known as naturalistic or interpretive research became apparent as the most obvious and appropriate tool for the task because of its flexibility, broadness, and inclusivity of a variety of innovative research practices (Preissle, 2006).

A qualitative method of research is a more process-focused endeavor when compared to quantitative research, which relies on instruments. Qualitative research as explained by Mackey and Gass (2005) focuses on phenomena that occur in observed situations, and the data are generally documented in non-numerical modes. This method of research is particularly useful in situations where the researcher is examining a human interactive experience, or the human's perception of said experience. The qualitative researcher has a goal of grasping the meaning a particular event or sequence of events has for the individuals involved. Qualitative research is useful for data, such as are found in this study, which are observed in a classroom and informed by the dynamic and continually shifting responses found in vibrant and interactive instructional hours. Teachers draw from their experiences to make decisions in highly personal ways that may be better captured and examined through journaling, open-ended questionnaires, and observations than in charts and graphs. This necessarily interpretive aspect makes qualitative research a reasonable selection for the current study, since qualitative research by its nature provides flexibility for the presentation and analysis of individual and

personal interpretations pertaining to the experienced events. A research endeavor that attempts to make sense of an event and to interpret the meanings the participants extract from their reactions requires a tool that has the capability of capturing the meaning that the individuals have constructed as a result of that event (Merriam, 2009). For these reasons, a qualitative approach was chosen for this inquiry.

Methods

In order to provide more clarity and to serve the interest of extending or confirming peer experience, the research at hand is presented using phenomenological case study within a bounded setting; tools based within the realm of qualitative research. These terms are clarified in the following subsections.

Case Study

A case study is a detailed description of an event involving a chosen individual or group of individuals that share an experience within a bounded setting (Mackey & Gass, 2005). A case study selects what is to be studied; the *bounded setting* determines the edges or the boundaries of that event (Merriam, 2009). Both of these terms are clarified in this section.

In the context of this research, case study is used as a strategy to view a particular phenomenon in a context that strives to mirror a facet of the refugee language learner experience: What is it like to learn a language when your teacher cannot explain content in your home language? How does it feel to not be able to ask a clarifying question? How does it feel to show up to class late and be behind on the day's progress? Case study is

particularly suited for this inquiry as it allows for the qualitative observation of the participants as they engage in the event, as well as collecting reflections of the participants themselves both during and after the event. Case studies can be useful in extended longitudinal studies; however, shorter-term research, in this case five class sessions, also benefits from the capacity of a case study to provide detailed descriptions of individual experiences over a short period of time (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Bounded Setting

A *bounded setting* means that there are edges maintained for the phenomenon under examination. If no boundaries are maintained, then the study cannot be presented as a case (Merriam, 2009). In the current research, the 'case' is bound by time; there are a finite number of sessions where the language learning is experienced. Further defining the case, the group of teacher-participants is limited not only by number, but also by the level of ELL they currently instruct. The content presented is pre-determined by the instructors and mirrors specific content taught in the LESLLA classroom. The data collection instruments are also structured and defined.

Any research method brings strengths and limitations to the scope of its abilities to measure data. Recognized strengths of case studies include the ability to focus on the experience of an individual, the ability to collect data regarding more than one individual at a time, and the potential to provide for rich context when comparing and contrasting experiences. Case studies in particular can illuminate complexities of the language learning process itself (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

One of the limitations of the case study as a research design tool is the care the researcher must take to avoid unsupportable generalizations. Although a reader perusing an array of case studies may come to conclusions of their own, a single case study with a small number of participants can speak only to its own findings and is not readily able to be generalized to the field (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The researchers as well as the readers of case studies must always keep in mind the biases that can easily impact the conclusions of the work (Merriam, 2009). Some of these biases lie with the researcher herself, and I expand on my own researcher-bias later in this chapter.

This study considered the impact of being a language learner in a monolingual environment as experienced by the teachers themselves. The 'culture' this intervention is designed to disrupt is that of native-born American ELL instructors raised in a Western society with a common language and general experience of bilingual language learning. The participants in this particular study had all experienced a minimum of four years of college and were therefore highly literate and well-educated. None of the participants had ever been involuntarily thrust into a new culture to learn survival with a language dramatically different from their own. Adult ELL instructors in the geographic local of this study exhibit a homogeny of many characteristics including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic class, and in addition, the lack of the experience of their home becoming a war zone. Case study as a methodology allowed for a recognition of the homogeny of the culture of these adult ELL instructors as a data boundary, and to create a deliberate challenge and disruption to that background with the intent of evoking a deeper understanding of the experience of their students.

Culture can be difficult to detangle from an educational experience. The design of this particular case study created a space where the focus could be placed on one solitary aspect of the language learning experience: a truly monolingual environment where the instructor can't speak the learner's language versus a bilingual or monolingual immersion where the instructor won't speak the students' language, but possesses the ability to understand the learners comments and questions. This study's intent was to glean information regarding how teaching practices might be perceived to be impacted by such an experience.

Because this experience was deeply personal to each participant, case study methodology had the advantage of considering and allowing for the participants' point of view to be revealed and then examined by the researcher. A case study also permits access to the emotions of the teachers which Zembylas (2005) claims has value in moving beyond standard teacher change and cognition—which this study also addresses--beyond a mere affective reaction to teaching situations, but as an inextricable aspect of the very act of teaching, and therefore necessary to understanding teaching.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a research method adds more focus to the goals of this study. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research, and in this study it added a clarifying quality to the work conducted. As described by Merriam (2009), phenomenology focuses on the examined experience and tries to discover how that experience is transformed into consciousness, or in the case of this study, how that experience is transformed into perceived impact on future teaching practices. Collecting data in the moment is the particular province of this research tool. Mackey and Gass (2005) refer to this method as

the most radical form of qualitative research since the researcher is looking for greater understanding of the topic, not seeking actual causes. Phenomenology allows the researcher to capture what Kusenbach refers to as "some of the transcendent and reflexive aspects of lived experience" (2003, p. 457). This is the energetic, in-the-moment data into which the study sought to delve. Phenomenology served as the tool to capture the data in the moment (related in the researcher's observations of the teacher-students, and in the weekly in-class questionnaire), and the data that became more evident as the participants reflected on their experience outside of class (collected via journaling).

In summary, the methods selected for the current study can be seen to telescope in the following manner. Qualitatively, the research looked at the processes and results of ELL teachers learning a language in a monolingual environment. Case study provided a means to gain access to this group of adult language learner/teachers understandings and reactions within the bounds of five weeks of a Karen immersion class. Finally, phenomenological research provided a lens to examine how this particular experience could answer this study's guiding questions: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Data Collection

Participants

This research was conducted with nine adult ESL instructors who are experienced in teaching the lower levels of ESL. The request for participants was conducted via a

group email to schools in the local consortium, word of mouth at professional gatherings and also by conversations among my professional acquaintances. To provide some clarity at this juncture, it is useful to understand that community schools often have their own jargon in referring to the class levels that they offer. For example, Literacy Level, Level 0, Basic Literacy or Level A may all indicate the same general very beginning language competency. In order to provide a commonality of verbiage to this discussion, the National Reporting System's Functioning Level Table is used as a guide (www.nrsonline.org). My preference was for Beginning ESL teachers, but teachers of Low Beginning ESL, High Beginning ESL and Low Intermediate ESL were not discouraged. The criteria most valued was people who were open to the guiding questions of the experience, cared deeply about their teaching and the improvement of it, and were able to commit to attending every session. As shown in Table 3.1, the participants exhibited traits which indicate a relative homogeny of subjects.

This data regarding the participants was collected on a form that the teachers completed prior to the first Karen class conducted. All data was self-reported and can be reasonably presumed to be accurate. A sample of this form is found in Appendix E.

Setting

This study was conducted in a large metropolitan area of the upper Midwestern United States. The data collection itself was conducted in a classroom of the school where the researcher is employed as a Beginning ESL for Adults instructor. The teaching environments for the participants, which are presented as a description of the setting, are similar in most characteristics with some variation in the more minor details.

This urban area is home to a large refugee population supported by a strong network of social services. There are 10 community-based adult schools in this particular city that cooperate with each other as a literacy consortium. Opportunities for professional development are relatively abundant and are led by highly-skilled passionate educators. Teachers from various schools interact at these events regularly and networks of cooperation are not unusual.

The individual adult ELL schools generally have four levels of English classes offered, which can be most universally described by the National Reporting System (NRS) levels mentioned earlier: Beginning ESL, Low Beginning ESL, High Beginning ESL and Low Intermediate ESL. These levels are sometime subdivided further depending on an individual school's population and teacher/classroom availability. Learners mastering the materials taught at the intermediate level sometimes are able to continue their education at a local adult high school. The number of students who accomplish this and are not derailed by work and family obligations are few. A majority of the learners at this consortium's schools are recently arrived refugees from Burma, Laos, Bhutan, and Thailand. They are brought to register for English classes by the county caseworkers and employment counselors who are assigned to them. In order to receive financial and basic needs assistance from the county, students must participate 25 hours per week active job search and/or English classes (P. Vang, personal communication, March 2015).

In order to understand the context of teaching Beginning ESL to low-literacy learners, and to further understand the impetus of the current research, a description of some of the other key elements and conditions of the teaching environment are provided.

TABLE 3.1

Selected Characteristics of the Teacher-Participants

ID	*Previous languages studied*	*Lived in a non-English speaking country? Where and how long?*	*What non-Roman alphabet languages have you studied?*	*Ever had a non-English speaking instructor?*	*Age*	*Amount of Karen previously known*	*How long teaching low-level adult ESL?*
A	Spanish, German, French, Arabic	Jordan Morocco	Arabic	Arabic	28	None	Seven years
B	French	Mexico Three months at a time for three consecutive years.	None	No	26	None	2.5 years
C	French, music	No	None	No	66	Four or five words	Five years
D	Latin, German	No	None	No	69	None	18 years
E	French, Spanish, Chinese	No	Chinese	No	51	A few words.	Two years
F	Spanish, Karen (about 10 hours class time)	No	Karen	No	27	A few nouns, some verbs; read at a beginning level how to count.	Five years
G	Spanish, Japanese	Italy, one month	Japanese	Yes	25	None	Two years
H	French, Nepali	France, six months	Nepali	Yes	26	None	1.5 years
I	Somali, Spanish	No	None	No	55	Bits and pieces, several phrases	15 years

These particular conditions add significant challenges to the LESLLA level teaching experience. Because these conditions are currently immutable, this study seeks to find conditions which can be impacted if the instructors have the opportunity to experience one facet of the classroom from the learners' perspective. With this in mind, the following factors are discussed: the unpredictability of open enrollment, the challenge of multi-level classrooms, the reality of teacher-created materials, and the dependence on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) as an accountability device.

Open Enrollment. Many of the local adult ESL programs practice open enrollment. Open enrollment means that students enter and exit classroom registration rosters regardless of any term dates or how far a class may have proceeded in a unit. At the Beginning ESL level there is no such thing as a student 'catching up' on missed content. Although this can be a stress-producing factor for teachers and the entering students themselves, it does effectively accommodate the continual and irregular influx of new refugees who need immediate services. It also allows for the reality of the ways that adult lives have circumstances that may interfere with regular class attendance. Child care needs and temporary employment are two common examples of those circumstances. Although Fitzgerald (1994) noted that open enrollment programs frequently experience a loss of as much as half of the enrollees by the end of a term, federal funding of schools is directly impacted by attendance hours, therefore administrative needs are better served by having as many students in class per day as possible.

Multi-level Classrooms. Adult language learners come from a variety of backgrounds. Depending on current immigration and refugee influx patterns, some schools may find that they have a preponderance of students from the same geographical region or country. A more likely scenario, however, is that a teacher will have students from differing continents with a variety of home languages represented among the student population. Not only will the languages vary, but also previous education levels differ. There may be a wide range of previous life experience ranging from comparative privilege to severe deprivation. At the LESLLA level, the most educated students are likely to have had perhaps four to six years of schooling. The least educated in the same group have often never learned to write their names in their home languages. The classes vary in age range as well, although common experience shows the younger learners moving out of the lowest levels relatively quickly, while the learners above the age of 40 often struggle in the beginning classes for years.

Another way that classrooms are multi-level can be seen in the demonstration of relative ease of learning listening and speaking skills compared to reading and writing skills in some classroom members, generally from more oral-based cultures. The mirror inverse of this language development is seen in other students who catch on to reading and writing because of home language literacy experience, but are at a loss in speaking and listening activities. The ELL classroom also is multi-level in the most-often used sense of the term in that the students range in the amount of English that they understand and can produce, ranging from individuals learning their first words of English to those about-to, but not-quite-yet-ready-to-advance to the next level class.

What *multi-level* means for the teacher is that no matter the size of the classroom, each student (or each subset of students) will have differing needs and abilities as the learning tasks are undertaken. A teacher can choose to teach to the middle competency, but more likely will develop activities of varying skill levels that can be engaged in simultaneously. Another option can be to have the higher level learners work in pairs with lower level students, however, at the LESLLA level, this is indeed a limited possibility.

Teacher-created Materials. The dearth of low-literacy teaching curriculums for the LESLLA teacher is a common topic of conversation among peers. Hopes are continually raised when a publisher uses the term *beginning* or *basic* literacy in the title of its offering, only to be predictably dashed when the contents again show that the materials are far above the instructional levels of LESLLA learners. Therefore, teachers of English at this level become skilled at creating materials to illuminate the target language of the day's objective. The downside of this adaptive skill is that the learners are continual test subjects as each teacher creates and tries out the new materials. This necessity of independently creating materials to execute organizational and/or learner objectives places a tremendous extra burden of time and often out-of-pocket expenses on already poorly compensated education professionals. On a more positive note, however, this is one of the most exciting, challenging and creative-thinking benefits of teaching at this level, at least until the publishing world catches up.

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) www.casas.org is one of a limited number of nationally and state approved accountability tools for adult education.

It provides a set of validated standardized tests that are used by most of the adult schools in the metropolitan area where this study was conducted. Student levels are often described in conversations between educational providers by the level of test the learner is currently taking (e.g.: 81R) and by the most recent score achieved: 153 for beginning literacy up to 236 for advanced literacy. Tests are expensive, content is dated (although currently being revised), and the illustrations rarely have counterparts in learners' day to day lives. Difficulties also exist with the mechanics of the test, difficulties that a Western educated individual would probably never notice. The test requires learners to fill in a circle (sometimes on a different sheet of paper), which assumes the test-taker knows which part of the box is the question, assumes the test-taker knows that the implied question is "What is the same?", and assumes that the test-taker knows that only one circle ought to be selected. The culturally specific and outdated line drawings, which are also often found in curriculum texts, are inscrutable to many low-literacy students, (Hvitfeldt, 1985). Since the test format is often incomprehensible, the assessment of what English the students may actually have already acquired can go unmeasured. This is usually sorted out by the teachers after the students attend their first class. The more flexible schools allow for movement of the student to the appropriate level, but some administrations insist that the learners first attain the "proper" score prior to advancing or being placed in a lower level. This tension results in frustration and time wasted for the teachers and, more importantly, the learners.

However, since government funding criteria as established through the National Reporting System is dependent on this language of CASAS scores for measuring of

community-based school performance, this is the measurement used in this area, and for funding reasons, cannot be avoided.

Considering the elements discussed above, it becomes readily apparent that teaching low-literacy English Language Learners (ELLs) successfully requires a great degree of flexibility and creativity on the part of the instructor. Sporadic attendance, multi-level classrooms and the dearth of suitable curriculum materials lead to challenges not generally found in the oft-studied K-12 environment. The harsh dissonance between the real life language skills taught in the classroom and the unrelated maneuvers required on the federally mandated tests which provide funding for the school add another layer of difficulty to the task for both the learners and the instructors.

Teachers of the Course

In the process of selecting the teachers for this study, initial consideration was given to native Karen individuals who had English proficiency and a teaching background. It was later determined that to better simulate the experiences of the ELLs in the classrooms, teachers without English proficiency would be better suited to this study. Reasons for this choice included: participants would be relatively limited in the clarifying questions they could ask, adult English language learners are often subjected to a variety of levels of professionalism among the instructors they encounter so previous teaching experience was not critical, and the teachers of the course coming from a more orally-based culture would possibly offer a range of teaching strategies that might be unfamiliar to the participants.

Two S'gaw Karen women from the lowest-level English class were selected and they agreed to participate. Both had been students at the school for two years and had not advanced past the beginning level. Both were very comfortable in the school environment and although not advancing to the high-beginning level, attended school regularly and worked diligently. The researcher met with the women, and through a native Karen interpreter, they were told about the goals of the class. They were given free choice of content and style, and offered the support of copy machines and overhead cameras as needed. The researcher explained that the main point of the classes was to duplicate the learner experience of having a language teacher who can't clarify content and answer questions in the students' home language. The researcher also explained that the overall goal was for the teachers to understand better what learners experience and become better English teachers because of this opportunity. They were given an opportunity to ask questions about the project and assured of continued support by the interpreter before and after the class for any assistance they might require from the researcher. The interpreter (a member of the school's social services staff) also made herself available for any emotional support should the endeavor prove stressful for the instructors. The amount and timing of financial remuneration for the instructors' work was also detailed.

Data Collection Techniques

There were three primary data collection techniques used for this research: introspective questionnaires, journaling, and field notes from observation. These are further explained in the section below with consideration given for each tools strengths and shortcomings. Examples are provided in noted Appendices.

Data collection technique 1—Introspective Questionnaires

Introspective questionnaires used as a qualitative data collection device gather participants' reflections on the meta-processes they are experiencing as they participate in an event (Gass & Mackey, 2000). A sample of the weekly form provided to participants is located in Appendix F.

Introspective questionnaires may be verbal (to be recorded by the researcher), or written, as was selected for the format in this study. There are three main categories for this sort of reporting that are used in second language research: self-report, self-observation, and self-revelation. Self-report allows subjects to describe their overall approach to the task, as in what type of learner they consider themselves to be. In self-observation (chosen for this study) participants report on what they have just experienced during a specific or bounded event. Self-revelation reporting involves the subject thinking aloud about her or his thought processes (Cohen, 1998).

A self-observation introspective questionnaire is particularly well-suited for this endeavor as it allows the researcher access to unobservable processes within each teacher-learner. Another strength contributing to the accuracy of this format is the short time-lag between the experience itself and the written record of it (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

One potential problem with this strategy is that its reliability and validity can't be easily measured. This study addresses this possibility by having a variety of teachers reporting in the same manner, and by having the researcher witnessing the behaviors of the participants during the five Karen language class sessions.

Introspective questionnaires are a useful tool for the qualitative researcher who requires information about the interior experiences of the subjects. The additional data that this tool contributes is critical to assisting the addressing of the research questions presented: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Data collection technique 2—Field Notes from Observation

Field notes from observation, as a data collection technique, provide thoughtful descriptions of activities without influencing the events. They are a systematic witnessing of actions, interactions, and reactions of participants in an event (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The field notes are generated as the observation of the targeted phenomenon is occurring. Therefore, they represent a firsthand encounter in contrast to an interview which takes place in a space created and designated to capture the reactions of the participants after the event has occurred (Merriam, 2009).

Observations are a commonly used research tool in language learning classrooms (Mackey & Gass, 2005). To be used effectively, the researcher must clearly define her role and the limits of her participation in the event itself. It is also critical that the researcher is clear about which targeted data is to be observed and documented. Best practices indicate that paying attention to a limited number of selected points will assist the researcher in discerning the difference between pertinent details and unnecessary trivia.

According to Merriam (2009), observation is the best technique to use when the researcher has an opportunity to view an event as it is occurring. The in-the-moment collection of data allows for less reliance on what the writer James Baldwin (1979) has called 'the treachery of memory' as time lapses before interviews can be conducted.

The potential problems with observations must be considered. Has the researcher selected the most optimal details to observe? Which method of recording the information will produce the most clarity? How will the researcher ensure that the recording methods are not disruptive to the event or in any way influence the actions of the participants?

Field notes from observation is a common tool in the holistic focus of qualitative research, and works best when the research questions guide the selection of the most relevant data, in this instance: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Data collection technique 3—Journaling

The third data collection technique chosen for this study is journaling. While there is comparatively a small amount of research on reflective journals as data collection devices, it is a method that is commonly used by qualitative researchers to capture the internal, therefore invisible, processes which can be experienced by the researcher and/or the participants (Ortlipp, 2008). Journaling, in the context of qualitative research, is described by Marshall and Rossman (2014, p. 70) as a process of collecting "a subjective account of an event from the point of view of the writer, who may be the researcher or a

subject of the research." Marshall and Rossman also note that the journaling process may occur once or multiple times throughout a study.

The challenges and limitations of journals are not unlike those of interviews. Journals represent a singular point of view, and can also be rather cumbersome as they often require transcription.

The next section of this chapter discusses aspects of the data collection procedure including participants and materials as well as a brief description of the content of the course. Next, specific descriptions and samples of the data collection devices and the rationale for using them are presented.

Procedure

Participants

Participants in this study were kept together as one group for the classroom instruction. This was partly to mimic the classroom setting, partly for logistical convenience, but also so the researcher could observe their interactions. It was anticipated that the teachers would be relying on each other to negotiate meaning as the teacher presented content. This activity (which also occurs in the ELL classroom) is commonly observed in a monolingual teaching environment, and the researcher fully intended to have the participants experience the importance of this interaction.

At the start of every session, each participant was given a feedback form (see Appendix F) on which to record impressions and experiences of the class session itself as it was occurring.

The researcher observed and took notes on the dynamics of the classroom environment throughout each of the five one-hour sessions. A sample of the Researcher Data Collection tool is provided in Appendix G. She also utilized a tape recorder to collect the post-class "decompressing" time of teacher chatter at the end of each class.

Materials and Content

The materials required for this study were simple and readily available: a language classroom with chairs, tables, white board, markers, a projector camera, and content selected by the instructors. Additional items specific to this study were the weekly in-class questionnaire and the audio recorder used by the researcher to collected data of the post-class discussion. Materials used to collect the data are detailed in Data Collection Instruments and Rationale found in the next section.

Course Content Description. Participants attended sessions that were held on Wednesday afternoons for an hour and a half for five consecutive weeks. One hour was allowed for class instruction. Thirty minutes were allotted for the participants to finalize completion of the weekly in-class questionnaire and then to participate in the audio-recorded post-event discussion. The course followed a similar content mix as is found in many Beginning ESL classes. (see Appendix A, MORE School curriculum) The sequence and the material presented are summarized in Table 3.2. Since the participants were learning an unfamiliar alphabet and numerals, the content that could be covered in this period of time was limited, just as it is in Beginning ESL classes.

TABLE 3.2

Content of Karen Language Course by Week Number

Week 1	Greetings: Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good night. How are you?
Week 2	Alphabet, writing learners' names in Karen.
Week 3	Days of the week, months of the year; Vocabulary: Umbrella, coat, variety of animals; Alphabet review.
Week 4	Alphabet; Combination of vowels and consonants; Alphabet song.
Week 5	Where are you from? I am from…; Writing learners' names, My name is…; Vocabulary: Bathtub, soap, toilet paper, toilet, faucet.

Data Collection Instruments and Rationale

Data collected for this study was produced in written form by the teacher-participants and by the researcher. Descriptions of the varying tools used to collect this data are discussed below. Appendix referrals are provided for the reader to view sample copies of the tools

Pre-intervention questionnaire. The pre-intervention questionnaire was given to the teacher-participants one week prior to the beginning of the six-session event. This form was provided via email. The questionnaire functioned as a survey to determine the background and experiences of individual participants which may have influenced this learning experience. The pre-intervention questionnaire also gathered information regarding the participants' expectations regarding the classes and their predictions about

the impact these classes might have on their future teaching practices. A copy of the pre-intervention questionnaire is available in Appendix E.

TABLE 3.3

Data Collection Instruments and Rationale

Pre-intervention questionnaire	Gather previous language learning experiences.
Immediate feedback tool	Collect in-the-moment reactions to and insights regarding the event.
Intermediary feedback tools:	Collect between class musings and insights.
wiggio.com / paper journals	Participants' choice of one or both options.
Post-intervention questionnaire	Self-evaluations of impact of the event and suggestions for future events.
Audio recordings	Collect data on discussions between participants immediately occurring at class conclusion.
Researcher's field notes	In-the-moment recording of classroom dynamics and participant behaviors.

Immediate Feedback Tool. The immediate feedback tool was provided to every teacher-participant as each class session began. This was a paper form. Instructions were given to take notes of feelings and perceptions of the event as it occurred and also any insights into their own teaching practices resulting from being on the student side of the interaction. The intent of the weekly questionnaire was to capture the in-the-moment feelings and observations about the actual language learning experience. Participants

jotted down notes throughout the class and gave the questionnaires to the researcher at the end of each class. A copy of the Immediate Feedback Tool is provided in Appendix F.

Intermediary Feedback Tools. In order to collect thoughts, reactions and insights the teachers experience between class sessions, intermediary feedback tools were used. Participants were given the option of paper journals, but were strongly encouraged to use a provided wiggio.com site to collect their reflections of the experience between class times. Wiggio.com is a work-coordinating tool developed by two Cornell University seniors to assist students as they collaborate in groups. This site also functioned as a discussion board to provide participants opportunities to discuss the experience with each other and/or to clarify and study what they had learned the previous session.

Post-intervention Questionnaire. Post-intervention questionnaires were provided to the participants at the end of the final class session. These focused more strongly on gathering data about the overall experience of the intervention, and particular changes that the participants believed they might add to their personal teaching practices. A paper form (see Appendix H) was distributed at the close of the final class with a self-addressed stamped envelope for mailing. The researcher's e-mail address and phone number were provided for additional avenues of feedback and insights to be collected for a two-week period after the conclusion of the intervention.

Researcher's Field Notes. The researcher positioned herself at the back of the room and handwrote notes of what she observed during the class. This included writing down participant comments, noticing participants' non-verbal behaviors, documenting

material covered by the instructors, and collecting of samples of handouts provided as instruction aids. These observational notes are interwoven throughout the text of Chapters Four and Five and are not cited separately. A transcription of Week #1's field notes are presented in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

Because this research does not appear to have clear counterparts in the literature currently available, the decision was made to use **grounded theory** as a framework for analyzing the gathered data. As Davis (1995) notes, results of qualitative studies are frequently criticized for not being easily applicable to a generalized population. However, she goes on to point out that qualitative studies do offer the advantage of opening an understanding of a very specific situation. This then has the possibility of being transferred to a wide range of social and cultural applications based on the particular perceptions, understandings and needs of the consumer of the research.

Grounded theory demands that the researcher build from scratch a relevant model which will explain itself by first describing how the various parts relate and then by providing a sort of a model that may be useful for future research endeavors (Davis, 1995). Generally, grounded theory attempts to bring greater focus to a topic by utilizing tools such as structured interviews, observations, and systematic analysis. Not only does this method allow researchers an opportunity to study the generated data from a variety of perspectives, it also opens the possibility for the data to become more of a driving force of the analysis. The goal is to develop a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena being examined (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Throughout the process, I continually looked for emerging themes and utilized a system that might be called a form of cyclical coding to label my observations in the data throughout and also following the data collection period. This allowed me to notice patterns in my participants' experiences and reflections, and to then further refine my findings as new data were added with each class section.

Verification of Data

Internal validity of this study was ensured in three main ways: triangulation of data, peer-examination/review of data, and rich, thick descriptions. Establishing reliability is an important priority for qualitative studies, due to the highly personal and non-numeric characteristics of the data collected. Dependability and consistency of data are key concerns.

The first method, *triangulation* of the data, has its roots in the fields of navigation and land surveying. Its strength as a validity strategy comes from the practice of using two or three measurements to create convergence on a site (Merriam, 2009). For uses in qualitative research, Denzin (1978) offered four different potentials for triangulation: the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators and/or multiple theories. This study depended on multiple sources of data and multiple collection methods to bolster validity. Triangulation as a method assists in confirming emerging findings.

The second process chosen to ensure validity is *peer review and examination*. This strategy involves discussions with mentors and colleagues as the process of the study is developed, executed, and analyzed. It is of great use for establishing meaning

and congruency of findings and preliminary interpretations (Merriam, 2009). The researcher in this study was able to call upon a solid network of low-literacy educators and research professionals to carefully examine all phases of the project from conception to completion.

The third method of validity assurance selected was *rich, thick descriptions.* This method entails providing abundant, pertinent narrative in order to provide sufficient context so the readers of the work will be able to discern parallels and applications to their own research or professional experience (Merriam, 2009). This strategy is particularly suited to a phenomenological case study in the LESLLA field because of the limited amount of research currently established. The plentiful descriptive material regarding the setting and the open-ended collection of individual teacher-participant reflections allows for connection to context on a more accessible level for each reader to decide if the findings are transferrable.

Ethics

In order to conduct this study in an ethical manner, several measures were implemented. First, informed consent was established in two ways. The researcher discussed the goals and the structure of the project with various low-literacy adult ELL instructors in order to generate interest and commitment for participation. The teachers who were eventually selected as the study group were also required to sign a consent form (See Appendix D) which outlined the purpose and the parameters of the research as well as expectations for the research participants. Participants were able to leave the study at any time of their choosing if they became unable or unwilling to continue.

Because all of the participants are well-educated professionals who are currently employed in the ELL field, they easily comprehended the goals and extent of involvement that the intervention would entail. Their vulnerability in this environment could be reasonably assumed to be non-existent. Participants, in essence were self-selected based on their enthusiasm and curiosity. Some simply wanted to support the researcher while others indicated a genuine desire to challenge and possibly transform some aspect of their teaching practices.

The teacher-learners were informed of their freedom to discontinue their participation in the study at any time without suffering personal or professional repercussions. They were also made aware that their names or any identifying information would not appear in the published results.

This endeavor to understand how low-level adult ESL instructors perceive the impact of a short series of monolingual Karen classes on their teaching practices relied on tools intended to access the thought processes and the strategies of the teacher-learners: pre- and post- event questionnaires, weekly questionnaires, and journaling. These were described in detail earlier in this chapter.

Background of the Researcher

This research is being done as part of my completion of an MA ESL at Hamline University in Saint Paul, MN. I began my graduate studies in 2009, six months after becoming a volunteer tutor through training with the Minnesota Literacy Council.

I am an adult ELL teacher at a small, non-profit community-based organization in this urban area. My current position is as a full-time beginning adult ELL instructor

which is referred to as Level 0/ Level 1 at our school. Examples of the content covered in my class are found in Appendix I. My previous position at this same site was two-fold: fifteen hours a week teaching intermediate/advanced low-literacy, and five hours per week as a digital literacy specialist creating the curriculum and teaching all of the six levels that the school serves. For the four years prior to that position, I worked as a substitute adult ESL teacher for four different community schools in the metropolitan area. I taught Beginning through Intermediate/Advanced, but I particularly enjoyed the challenges and flexibility required in Beginning ESL.

I am passionate about teaching English to adult refugees. I am acutely aware of the limited time they have for learning, and the urgency of their need for language skills to participate in the basics of adult life in a new country. I am always looking for more expedient, pleasant, and efficient ways of teaching, and I am constantly seeking out what our field may be missing that could further the effectiveness of our practices. This is the motivation that fuels the questions of the current study.

I bring clear biases and strong personal beliefs to my work on this research. My bias is, of course, that I anticipate that the participants will in fact be impacted by this instruction in Karen. I expect that they will likely realize that they are teaching too much, too quickly. I think that they will gain empathy and additional understanding of their learners' task. I hope that this experience will help them to gain a more patient perspective.

I deeply believe that as a field we need to step outside of our traditional training in second language acquisition, which though valuable, is based firmly on childhood

learning or on the L2 acquisition of already literate and/or strongly educated adults. Adult refugee learners usually have such an abbreviated window of time to learn English before they are required to take employment, or before they no longer have child care assistance. I am looking for short-cuts. I am looking for a complete change of my perspective in order to make English more easily learnable from the perspective of my students. I relish the challenge of even developing the right questions to ask.

I have tremendous confidence in the imaginative talents, the on-the-fly assessments, and the perfect-for-the-moment solutions that my colleagues create every day. I expect the usual reactions to a completely monolingual class: go slower, less content, more repetition. What I am hoping to instigate and to document are some eureka moments of clarity that will impact the efficiency of our methods. I want to discover what our field may be missing that could further the effectiveness of our practices. This is the motivation that fuels the questions of the current study: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the practice of qualitative research, as well as clarifying information regarding the phenomenological case study being presented. Context for the importance of this research was provided by further examination of the classroom environment in which the participants teach. It described the participants of the study, the instructor, the class content chosen, and the setting where the study occurred.

The background of the researcher was given. The pre-test and post-test along with the methods and materials I used to collect the data were exhibited and discussed.

In the next chapter, the results of the data collection are discussed. Possible implications, limitations, and further research needs are offered.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Overview

This chapter provides the results generated during the event timeline as well as data gathered one month after the completion of the event. These data are presented and organized into the overall categories of Experience and Impact with subcategories provided for the themes which were generated in the service of answering the research questions identified for this inquiry: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?* The final section of the chapter synthesizes the accrued data and prepares the reader for the conclusions presented in Chapter Five.

The current study took place over a five-week period in a classroom of an adult community-based school serving area refugees located in a mid-size metropolitan area. The participants were nine low-level adult ELL instructors. The teachers of this Karen language class were three native-Karen speakers, one who taught one class, one who taught two classes, and one who taught all five of the one-hour monolingual classes held. Five avenues of data collection converged to generate the results of this inquiry: researcher-observation, in-class writings by participants, between-class reflective

journaling by participants, audio-recordings of post-class discussions, and a post-event questionnaire. The results generated by these five data collection methods are discussed in this chapter through the lens of the research questions which the aggregated data illuminated: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Themes Generated in Service of the Research Questions

The written and recorded observations and comments of the researcher and the teacher-participants were transcribed and printed. Each data point was then separated into like categories, and themes emerged. These themes were then divided according to the research question they most clearly addressed. In Table 4.1, themes most applicable to research question one, *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers?* were grouped under the heading Experience. Themes responding more closely with research question two, *What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?* were listed in Table 4.1 under the heading Impact. Each theme is next expanded as a subheading as the chapter proceeds. The results of the post-event questionnaire are configured separately after the presentation of the event data. These results are likewise separated into Experience and Impact categories.

TABLE 4.1

Themes generated during and between class sessions

Experience	**Impact**
• Task Difficulty • Attendance/Forgetting to Bring Notes • Dependence on Peers • Teacher-Talk Confusion • Learner Engagement/Disengagement	• Insights into Student Classroom Behaviors • Considered Changes to Teaching Practice • Reinforcement of Learned Educational Principles • Impact on Teacher-Talk

Experience

The first research question is: *What is the experience of a short-term Karen language immersion learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers?* The classroom intervention events sought to gather salient data points as experienced by the teacher-participants. These data gathered what the participants noticed as they assumed the role of students in a monolingual, non-Roman alphabetic language learning environment. This was an exercise in empathy as well as in perspective. Questions foremost in the researcher's mind included: How will the participants interact? How will they react when the teachers do not understand that they are asking a question? What will their response be to numerous corrections to their attempted pronunciations? How will their frustrations be expressed? Five themes of what the participants and the researcher noticed in this process are presented in Table 4.1: a renewed appreciation for the

difficulty of the task, empathy for outside events impacting attendance, the value of student-to-student classroom talk, the impact of extraneous/incomprehensible teacher classroom-language, and the experience of and reasons for engaging/disengaging as a learner.

This inquiry resulted in a significant increase in empathy for students, as evidenced by every participant's response in every questionnaire and in each discussion. Adult ELL instructors seem to be quite naturally empathetic as they interact in their classrooms and one can project that they also view themselves as being empathetic. The experience of this research event, however, strengthened and refined this empathy in a key way: as a result of direct language learning experience. Each teacher mentioned a renewed appreciation for the way their students engage in a similar situation for five hours a day, five days a week. They were quite cognizant that the nervousness, stress and anxiety they, as participants, were experiencing was, in comparison, a mere one hour a day, once a week. Such awareness ties in directly with research question one: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience for a group of low-level adult ELL teachers?*

In this section, five salient themes (see Table 4.1) emerged illustrating particular aspects of this empathetic experience. These are presented via direct quotations transcribed from the variety of data collection tools.

Task Difficulty

From the moment the first class session started, the teacher-participants gained a renewed appreciation for the difficulty of learning a new language. The sharp contrasts

between the Karen and English alphabets (See Appendix B) presented a formidable challenge from the beginning moments of instruction. The fact that the teachers only spoke in Karen and could not answer questions created anxiety levels in the classroom that were immediate and audible.

"I have no idea what they are writing about on the board." (week 1, in-class questionnaire)

"I had to totally rely on my ears to work with pronunciation. It surprised me how hard it was to do this." (week 2, between-class journal)

"How will we get from mimicking sounds to actually understanding?" (week 1, in-class questionnaire)

"Listening and not understanding is very stress-inducing." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"Some learners have previous knowledge of Karen. I feel like I am behind before I ever started. I'll bet some of my students feel the same way." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"How hard it is to read/spell without knowing the alphabet. Maybe I should review it in my class." (week 1, in-class questionnaire)

"I need a lot more time to study the shapes of the letters." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I wonder if my students can even <u>hear</u> all of the sounds I am teaching. I seem to be failing at mimicking the sounds she is making." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"How similar everything looks and sounds." (week 4, between-class journal)

"Oh my gosh! We are all fossilized!" (week 3, post-class discussion)

"If I really needed to learn Karen to survive in a new environment, I would be in deep trouble. I wonder if some of my students feel this despair every day." (week 2, between-class journal)

"So stressful. You really realize how difficult it is. When I teach, I think I am going at a slow pace… I'm not." (week 1, post-class discussion)

"I have a lot going on in my life, and I was not able to practice at home like I have done every other time I had a language class in my class. This reinforces for me the critical need for emphasized repetition in my classroom. Most all of my students have too much going on in their lives to be able to practice much at home either." (week 3, between-class journal)

As evidenced by the above quotes, teacher-participants were immediately and vocally taken aback by the reality of how difficult the adult language learner's task is, particularly in a monolingual classroom. The panic over not knowing even what the topic was, the failures at duplicating sounds that the instructors were teaching, and the lack of hope at attaining any success in this endeavor created an immediate wonder at and sympathy for their students. The difficulty of the task itself was evident. This difficulty was then compounded by being late to class, missing class, and forgetting the previous week's notes at home. The next section, Attendance/Class Preparedness presents the teacher-participants' voices as they struggled with their outside lives interfering with their studies.

Attendance/Class Preparedness

Students in the adult ELL classroom often have sporadic attendance due to a myriad of appointments and family obligations. Getting children to the bus on time, or being dependent on a ride to school often results in lateness over which they are powerless. The participants in this study had the attendance stressors of arriving directly from their own classrooms from various areas of the metro during rush hour, rainstorms creating traffic congestions, and some construction that began close to the study site which disrupted previous parking options. This subsection expresses the anxiety and worries the participants experienced as circumstances of their lives interfered with their attendance and their ability to remember to bring their previous class notes.

"I arrived ten minutes late and I fell behind right away. Others got a jumpstart on the alphabet, and I had NO clue." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I forgot my notebook and I felt kind of lost without my previous notes." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I am feeling nervous about missing the first day of class. I feel like I might get left behind very easily if this lesson builds off of the last lesson." (week 2, between-class journal)

"I arrived late due to construction blocking the road and difficulty finding a new place to park. I really did not miss much, but I felt a little off." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I missed just one class, and I feel so far behind. My students have so many appointments and family obligations. It must be so hard for them to feel a part of things." (week 3, post-class discussion)

"I have to miss the next class. I'll be even further behind." (week 2, between-class journal)

"I was late today and was immediately overwhelmed and lost." (week 2, between-class journal)

ELL teachers are accustomed to student attendance being sporadic as family and life obligations arise. Teachers often talk together about the difficulty of maintaining curriculum continuity and progress while trying to accommodate students who miss class or forget their supplies. The above section makes clear that the teacher-participants experienced a profound increase of understanding of how *student* anxiety is compounded by missing class, being late, forgetting notes, and unforeseen obstacles to attendance. The next section reveals the undeniable dependence the teacher-participants had on one another in order to glean any sort of useable meaning from the teaching event occurring around them.

Dependence on Classmates and First Language Use

ELL classrooms can be noisy environments. In times past, it wasn't unusual to hear a teacher admonishing, "English only". Some teachers have wondered what their students were talking to each other about, and whether it or not it was on the topic of the lesson. This Karen language learning experience unequivocally clarified the necessity of the teacher-participants' reliance on their peers to comprehend even a little of what was

happening in the classroom. The researcher recorded several instances of the participants expressing concern for the student they had who were, in fact, "language-islands" in their classrooms.

"As students, we were chatting in English constantly just trying to figure out what the teacher was teaching us. That is probably what my students are talking about in the classroom, too." (week 2, between-class journal)

"We only caught on after we heard a few English translations by other participants." (week 1, in-class questionnaire)

"We did a lot of talking amongst ourselves to figure things out." (week 1, in-class questionnaire)

"My table-mate's recent experience studying Karen was highly valuable." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I felt lucky that all of the other learners were English speakers. I can't imagine what it would have been like to be the only speaker of my language in this classroom. I really relied on the group as a whole figuring out what the teachers were trying to teach us." (week 3, between-class journal)

The above statements vividly demonstrate that teacher-participants' perceptions of classroom chatter by students were radically changed by this monolingual Karen learning experience. They learned that reliance on fellow students was unquestionably required; it was not optional. Individual progress depended on group collaboration. The teachers uniformly noted that they never stopped talking to each other, and they

demonstrated greater concern for students of theirs who were the sole speakers of their home language in the class. The next section looks at how the teacher-participants experienced language used by instructors which seemed to be explanatory, but was in fact incomprehensible.

Teacher-Talk Confusion

Extraneous teacher-talk in a low-level classroom is a common challenge for ELL instructors. The urge is to "explain" events and tasks to the learners, but the result is generally just noise to students who do not have enough language knowledge to even recognize that it is an explanation that is being offered. A related challenge is offering the new material in a steady and consistently repetitive manner. The inclination if a student does not understand a concept, in any other sort of classroom, is to offer the information from a slightly different perspective or with new phrasing. In the ELL classroom, this strategy only burdens the learners with yet more inscrutable language. The ability to thoughtfully and consistently restrict the amount of explanatory language offered is a skill that most low-level ELL teachers work on continually. This research event gave the teacher-participants a renewed awareness of the extra burden teacher-talk can create.

"I didn't know what to do, and I had no way to ask. I knew she was talking to me, but I didn't know what she was saying, so I just kept looking at my paper. I think my students do this more than I think. They just pretend they don't hear me, or they just say no because they don't understand what I am asking them to do." (week 3, post-class discussion)

"Getting the directions took awhile. I finally understand the pattern, I feel less anxious." (week 4, in-class questionnaire)

"The teacher did not seem to be consistent with how she explained the alphabet, so I think it was more confusing than it needed to be." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"At times there was too much teacher-talk. I felt like I wanted to or should understand everything she was saying. It was overwhelming to me." (week 4, in-class questionnaire)

"What seems systematic to the teacher may not be systematic to the students." (week 4, in-class questionnaire)

"The teachers used too much new language and spoke too fast." (week 4, in-class questionnaire)

The data presented above makes evident the additional burden for the learner that extraneous, or simply not-understood, teacher-talk creates. Participants noted their own bafflement and discomfort when they didn't understand what they were being asked to do, and also when there was a significant amount of what sounded like teaching, but was all in language they did not comprehend. As noted, this is an area ELL teachers frequently discuss as a challenge, but the direct evidence they experienced in this study renewed their commitment to strive to limit this tendency. The next section presents the experience of learner engagement and learner disengagement which startled some of these enthusiastic teacher-participants.

Learner Engagement/Disengagement

One aspect of this experience at which participants expressed surprise was the phenomena of learner disengagement. In discussions with the researcher, several participants stated that they expected their interest and enthusiasm for the class to keep them engaged in the learning process. As experienced classroom learners, the feeling of despair when disengaged from the activity surrounding them was an unexpected insight into their students' experiences.

"I started to lose interest as I became overwhelmed." (week 1, in-class questionnaire)

"I have no engagement right now. Nothing makes sense to me. I am wondering if I am learning-disabled!" (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I was really nervous when I didn't know the routine of what she doing next. I mostly just sat there and tried to keep from getting more anxious." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"Other learners seem to be catching on; I am not. I understand now (since I did it) why my students who aren't getting the lesson lose focus." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"The class lost focus when we didn't follow or understand things." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"I felt like I was not able to follow much of what was going on in the class. I was having trouble paying attention. Now I know, not just intellectually, but on an experiential level why my most-challenged students tune out instead of trying to pay attention and learn. I know how that feels now." (week 5, between-class journal)

Experiencing the negative emotions of "checking out" while the class proceeded was an illuminating surprise for many of the teacher-participants. While previously a few of the teachers thought that their students often lost focus due to extraneous circumstances, which can certainly be the case, the teachers also became aware that falling behind in a lesson is likely a frequent cause of this same disconnection. This experience resulted in teacher-participants giving stronger consideration to checking in with and/or providing extra support to learners who disengage.

The sum of these most representative samples of the participants' comments clearly demonstrates that this non-Roman alphabet, monolingually-taught class was an experience that deeply challenged the current thinking and perspectives of the teacher-participants. The data presented in this section responded to the first research question: *What is the experience of a short-term Karen language immersion learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers?* The next section, *Impact,* presents observations and insights specifically speaking to the effect teachers projected that this experience would have on their teaching practice. This data corresponds directly to the second research question: *What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

Impact

The second research question is: *What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?* The data collected in the service of this question is the heart of the intention of this research endeavor. As a qualitative researcher, questions around this experience's impact were

constantly in mind. How might teaching practices be impacted? Was this a transformative event? What was affirmed in current teaching practices? What might be abandoned? Do the teachers anticipate viewing some of their students' classroom behaviors differently? Were new ideas generated specifically for the low-level adult language classroom? Table 4.1 illustrates the four themes which emerged: new insights into classroom behaviors, consideration of modifications to future teaching practices, reinforcement of previously learned education principles, and awareness of the distraction and the futility of extraneous teacher-talk.

The impact this research event had upon the anticipated future teaching practices of the participating ELL teachers was readily evident. Adult ELL instructors tend to be enthusiastic and engaged practitioners, continually seeking new and better ways of teaching their students so that the learning process can be more efficient and less anxiety-provoking. The direct experience of learning Karen in a monolingual environment propelled the teacher-participants to consider a variety of changes to their current practices. The event also reinforced previously learned educational principles, giving some of those principles more pertinence to daily practices. This section connects directly with research question two: *What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

In this section, four themes (see Table 4.1) are presented illuminating selected insights and changed perspectives which occurred throughout this language immersion experience. These are presented through direct quotations from participants transcribed from the variety of data collection tools. The themes illustrated in this section are: insights into classroom behaviors, considered changes to teaching practices,

reinforcement of learned educational principles, and an awareness of the futility of teacher-talk. The first to be presented is Insights into Student Classroom Behaviors which discusses ways the teachers changed their judgments as a direct result of the increased empathy generated by their participation in this study.

Insights into Student Classroom Behaviors

Throughout the five session event, the researcher observed and noticed many instances of the participants exclaiming: "Now I know why my students do (fill in the blank) so often! I am doing it, too!" This subsection presents a sample of the collected perceptions of the teacher-participants as they gained a new understanding for classroom behaviors that previously either confused or sometimes caused them annoyance in their own classrooms.

"For the farm animals worksheet, I realized I was writing my translations in my notebook instead of writing my messy notes on the handout. I have seen my students choose to do this, too. I used to wonder why they didn't just write on the handout that I had provided." (week 3, between-class journal)

"I feel that if she had asked me to read the alphabet, I would have said 'no'. I wasn't even close to being comfortable with doing that yet. And that happens in class, where you'll have a student refuse to do something. And so that's why. When we encounter that with our students, it's because they feel like I feel right now." (week 3, post-class discussion)

"When you do not have a lot of knowledge of what is happening, you do feel that everything written on the whiteboard is important, even if you do not understand it. My

students often insist on copying (sometimes painstakingly) everything I write on the board. This makes more sense to me now." (week 1, between-class journal)

"The symbols can be confusing in their similarity. Like our students mix up 'u' and 'n' or 'E' and 'F'." (week 3, between-class journal)

"I am going to stop being annoyed when students bring materials from other classes that they have had. I found myself referring to mine [materials from a concurrent Karen class]." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I kept wondering 'What's the task? Where are we going with this vocabulary? It's great, but where is it going?' I wonder if our students are also getting something different in our classrooms than what they expect. Sometimes my students try to redirect me; I found myself doing this with our teacher. It's like, 'You are trying to teach me this stuff that you think is important, but I have my own goals; let me steer you toward what I want to learn.'" (week 4, post-class discussion)

This new understanding of student behaviors was one of the most profoundly impactful insights that the teacher-participants reported. This section presented a sample of those perceptions of the teacher-participants as they gained a new understanding for classroom behaviors that previously either confused or sometimes caused them annoyance in their own classrooms. The above quotes make clear the relief and joy the participants experienced as they came to new understandings that deeply changed their perceptions of and reactions to commonly witnessed classroom behaviors. In the following section, teacher-participants ponder and express changes that they are

considering, as well as modifications that they immediately implemented upon gaining clarity.

Considered Changes to Teaching Practice

The opportunity for participants to experience a more direct empathy with their students' experience of the language classroom was one of the driving forces in the design of this project. After the generation of that heightened empathy, the hope and expectation was that it would cause teacher-participants to consider changes to their teaching practice. This subsection presents examples of the most common ways the teacher-participants were thinking about these changes immediately following the conclusion of the final class. Ways that they noticed that they actually did change their practice (a month after the conclusion of the event) are presented through the post-event questionnaire results offered later in this chapter.

"I need to respect more when my students aren't ready to speak. I found that I really couldn't say much to my teachers when they called on me." (week 5, between-class journal)

"It is always good to review the basics. I could have used the full five weeks on the alphabet alone, maybe more. So I need to stop thinking that working on the alphabet is boring or too easy." (week 5, between-class journal)

"More repetition, more 'silent period' time. More consideration that students may want to learn different things, for example, I was more interested in learning phrases; some of my peers cared more about learning to write." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I will try harder to accommodate struggling students in my classroom when I see them disengaging from the process. I understand now why they do that." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I need to write bigger on the white board." (week 1, between-class journal)

"I normally think of pronunciation as a one-on-one activity. I now see how it can be helpful to work on pronunciation with more than one student." (week 2, between-class journal)

"I have started building silent-time for content absorption into my teaching very consciously." (week 4, between-class journal)

"Student choice and what learners want to learn right away seems more important to me now." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"I realize now how important it is to connect with students who arrive late." (week 2, between-class journal)

"Less is more! I will check and monitor more frequently. Also I will provide quiet moments for absorption." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"Slow down!" (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"I am going to start writing larger on the white board. It made a big difference to me to be able to see the details of the Karen alphabet letters." (week 1, between-class journal)

"I need to make sure to find some small way to engage every single learner, every single day. It is so easy to get disengaged in a lesson when others are learning faster than me." (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

"I am going to teach blending consonants and vowels much more slowly than I do now." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"I am going to continue using lots and lots of pictures!" (week 5, between-class journal)

"There was too much energy spent on reading before we were ready for it. I will use a lot less text, go slower, and offer a smaller amount of content." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"Learning a language is a much slower process than I was acknowledging in my teaching practices. I am teaching slower, with more repetition, and I am watching out for student disengagement as a signal that processing time is needed." (week 5, between-class journal)

"This Karen class was a very valuable experience for me! Because I personally often wanted the teacher to go slower or to explain (in English!) the 'big picture', I realized over and over that I must go slower when I teach. While I was teaching my class today, I was aware that by focusing on what felt like one small thing, the students had more success and ease of pronunciation." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I felt anxious so often in this class. What can I do to help my students to be less anxious? What can I do to notice when my students might be anxious?" (week 2, in-class questionnaire)

The related experiences of the teacher-participants considered in this section clearly demonstrate an intention to modify teaching practices. The particular changes they were considering throughout this event included: going slower, using less text, allowing for processing time, and being more conscious of visuals. The next section presents evidence of the participants acknowledging the value of previous professional coursework and how the principles posited there became clearer through this direct experience as learners in the classroom

Reinforcement of Learned Educational Principles

The teacher-participants in this study were all highly educated with numerous years of teaching experience in their lives. Frequent expressions of "Oh, I remember learning about this principle", and "It's good to be reminded of how important (fill in the blank) is" were heard as the researcher observed the classroom. This inquiry shows the value of newly connecting the learning principles of this profession to the direct experience of being on the receiving end of the existence (or non-existence) of those practices in the classroom.

"This has informed my teaching by solidifying my practice of giving students abundant time to work with a limited set of new vocabulary." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I understand the reasons now why keeping lessons along the same theme is so important. It was really hard for me when topics were switching so quickly." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"This past Wednesday was quite fun for me, as I felt some progress in my personal Karen acquisition journey! I really appreciated the pace and the repetition. It sealed the deal

that I should continue to teach with both of those practices; I see the value of them firsthand." (week 4, between-class journal)

"I cover something like eight to ten words in a week and I'm constantly questioning myself. This affirms that is exactly what I need to be doing." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"In acquiring my MA, I learned about the 'silent period' for language learners, but I have never really acknowledged it in my classroom. After this experience, I realized how important this time for absorption and processing was for me." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I think it has solidified some things I already do such as having a routine, giving lots of practice time, and being choosy about how much and/or when I introduce new vocabulary." (week 5, between-class journal)

"It does make me realize how much review matters. I have been trying to teach myself to read Karen. I started taking a class, and now I have this class. They each started with the alphabet and each time I get something out of it that I didn't get the last time. I really appreciate the repetition. The teachers tend to go super-fast, like, 'It's the alphabet. It's super-easy. Why don't you know it yet?' Well, cuz it's a totally NEW alphabet. And I am an adult learner now. And I missed part of it. It does reinforce that maybe, as a teacher, I'm sick of reviewing, but probably they're not. It builds confidence. They are still learning. It's okay to repeat until I'm blue in the face." (week 3, post-class discussion)

"I really enjoyed the alphabet song. Sometimes I have worried that singing the ABC song is too childish. Not at all! It made it easier and fun to practice. I found it seriously useful." (week 4, between-class journal)

"I thought maybe I have been using too many pictures and that was somehow juvenile. Not so! Just having a picture of a bathtub and a matching word was so helpful." (week 5, between-class journal)

"I think I bore students with endless repetition, now I know – I don't!" (week 4, between-class journal)

This section provided examples of teacher-participants recognizing and re-committing to principles they had learned in their initial educational training. Teachers re-dedicated themselves to more conscientiously practicing key teaching ideals such as: classroom routine, theme consistency, limiting amounts of content and the value of songs and visuals. The next section briefly revisits the topic of teacher-talk, this time from the perspective of those who are engaging in it.

Awareness of the Futility of Extraneous Teacher-Talk

As discussed in the Experience section, extraneous teacher-talk created additional confusion and anxiety for the teacher-participants. In this subsection, teacher-participants express their heightened awareness of this occurrence and their intentions to curtail it as much as possible.

"Using the same verbiage day after day for classroom instructions is as important as the repetition of the content." (week 2, between-class journal)

"No need to teacher-talk. It can be really overwhelming to students." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

"I am much more aware of sequencing of activities, consistency in the teaching actions, and how important teacher signals are to me knowing what is happening now." (week 5, in-class questionnaire)

This section revisited the topic of teacher-talk which was examined in the *Experience* section from the perspective of the student. Here in the Impact section, teacher-talk was looked at from the point of view of the teacher-participants' intentions and reasoning for continuing to try to limit this behavior in their classrooms.

The *Impact* section summarized selected data gathered around the themes of insights into student classroom behavior, considered changes to teaching practices, reinforcement of learned educational principles, and the futility of extraneous teacher-talk. In conjunction with the previous section, Experience, the inquiry of the two driving research questions was addressed: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

The study now considers the data collected one month after the conclusion of the five Karen classes. It is presented here in a separate section as the data was gathered post-event, and does not directly respond to the presented research questions. The post-event questionnaire data gathered teacher reflections that are sorted into the same categories of

Experience and Impact along with a survey of Suggestions for a future first language learning immersion experience for teachers.

Post-Event Questionnaire

The choice to present the data from the Post-Event Questionnaire in a separately dedicated section was made for two main reasons. First, the data was collected one month after the five-week classroom event and warrants a separate section as it is slightly out of the purview of the driving research questions: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?* The second reason for the creation of an individual section is that this unique data communicates findings which have lasting resonance for the participants into their teaching contexts.

This section is similarly divided into Experience and Impact as was the main data presentation, and offers one additional dimension: How would the participants modify this experience if it were to be offered again?

Seven of the nine participants responded to the post-event questionnaire sent out one month after the conclusion of the event. A sample of this data collection tool is provided in Appendix H. The first part of the form asked about the experience of the event. The second part of the form asked how their teaching practice had been actually impacted.

Experience

All respondents found the experience to be of value to them as a teacher, and all thought that other teachers might benefit from a similar event were it to be offered. Five of the seven would consider participating in a similar or expanded event, while two responded "no" and "unsure." Not surprisingly, all seven respondents reported increased empathy for their students' classroom experience.

Impact

All respondents reported that they were currently teaching more slowly, teaching less content, and practicing more tolerance for student-to-student in-class chatter. They also reported increasing the amount of repetition included in their lessons and allowing for more student thinking time. Two participants reported an increase in their use of visuals.

The second question in the impact section was more open-ended: *Please remark on any other ways that you feel your teaching practice has been impacted.* The assembled responses are bullet-pointed below and reflect a strong human connection to their students' learning challenges:

- *I have become more patient, empathetic, and positive as a teacher to my students.*
- *I have been really conscious of how long it takes to learn and write another alphabet. I also have learned to value repetition and pacing.*
- *More patience and understanding/empathy as a teacher = better teacher-student relationship.*

- *It's just made me so much more empathetic. It has given me pause more often in my expectations of and patience toward the students. Very valuable experience in general!!*
- *I am concentrating on my tone of voice, so that when they can't understand my words, at least they might hear and feel positive, encouraging vibes in my voice.*
- *I think the biggest change is empathy for students.*
- *I have started using the Karen alphabet to help students who can read Karen to correct their pronunciation by spelling English words for them in Karen. Also, I can occasionally understand something a student says under their breath in Karen. Sometimes I can recast it in English, or help them out when they're searching for a word. My students love it, and so do I.*

Suggestions for Future Event

The third question in this section asked for recommendation for a similar future professional development offering. Participants were asked their input regarding number of weeks for the event, length of class time, content to be covered, and preferences for methods of giving feedback to the researcher.

Event length: One teacher thought fewer than five weeks would be better, four teachers said more than five weeks would be preferable, and two teachers thought that five weeks was just enough.

Class length: No respondent felt that the amount of time for the class session should be shorter. Three respondents wanted the class to be 1 to 1.5 hours; three felt that 1.5 to 2 hours would be more beneficial; and one submitted no preference.

Content covered: Suggestions here covered a range. One person wanted conversational phrases, one suggested Basic 0-1 literacy, and one suggested alphabet and vocabulary. A suggestion from the teacher who wanted a longer event was as follows: *I'd love to do a unit like one we would teach in our classes (e.g. transportation) complete with story, phonics instruction, oral fluency practice/dialogues, and a CASAS-style assessment! [Researcher's field note: Would this mean an assessment that had only one question about transportation?] It would be great if the teacher was using some of the techniques we are taught to use, like LEA, as well. Then we could really see what it's like to be a student in our classrooms and how to adapt what we're doing.* Three participants did not answer this question.

Feedback methods: Two people liked the options provided in the event. One suggested Survey Monkey and/or a Google form for anonymity. One participant liked the idea of a journal book distributed at the beginning of class. Three people did not answer this question.

The responses generated by the completion of the post-event questionnaire yielded a snapshot view of how the participants were thinking one month after the conclusion of the language classes. In this section they responded to inquiries pertinent to their experience and the impact that experience had on their teaching practice. The teacher-participants also offered feedback and suggestions regarding the value and the structure of future similar events.

Closing Discussion

This study sought to determine if this experience in language-learning empathy had enough of an impact to cause teachers to modify some aspect of their practice. As Smith (2003) pointed out, the distinction between changes in a teacher's thinking and changes in a teacher's actions are not always easily definable. The data collection tools used in this study attempted to make that distinction visible by asking participants to self-report thoughtfully about their learning and intentions. Guskey (2002) notes that teacher change takes time and its impact may be related to whether the change is imposed as an arbitrary ruling from administrators or whether teachers feel that there is a compelling reason for their practices to change. A goal that was met in this study, through voluntary and direct experience, was to create that self-imposed compelling reason for changing some teaching practices. These teacher-participants were involved in a professional development exercise that drew upon their knowledge base. It required inquiry, curiosity, challenging thinking, and learning on their part. Because of that, this event made them more likely to initiate change on their own, as was suggested by Richardson and Anderson (1994). In fact, the data indicates that this appears to have occurred.

This study depended upon the willingness and the ability of its participants to examine their personal language learning experience at a meta-level, which as Farrell (2008) pointed out is particularly important for teachers of adult learners. This study was based on actual classroom events which Breen (1991) believes is critical to teacher change. As stated in Chapter Two, the ability to continually challenge one's assumptions and preconceived notions is at the heart of a reflective teaching practice. This intervention was designed to disrupt teachers' current comfort levels and engage them in

a reflective practice to cause change in their perceptions of the learner experience, and subsequently, to cause change in teaching practices as well.

The data collected and analyzed in this study described low-level adult ELL teachers challenging their teaching practices by placing themselves as students in a non-Roman alphabetic monolingual language classroom. The data clearly indicate an increase in the teacher-participants' empathy for their students' daily endeavors. It revealed a greater understanding of student choices and behaviors in the classroom. The data also demonstrated the ways in which teachers immediately changed their teaching practices as well as their plans for future modification.

Conclusion

Through the collection of these data, I sought answers to the following questions; *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

In this chapter I presented the results of my data collection. In Chapter Five I will discuss my major findings, their implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

In this research project, my goal was to answer the questions: *What is the experience of a short-term immersion Karen language learning experience on a group of low-level adult ELL teachers? What is the perceived impact of this experience on the teachers' views of their learners and on the teachers' subsequent instruction?*

The previous chapter presented the results of the data streams that were aggregated over the five weeks of one-hour Karen language class sessions. This chapter will present major findings, limitations, implications, and suggestions for further research.

Major Findings

The major findings of this study directly relate to the research questions posed. The teacher-participants found the experience to be nerve-wracking, pleasantly challenging, and a tremendous source of new and deeper empathy for their students. The data indicated numerous events of identification with student behaviors and adult-learner anxieties in the classroom. This data gave a clear indication of what the teacher-participant experience was in the monolingual Karen language classroom. The data also demonstrated that teachers not only pondered changes to their current teaching practices, but did indeed implement them after the close of the data collection sessions. Uniform

findings showed less content being delivered more slowly and with greater repetition. Additionally, teachers allowed for a silent period for processing of new information. The culminating conclusions drawn by myself and by the participants are that such an experience was a vital reminder of the difficulty of the adult language learner experience and that this experience deeply impacted the very foundation of the participants' teaching practices.

Limitations

Of course, this study did not occur without some limitations. Qualitative data deals distinctly with the human experience, a characteristic that makes data at once compelling and complex, and open to interpretation. It allows for the inherent variables that that subject matter necessarily presents to the researcher. To be clear, the specific limitations to this study include: changes in the Karen teaching staff during the class, lack of teaching experience of the leaders of Classes #1 through #3, the short time frame of the study, the fact that the teachers themselves were not a low-literacy/ low-schooled population, and the small, but useful amount of English classroom language which the co-teacher of Classes #4 and #5 was able to comprehend. Each data collection technique also had particular limitations which were discussed in Chapter 3. Despite these limitations, the implications of the study are profound and worthy of consideration.

Implications

This small study is now complete, the results and limitations have been presented. The question under consideration in this section is: "So what?"

So what if low-level adult teachers felt a lot of insecurity, discomfort and anxiety in the classroom? So what if they are now teaching less content more slowly? So what if they really understand now why there is so much student chatter in the classroom? So what if they have a new awareness of the adult learner affective filter and how various actions raise and lower that barrier?

My response to these self-imposed queries is: This experience matters, and it matters a great deal. I believe it matters so much that this experience ought to be a once-a-year training for teachers. If that could occur, then the most thoughtful, reflective teachers ought to be pulled out of each of those groups to make a sort of an *uber*-reflective group to study further and to sort out implications for low-literacy ELL methods of teaching. Such self-awareness could radically transform our teaching practices for low-literacy adult learners. Additionally, I believe that our teaching practices desperately need transformation. We are currently patting ourselves on the back too often just because we love our work so much and personally receive so much gratification in performing it. We can and want to do much better for our students.

In my five years of teaching and of observing the teaching practices of my cohorts, I have come to deeply believe that low-educated, low-literacy adult language learning is intrinsically and profoundly different from initial language learning by children, different from second-language learning by children, different from second-language learning by young adults, and absolutely different from the foreign language learning classroom. These areas of expertise often comprise the backgrounds of our teachers, and they reasonably apply those experiences to their adult low-educated, low-literacy learners. These areas of second-language acquisition coursework, research and

practice can inform and provide a base to start from, but for this population, the research is still in its infancy. It takes years for a thoughtful teacher to transform what she knows into materials and activities that will work for her learners. We are still desperately awaiting publication of truly basic ESL literacy materials which we can implement with little modification.

The field is necessarily made up of highly educated print-literate professionals often applying their methods of language learning onto learners who sink-or-swim in the process. It is very obvious in a classroom whenever there is one student who has had some schooling or is literate in their home language. That student quickly becomes a conduit of information for the others. That student does not stay at Level 0 long. They already know how to read. They already know how to learn in a classroom. Older, less-literate learners are frequently at Level 0 and 1 for years. I suspect that many of them take their coursework home and have younger family members teach it to them bilingually. We owe it to these community elders and to the furtherance of our profession to create an appropriate and comprehensive avenue of learning for these talented, resourceful, resilient, traumatized, displaced, marginalized, low-educated adults. This may demand radical transformation of teaching (and accountability testing) practices. I know instinctively (and I hope future research will corroborate) that when the elders and the parents of a community are not dependent on their children to interpret the language and the culture to them, that those communities are strengthened, their children are better supported, and there is less temptation to participate in teenage gangs and other unhealthy and disruptive behaviors.

What have I learned through this project? From this experience, I am ever convinced that my colleagues are up for the challenges of reflective practice as a means to improving teaching and learning. Teachers at this level of instruction create, implement, retain, and discard new ideas daily; ours is not a 'this is good enough' group of educators. We are passionate about finding what works and sharing it freely with each other. It is discouraging to face the fact that adult education of refugees currently is considered a low priority by our society. We can and must do better.

As teachers of low-literate adult language students, we perhaps are misled about the effectiveness of our practices by the good-hearted, patient nature of our learner populations who don't have the language, formal schooling experience, or the sense of entitlement to complain about us even if we deserve it. Our funding relies heavily on tests that are apropos of nothing related to the reality of the vast amounts of learning that our students accomplish daily. Our students' accomplishments are unacknowledged by these "assessments". They often experience profound discouragement when attempting to perform on these regularly scheduled tests.

Following this research project, I believe now that all language learning is multilingual language learning. Sometimes the common language is pictures or pantomime. Sometimes it is the one 'ah-ha' instant of understanding by one learner that can then spread around the classroom like wildfire. Of course, that is effective only among the common language speakers of that one learner. A distinction of our classrooms is that often there are individuals who are language islands unto themselves, so these moments of comprehension are unevenly distributed.

The realities faced by adult refugees are many and they are harsh. As anyone who has travelled in a country where they had to rely on the kindness of others to negotiate simple questions such as “Where is the restroom?” knows, it is difficult to operate as a dignified and self-reliant adult when you do not speak the language at all. Knowing even a few courtesy words such as hello, and thank you can make a world of difference. A little bit of useful language can be the deciding factor in the choice to go for a walk outside, to go to the store alone, or to instead just stay home all day until the children come back from school.

The first wave of each language group’s arrival in the United States perhaps necessitates at least a generation before some members of that community are English-proficient enough to provide a modicum of basic interpretive services. And those quick language learners usually start interpreting before they are truly ready. They do it before their web of cultural understanding has been woven sufficiently to catch new information and to recognize critical nuances.

I imagine that it could be quite useful that as members of the first wave of new language refugees developed proficiency, that they could support their families by becoming basic English teachers for their community. This possibility is blockaded by the requirement that K-12 teachers have a license, and that ABE teachers have completed at least some graduate education. While I would love to see an avenue developed to permit these native speakers to offer classes for new arrivals, perhaps there is a way to bring in more first language volunteers and cultural liaisons in a more systematic, effective way than the ad hoc nature that such support services happen in ABE today.

The remarkable (while underrated and undervalued) talent of low-level ELL teachers is that we do the impossible every single day. We make clear, in a monolingual environment, concepts and language that are difficult in a *bilingual* environment taught by well-trained instructors to educationally-advantaged students. This study has had the impact of opening doors in the LESLLA teachers' perception of the challenges faced by the students. The participants uniformly reported changes in their teaching practices. While the study's general format can be certainly expanded and improved, it remains a useful tool to create more effective and less stressful practices for teaching this unique population.

Further Research

The fundamental differences that exist between the various targeted learner-audiences seem to point to a need for research specifically aimed at teacher cognition and teacher change in all areas of the adult education field. As noted by Farrelly (2013), this particular research area of low-literacy adult refugees exhibits even greater gaps in applications for teaching tools. Just a few of the questions which are worthy of future research are:

- Would LESLLA students from oral cultures be better equipped to learn English quickly if they were released from the print-intensive structure imposed on them by Western education systems? What would be the impact of granting them two years of oral learning (compare to how native children of any language speak the language prior to learning to write the alphabet) prior to writing and written test requirements?

- What would be the impact on low-level English teaching if it were strongly suggested that teachers be themselves continually enrolled as language learners?

- What if a study could be done collecting the meta-experience of classroom by the LESLLA learners' themselves? How would they report on what it feels like to learn in a monolingual environment? How would that data change the way LESLLA teachers practiced?

- Are our oral culture students in fact better equipped to learn a new language than are their age-equivalent counterparts in a literate culture? What skills are they bringing and utilizing that we are not noticing? How can those tools be incorporated into our teaching efforts?

- What is the impact on community stability of parental and elder competency in basic English? What is the impact of the lack of that competency?

Conducting this study as a researcher delighted my sense of curiosity and reinforced my belief in empathy as a life-changing and highly practical experience. Empathy is generally regarded as useful in improving human interactions, but I feel that in the LESLLA classroom, where the teachers are the gatekeepers to a language necessary to survival in a new land, a deep and valid empathy can revolutionize and ease the practically impossible task of language learning as a low-literate refugee adult. This study increased my already strong pride in my field and my colleagues. It has made me want to find out more.

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Appendix A

MORE Curriculum for Beginning Literacy and Pre-Beginning ESL

CASAS Reading Test 27/28 and CASAS Listening Test 81/82

Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
Alphabet	Repeat and recite	Upper and lower case, write or match written letters to spoken letters
Numbers	Cardinals: Recite to 100; count to 100 by 10's, 5's, and 2's; point to or match numerals to words, 0-20 Ordinals: Recite 1^{st} – 10^{th} and match numbers to words	Cardinals: 0 to 100, complete sequences of missing numbers, write numbers in words 0 through 20, match numerals and words for 0-20 Ordinals: Write and match numbers and words for 1^{st} – 10^{th}
Shapes	Identify shapes by name: circle, square, rectangle and triangle	Draw circle, square, rectangle and triangle, match word and shape
Colors	Identify and select colors by name: black, white, red, blue, yellow, green, orange, purple, pink and brown; follow verbal directions for selection of color	Identify color by matching word to color, identify color by writing word for color.
Greetings, Introductions and Farewells	Use and respond to basic greetings and farewells. Identify correct sequencing of related statements. Non-verbal skills: Shaking hands and making eye contact.	Read and write related vocabulary. Write dictated vocabulary. Identify correct sequence of written conversation phrases and select appropriate phrases in given circumstances.

Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
Personal Information	State and spell basic personal information. Answer questions relating to: (a) Introducing self (b) Calling 911 (one-word answers) (c) Providing information to persons needing information, such as medical staff. schools or employers	Complete basic personal information forms. Write responses to verbal and written questions. Make personal identification cards.
Telephone Use	(a) Contact school or work to report absence, (b) Call 911, (c) Answer phone and express lack of understanding (practice back to back)	
Calendar	Distinguish and recite the days of the week, months, dates and the concepts of yesterday, today, and tomorrow	Write dates and match written dates to spoken dates. Write dictated related vocabulary. Write dates in various word and numeric formats
Weather	Describe the weather using basic vocabulary (hot, cold, sunny, cloudy, rainy, snowy, windy) Identify and say the seasons. Ask and respond to questions about the weather and the seasons. Understand what to do in weather emergencies.	Match and write words for pictures of weather and seasons. Write words for seasons and weather. Write dictated words.

Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
Time	Tell time to the half hour on watches, clocks and cell phones; answer questions relating to time. Use concepts of morning, noon, afternoon, night, midnight, a.m., and p.m. correctly.	Match written time to face on time piece. Write dictated times. Write the time on various types of clocks/watches/cell phones.
Money	Recognize and name U.S. coins, including dollar coins. Count bills and coins to $100. Count multiples of coins and bills. Present coins and bills to equal a stated amount.	Match the written words for coins to the coins. Write dictated words for coins. Read and say amounts. Write dictated amounts. Read check and money order amounts. Other: understand decimal point
Directions	Follow and give one-step commands. Ask for repetition of directions. Know: right, left, up, down, straight ahead	Match written words and phrases to pictures, actions, signs or arrows. Write dictated words.
Food	Name common foods and food categories. Basic measurements: ¼ cup, ½ cup, ¾ cup, 1cup, 2 cups, pounds	Match written words of food items to pictures. Write dictated words. Read and write price per pound and recognize price on meat labels.
Clothing	Identify basic, common clothing items (shirt, sweater, pants, coat, shoes, dress, skirt, scarf, gloves, hat, umbrella, and boots). Say price and size. Categorize items by size, type, color, and season.	Match written words for items of clothing. Write dictated words. Chose correct written word from group of items or words. Recognize size abbreviations S, M, L.

Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
Housing	(1) Differentiate between house and apartment. (2) Names of rooms: bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, living room. (3) Names for common furnishings and appliances (4) Categorize furnishings and appliances by room. (5) Know vocabulary for housing problems, such as cockroaches and mice.	Match picture of item to its written word. Write the word for the item. Write dictated words. Chose correct written word from group of items or words.
Classroom	Basic classroom objects (pencil, etc.), commands (open, close, say, read, write, listen, repeat, come to the board, write your name, write the date, sit down, stand up, draw, copy) and concepts (top, bottom, turn over, front back, match, say, circle, underline, fill in, and check)	Match objects or pictures to its written word. Write the word for the item. Write dictated words. Chose correct written word from group of items or words.
Family	Basic family words (husband, wife, son, daughter, child, children, brother, sister, mother, father)	Match pictures of people in context to a written word. Write dictated words. Chose correct written word from group of items or words.

Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
Personal health and safety	Basic body parts. Point to the stated body part. Name body parts. Express a problem or illness verbally or non-verbally by single words or body language. Respond to questions about a problem or illness. Situational knowledge of answering the question "How are you?" in class, in a clinic or in a dental office.	Match parts of the body to their written words. Write dictated words. Chose correct written word from group of items or words. Basic reading of medicine labels. Read expiration dates.
Signs and Maps	Signs: Verbalize meaning of common signs. Maps: Locate country of origin, the US, Minnesota, and pertinent local cities on maps. Point to and say north, south, east, and west on maps and in the classroom.	Signs: Match signs with written explanation of meaning. Write dictated words. Categorize signs by color and degree of danger. Maps: Place written directions on map, match words with abbreviations for north, south, east, and west.
Grammar	(a) Singular and plural subject pronouns. (b) Common verbs in present tense. (c) Teacher talk in present, present continuous, past, and future tenses without detailed explanation or reasoning—just normal speech patterns in class without teaching tenses other than present. (d) Say and differentiate between singular and plural regular nouns and common irregular verbs. (e) Use common situational prepositions	(a) Read and write pronouns in context. Match pronoun to picture. (b) Read and write common present tense verbs in context. (c) Read and write common singular and plural regular nouns. Match word to picture or prop. (d) Read and write common situational prepositions in context. (e) Match preposition to picture or prop.

Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
Basic Literacy Skills	(a) Say the sound for the letter and the letter for the sound (phonemic awareness). (b) Auditory scanning for meaning.	(a) Write the letter for the sound. (b) Visual scanning for meaning. (c) Read from left to right.
Emotions/ Feelings	Emotions or feelings, such as sad, happy, angry, afraid, nervous, upset, tired, sleepy, hungry, thirsty, sick	Match words, phrases or sentences to pictures demonstrating emotions or feelings.
Test-taking Skills	(1) Practice using the CASAS Listening answer sheet in class. (2) Select one of four possible phrases or conversations that match a given picture. (3) Select one of four possible responses to a statement that shows correct sequencing for the conversation.	(1) Practice using the CASAS reading test format in class (fill in the circle below the correct one out of four possible answers). (2) Select one of four possible answers that describe a picture. (3) Select one of four possible answers to questions that relate to signs, abbreviations, symbols, or short texts. (4) Select one of four possible answers to questions that relate to a simple graph.
Transportation	Basic vocabulary, questions, and responses relating to transportation.	Match word to pictures of basic modes of transportation. Write dictated words.

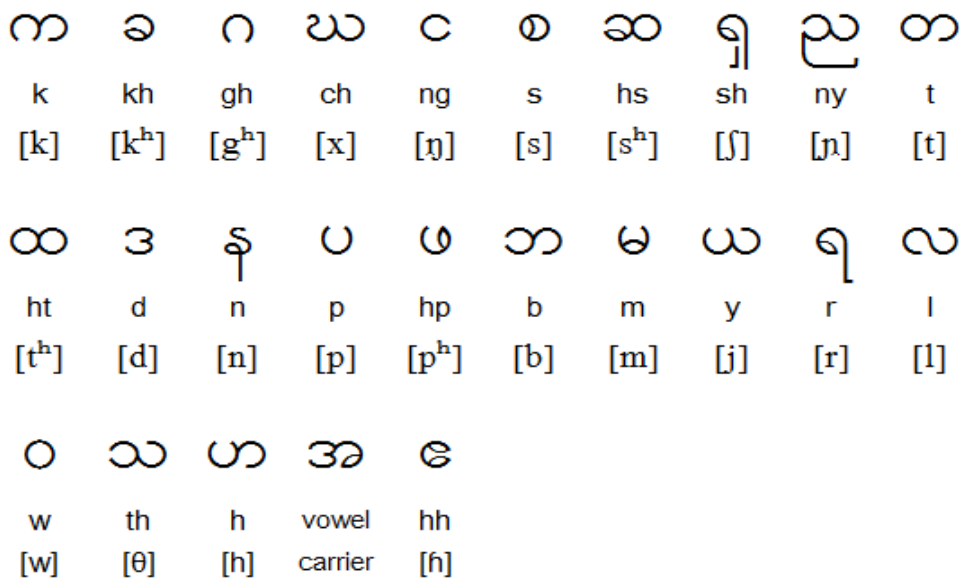
Basic Topic	Listening/Speaking Skills	Reading/Writing Skills
General Reading Skills		(1) Use capitalization as clue to meaning of proper nouns. (2) Common abbreviations (3) Punctuation—period, question mark, comma in date, dashes and slashes in numerical dates (4) Sentence begins with capital letter. (5) Alphabetization. (6) Predict content of text from pictures (7) Scan simple texts, schedules, forms, and advertisements to find specific information or gist of meaning.

Last revised July 6, 2011

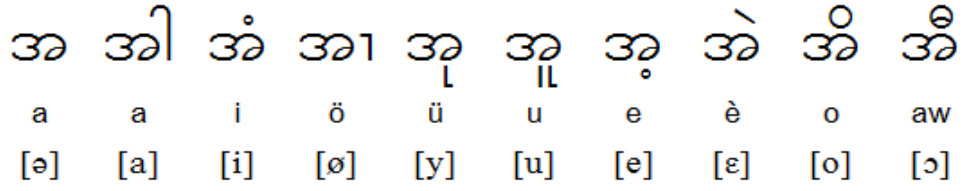
Appendix B

S'gaw Karen alphabet and pronunciation

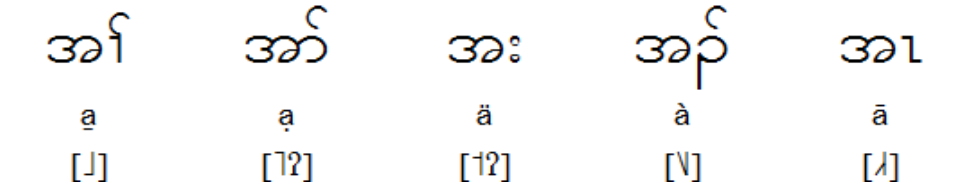
Consonants



Vowels



Tones



Sources: http://www.drumpublications.org/download/transliterate.pdf & http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks09/0900201p.pdf

Appendix C

Sample of S'gaw Karen written text

၂. ကွဲးလီၤတ၊်ကတိၤဒိလၢလ၊်သ့ၣ်ဘၣ်သူမ့တမ့်၊်စးခိဝါဒီးမၢဖိသၣ်တဖၣ် တယာ်ကွ၊်အခီပညီတက့၊်.

အဒိ, မ့်၊်လ၊်ပှၤသံတမၤဘၣ်ထါ – *ပမ့်၊်လ၊်တ၊်လၢပှၤဂၤအအိၣ်အဘျုးတအိၣ်* ပလဲၤတ၊်ဂီၤပလဲၤဘၣ်တ၊်ခုၣ် – *ပမၤဝံၤတ၊်ချ့,ချ့,ပဒိးန့၊်တ၊်အသူအသၣ် ချ့,ချ့,*

၃. သံကွ၊်တ၊်သံကွ၊်လၢလာ်တဖၣ်ဒ်သိးဖိသၣ်ကတဲသကိးဘၣ်ဃးတ၊်ကတိၤ ဒိတဖၣ်အံၤတက့၊်.

- တ၊်ကတိၤဒိ, တ၊်ကတိၤခွၣ်မ့၊်တ၊်မနုၤလဲၣ်.
- တ၊်ကတိၤဒိ, တ၊်ကတိၤခွၣ်မ့၊်တ၊်မနုၤလဲၣ်. ဒီးတ၊်ကတိၤဒိ, တ၊်က တိၤခွၣ်တဖၣ်အံၤသိၣ်လိပှၤတ၊်မနုၤလဲၣ်.
- နဆိကမိၣ်တ၊်ကတိၤဒိတဖၣ်အံၤဟဲဖဲလဲၣ်.
- တ၊်စိၣ်ခိတ၊်ကတိၤဒိတဖၣ်အံၤဆူစိၤတစိၤဘၣ်တစိၤဒ်လဲၣ်.
- ဘၣ်မနုၤအဃိတ၊်ကတိၤဒိတဖၣ်တ၊်ညီန့၊်တိ၊်ရူးအိၤဘၣ်နှၣ်လဲၣ်.

၄.သံကွ၊်ဖိသၣ်တဖၣ်လၢမ့၊်အမၤလိန့၊်တ၊်ကတိၤဒိလၢအဟံၣ်ဖိဃီဖိတဖၣ် အအိၣ်စ၊ါ.

- လၢဟံၣ်ပူၤအမိ၊်အပ၊်သူညီန့၊်တ၊်ကတိၤဒိမနုၤလဲၣ်. အဒိ, ညၣ်လံၣ်အါဘိအပူၤဒိၣ်ဖဲအမိ၊်ကလာ်အဖိအလံၤလၢကွ၊်တိ၊် လိာ်အသးဒီးမၤတ၊်အဝံၤအခါမိ၊်ညီန့၊်ကတဲသုမၤသုသးဒ်ညၣ်လံၣ်အါ ဘိအပူၤဒိၣ်နှၣ်လီၤ.
- အဖံ, အဖုကတဖၣ်ညီန့၊်သူတ၊်ကတိၤဒိမနုၤလဲၣ်.

၅. ဖိသၣ်တဖၣ်မ့၊်တန့၊်ဟူညီန့၊်အမိ၊်အပ၊်သူတ၊်ကတိၤဒိတဖၣ်တခီမၤအ

Appendix D

Participant Consent Letter

August 5, 2015

Dear Teacher-Participant;

I am a graduate student at Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN and I am completing a Masters of Art in English as a Second Language.

I am asking you to be a participant in public scholarship research that I am conducting to meet the degree requirement of a thesis. This work will be catalogued in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository, and it may be published or used in other ways.

My research will examine and discuss how low-level adult ESL instructors perceive their own experience of participation in five monolingually taught S'gaw Karen classes. I will also be collecting data on how teachers anticipate that their experience may or may not impact their teaching practices. Research and writing are dynamic activities that may shift in focus as they occur.

As a participant, I will ask you to do a pre-interview, a post-interview, complete a weekly questionnaire during class, and to journal your thoughts about the experience. The journaling may be conducted on paper and/or on a wiggio site. I will also observe the class. Parts of the event will be audio-recorded. Any casual conversation (phone, email, in-person) regarding the experience might also be utilized as data. The class will occur over a five-week period with sessions being one and one half hours each.

This letter is also requesting your consent to use samples of your work created in these classes for the final version of this capstone.

Potential costs to you include: time, possible stress entailed in learning a new language, potentially emotional discomfort of discussing one's meta-cognition of experiences, and monetary compensation for the Karen teachers.

Potential benefits include: a chance to gain a new perspective on your teaching practices, an opportunity to contribute to the research canon benefiting adult low-literacy learners, an opportunity to connect with fellow low-literacy professional, and some knowledge of the Karen language.

Your participation will be fully confidential in regards to the publication of this research. I will respect your privacy and anonymity by using pseudonyms and also by aggregating some of the data in my work.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the option to withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

The class will be held at MORE School in St. Paul, MN. This location involves minimal risks and relative physical comfort. I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from MORE School to conduct this study.

I hope that this is an experience that you will find to be significantly beneficial to your life and your teaching career.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact my advisor, Patsy Vinogradov via email pvinogradov01@hamline.edu or phone (651) 523-2646.

Thank you,

Loretta Dakin

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loretta.dakin@yahoo.com

(612) 722-5009

If you agree to be part of this research study, please keep this page. Sign and date the agreement on each of the following two pages. Please keep one for your records and return the duplicate to me by mail no later than September 15, 2015. You may also copy the form in an email to me.

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Research

Keep this full page for your records.

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be collecting and analyzing data regarding professional ESL teachers experiencing Karen monolingual language instruction in order to experience the learner experience more deeply. I understand that being involved in this research poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the process at any time without negative consequences.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Research

Return this portion to the researcher, Loretta Dakin.

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be collecting and analyzing data regarding professional ESL teachers experiencing Karen monolingual language instruction in order to experience the learner experience more deeply. I understand that being involved in this research poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the process at any time without negative consequences.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Appendix E

Pre-intervention questionnaire

1. Please list all of the languages that you have studied
2. Have you ever lived in a non-English speaking country? If yes, please list the country or countries and amount of time.
3. How much Karen language do you already know?
4. Have you ever had a non-English speaking instructor for any language you studied?
5. What non-Roman alphabet languages have you studied?
6. How long have you been teaching at this level?
7. Were you trained to teach adults, children, or neither?
8. What do you hope to gain from this experience?
9. What are your questions about this experience?
10. Do you have any worries about these classes?

Appendix F

Weekly in-class questionnaire

Name _____ Date_____

Something that worked really well today:

Something that didn't really work:

New idea I had today:

How will today's class inform or modify my teaching practice?

What did I notice about myself or other learners in this class?

Right now, here is what's going on in my head:

I am wondering……

Other comments:

Appendix G

Researcher Field Notes Sample

Week #1 Teachers: Gay Taw and Mu Say

3:30 PM-3:45 PM Welcome, introductions, and research intention instructions given.

3:45 PM Class starts Hah loh gay (good afternoon); Tee bah nah tha ku dom ah (Nice to see you.) Oh cho oak li ah (how are you?) Teachers write seven greetings sentences on the board in Karen only. Point and read together. No demonstration of meaning given.

Participants obviously repeating what the teachers say without comprehension.

"Is she spelling? I think she's spelling."

The word "finished" is learned because one student said "I know what *wee lee uh* means – finished!" All students appear to have learned one word.

Ten minutes into the lesson, students do not seem aware that they are getting a lesson on greetings.

Because the students are repeating/mimicking in not-too-terrible a manner, the teachers might be assuming comprehension.

4:10 PM Students have a breakthrough figuring out the lesson is: *good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good night.*

Lots of negotiating of meaning and possible meaning with each other.

"*Nah* means *night*?" Looking for similarities to English.

4:30 PM Participants tell me they wish I had given them materials to work with, but I want us to experience this as a refugee camp classroom operated, not a western one. Participants ask me to relay to the Karen teachers that they would like to learn the alphabet. I comply.

Appendix H

Post-Event Questionnaire

Experience of the Event

1. Was this experience of value to you as a teacher?
   Yes No Unsure

2. Do you think other teachers might benefit from a similar event if it were offered?
   Yes No Unsure

3. Would you consider participating in a similar or expanded event if it were offered?
   Yes No Unsure

4. Has your empathy for your students' classroom experience increased?
   Yes No Unsure

Impact on Teaching Practices

1. Have you made any of the following changes to your teaching practice? (Circle all that apply, or delete those that do not apply)

Teaching slower Teaching faster No change to speed of teaching
Teaching less content Teaching more content No change to amount of content
More tolerance for student-to-student in class chatter Less tolerance for classroom chatter
Increasing amount of repetition Decreasing amount of repetition
More time allowed to student absorption and processing Change of use of visuals

2. Please remark on any other ways that you feel your teaching practice has been impacted by this experience.

3. If this event were to happen again, what would your suggestions be for:
   Number of weeks?
   Length of class time?
   Content covered?
   Ways to give feedback to researcher?
   Other?

Appendix I

Sample Instructional Materials

ကညီအလံ်နံ်လံ်လါ

၁) သလ့ၤ
၂) ထ့ကူာ်
၃) သ့ကီ
၄) လါချံ
၅) နှ်ညါ
၆) လါနှံ
၇) လါဃီး
၈) လါခူး
၉) ဆံးမှ်

၁၀)ဆံးဆဉ်

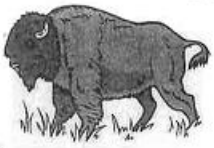
၁၁)လါနီ

၁၂)လါဖျုၤ

ကညီအမှ်နံၤမှ်သီ

၁) မှ်ဒဲး
၂) မှ်ဆဉ်
၃) မှ်ယူာ်
၄) မှ်ပျုၤ
၅) မှ်လ့စီၤ
၆) မှ်ဖီဖး
၇) မှ်ဘျဉ်

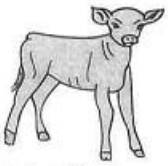
Farm Animals တၢ်ဘှဉ်ဆဉ်ဖိကျိၵ်ဖိအလိၵ်



1.
Bison, Buffalo,
ပန်မံး(တၢဘီနၢး),ပန်

2.
Bull, ဂီၤဖံးဖါ

3.
Cow, ဂီၤဖံးမိၵ်,ကျိၵ်မိၵ်



4.
Calf, ဂီၤဖံးဖိ

5.
Cat, သဉ်မံယီၤ

6.
Rooster, ဆီဖါ

7.
Chicken, ဆီ

8.
Chick, ဆီဖိ

9.
Dog, ထွံဉ်

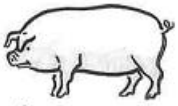
10.
Puppy, ထွံဉ်ဖိ

11.
Goat, မာ်တဲးလဲး

12.
Horse, ကသုဉ်

13.
Sheep, သိ

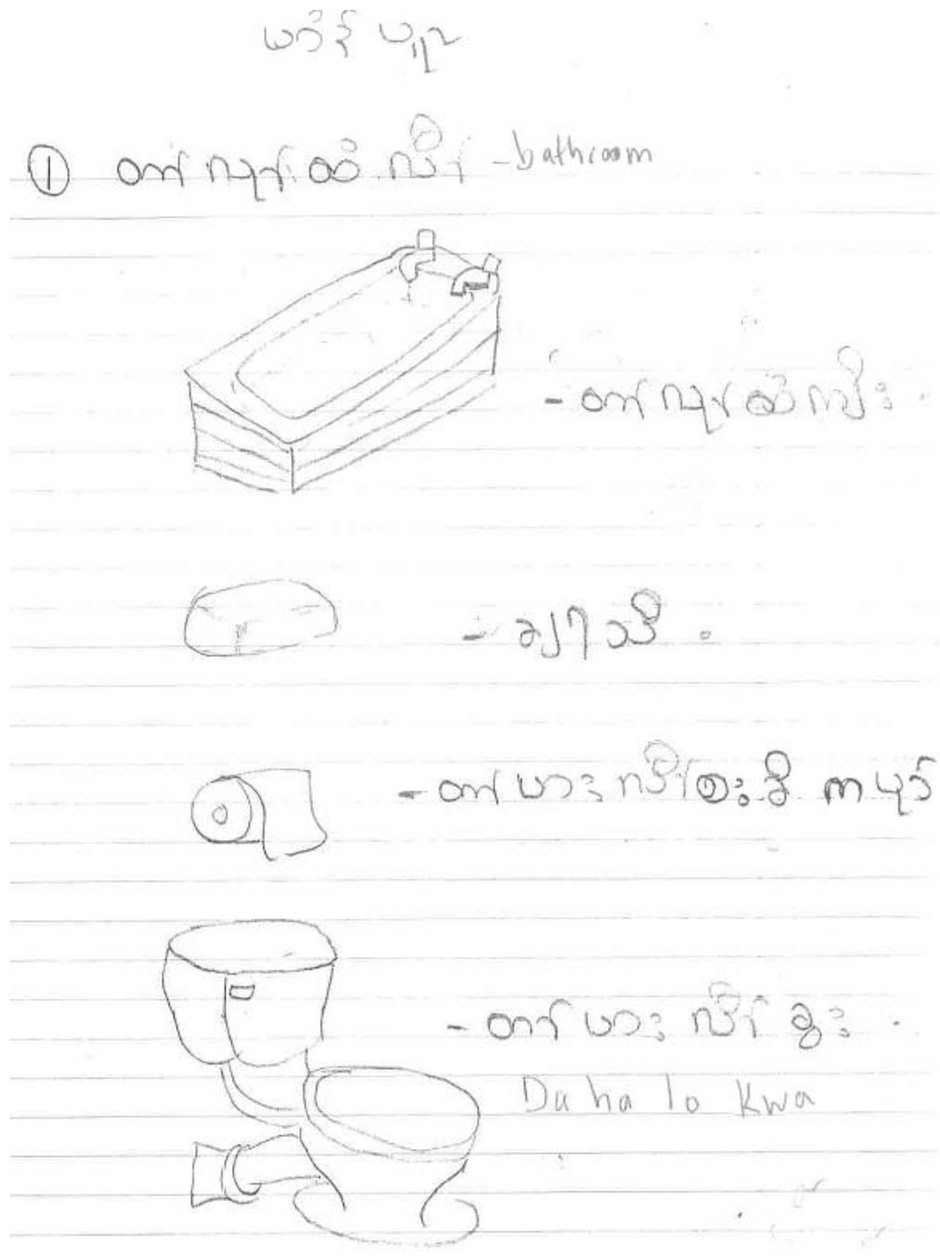
14.
Lamb, သိဖိ



15.
Pig, ထိး

16.
Piglets, ထိးဖိ

17.
Turkey, ဆီကဆီ


- bathroom
Du ha lo Kwa